



MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION

Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

*Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11*

I, Simon Cooper, Coroner, having investigated the death of Graham Rex Conley

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Graham Rex Conley;
- b) Mr Conley died as a result of injuries sustained by him as driver in a single motor vehicle crash. He was not wearing a seatbelt at the time of the crash;
- c) The cause of Mr Conley's death was blunt trauma of the thorax; and
- d) Mr Conley died, aged 75 years, on 21 April 2022 at Reekara, King Island, Tasmania.

In making the above findings I have had regard to the evidence gained in the investigation into Mr Conley's death. The evidence includes:

- Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Declaration of Life Extinct;
- Affidavits confirming identity;
- Report – Dr Donald Ritchey, Forensic Pathologist;
- Report – Forensic Science Service Tasmania;
- ambulance Tasmania – Patient Care Record;
- Patient Health Summary – Ochre Health Medical Centre, King Island;
- Medical Records – North West Regional Hospital;
- Affidavit –Katrina Conley, sworn 4 May 2022;
- Affidavit – Wilmari Britz, sworn 26 July 2022;
- Affidavit – David Vellekoop, sworn 3 August 2022;
- Affidavit – Philip Evans, Transport Inspector, sworn 2 June 2022;
- Affidavit – Senior Sergeant Shane Smith, sworn 9 July 2022;
- Affidavit – Senior Constable Ross Alexander, sworn 14 June 2022 (and photographs);
- Affidavit – Constable Michael Lincoln, sworn 24 August 2022; and
- Police body worn camera footage.

Circumstances of death

Mr Conley died at the scene of a single vehicle crash on North Road Reekara, King Island at approximately 4:00pm on 21 April 2022.

The vehicle he was driving a Suzuki Jimny (in which he was alone) left the road and collided with a power pole. At the time the weather conditions were fine and dry (although it was overcast).

Members of the public came across the scene of the crash and found Mr Conley unresponsive but still seated in his vehicle. Mr Conley was not wearing a seatbelt.

Emergency services personnel were quickly on the scene and after efforts at CPR Conley was taken to the nearby King Island Hospital. Unfortunately, he could not be resuscitated and he was pronounced deceased at 6:15pm.

Investigation

Mr Conley's body was formally identified before being transferred to the Royal Hobart Hospital for autopsy.

At the Royal Hobart Hospital, experienced forensic pathologist Dr Donald Ritchey performed that procedure. Dr Ritchey found extensive evidence of severe blunt trauma of Mr Conley's thorax (chest). He noted advanced natural disease of the heart, lungs and brain.

Samples taken at autopsy were subsequently analysed at the laboratory of Forensic Science Service Tasmania. No alcohol or illicit drugs were identified as being present in those samples.

The vehicle that Mr Conley was driving at the time of the crash was subsequently inspected by Mr Philip Evans a Transport Inspector. Mr Evans found some deficiencies associated with that vehicle but nothing that could have caused or contributed to the happening of the crash. Mr Evans inspection of the vehicle confirmed that the driver's seatbelt was not being worn at the time of the crash.

I note that the road surface at the place where Mr Conley's vehicle left the road and collided with a power pole was in good condition.

Conclusion

There are no suspicious circumstances associated with Mr Conley's death. There is no evidence that any other person was involved in the crash which claimed his life.

It is possible that his heart condition was a precipitating factor in the vehicle leaving the road.

I note that Mr Conley was not wearing a seatbelt at the time of the crash. If he had been wearing a seatbelt it is more than likely he would have survived the injuries he sustained in the crash.

Comments and Recommendations

I **comment** that the wearing of seat belts has been compulsory in Tasmania for over 50 years. Nonetheless, and quite extraordinarily, people in this state continue to die needlessly from injuries sustained in motor vehicle crashes which would have been prevented, or at least lessened, by the wearing of a seatbelt.

I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Mr Conley.

Dated: 25 October 2023 at Hobart, in the State of Tasmania.

Simon Cooper
Coroner