



MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION

Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11

I, Olivia McTaggart, Coroner, having investigated the death of Kelvin John Dawkins,

Find, pursuant to Section 28(1) of the *Coroners Act 1995*, that

- a) The identity of the deceased is Kelvin John Dawkins;
- b) Mr Dawkins died as a result of injuries sustained in a single motor vehicle crash;
- c) The cause of death was blunt trauma to the chest, being haemothorax, rib fractures and lacerated aorta with acute blood loss and mediastinal haematoma with acute blood loss; and
- d) Mr Dawkins died on 15 September 2018 on Wilmot Road, south of Forth in Tasmania.

In making the above findings I have had regard to the evidence gained in the comprehensive investigation into Mr Dawkins' death. The evidence comprises the police report of death; an opinion of the forensic pathologist who conducted the autopsy; toxicological evidence; expert crash investigation evidence; vehicle inspection evidence; police and witness affidavits; all medical records and reports and forensic evidence.

Mr Dawkins was born in Sheffield, Tasmania, on 26 February 1941. At the time of his death, Mr Dawkins was aged 77 years, had been married to his wife, Robyn Hope Dawkins since 1964 and they have four children. He was a farmer and lived at Wilmot.

Upon leaving school, he moved to Melbourne where he worked for several years before moving back to Tasmania. After he married, he worked as a driver with Hydro Tasmania at Gowrie Park. He later went on to buy a trucking company and built a family home in Wilmot. He then moved into vegetable farming and continued to work in this occupation until his death.

Mr Dawkins had held a driver's licence since he was a young man and had an unblemished driving record.

Mr Dawkins suffered long-standing heart disease, kidney disease, asthma and type II (insulin-dependent) diabetes. Notably, he underwent heart bypass surgery in 1997 and was taking a

range of prescribed medications to address his symptoms and treat his various health issues. In her affidavit for the investigation, his daughter, Megan Gibson, said that in 2017 her father suffered a serious accident where a large bale of hay fell on him, although he only suffered a number of broken ribs. She described her father as fit and active. His last visit to his regular general practitioner was on 12 September 2018, when he complained of shortness of breath. His doctor suspected bronchitis and referred him for a chest x-ray. Ms Gibson said that her father occasionally complained of tightness in his chest and was tired in the weeks leading to his death. However, no particularly unusual or significant symptoms in the days before his death were noted by her or Mrs Dawkins in their affidavits.

On the morning of 15 September 2018, Mr Dawkins commenced driving alone from his home to Forth to pick up some veterinarian supplies for his granddaughter's calves. The distance of the drive was approximately 35 kilometres. He was driving his wife's white 1999 Holden Vectra sedan on Wilmot Road. Wilmot Road consists of one lane in each direction.

At approximately 11.27am, when he was about 6 kilometres south of Forth, he commenced to traverse a long, right-sweeping bend at an area known as Rock Island Bend. At this location, his vehicle drifted out over the centre line and partly onto the incorrect side of the roadway. The road markings analysed subsequently by the crash investigator indicate that Mr Dawkins consciously corrected the trajectory of his vehicle with sharp left hand steering input that caused a loss of control. The driver's side of his vehicle impacted heavily against the roadside Armco railing of the northbound lane, destroying a 9 metre length of that railing and colliding with a speed advisory sign. It then flipped onto its roof and came to rest next to the railing.

Motorists drove across the crash within minutes of it occurring and attempted to assist Mr Dawkins, however he was clearly deceased.

Police officers from Ulverstone attended the scene at 11.42am. Forensic Services officers and crash investigation officers subsequently attended to examine the scene for the investigation.

Mr Grant Dawkins, the son of Mr Dawkins, arrived at the scene and formally identified his father.

The forensic pathologist, Dr Rosanne Devadas, conducted an autopsy on 17 September 2018 and determined that the cause of death was blunt trauma chest injuries, being haemothorax, rib fractures and lacerated aorta with acute blood loss and mediastinal haematoma with acute blood loss. She reported that there was no evidence at autopsy to suggest that an acute medical episode contributed to the manner of Mr Dawkins' driving leading to the crash.

The toxicological results show that Mr Dawkins had no alcohol or illicit drugs in his system. Although the results identified the presence of his prescription medications, it appears that they were present at levels consistent with his usual doses. Some of these medications are likely to have increased fatigue, however I cannot determine whether they played any significant role in the crash.

Transport Inspector, Mr David Quinn, inspected the vehicle after the crash and found it had no defects and was in roadworthy condition.

Whilst Mr Dawkins tended not to drive in built up areas as he grew older, he was familiar with the vehicle and the roadway. The weather was dry and visibility excellent at the time of the crash.

The crash investigator concluded, on the basis of scene examination, that Mr Dawkins was driving at 92km/h in a 100km/h speed zone and at a speed that was suitable to the road and weather conditions at the time. He was wearing his seat belt. There was no evidence in the investigation of Mr Dawkins' manner of driving before the crash.

I accept the conclusions of the forensic pathologist and crash investigator. I am not able to determine why Mr Dawkins' vehicle drifted over the centre line of the road, although the main possibilities are distraction or fatigue. I am satisfied that he did not suffer an acute medical event. As noted above, he was conscious when he deliberately attempted to correct the drift of the vehicle by application of harsh steering input. Unfortunately, this steering input lead to a loss of control and a crash, causing his death.

Comments and Recommendations:

The circumstances of Mr Dawkins' death are not such as to require me to make any recommendations pursuant to Section 28 of the *Coroners Act 1995*.

I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Mr Kelvin John Dawkins.

Dated: 17 February 2020 at Hobart Coroner's Court in the State of Tasmania.

Olivia McTaggart
CORONER