



# MAGISTRATES COURT of TASMANIA

## CORONIAL DIVISION

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### **Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)**

*Coroners Act 1995  
Coroners Rules 2006  
Rule 11*

I, Simon Cooper, Coroner, having investigated the death of Leeanne Margaret Humphries

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Leeanne Margaret Humphries;
- b) Ms Humphries died in the circumstances set out further in this finding;
- c) The cause of Ms Humphries' death was carbon monoxide poisoning; and
- d) Ms Humphries died, aged 55 years, on 14 January 2022 at unit 3/31 Sale Street, Huonville, Tasmania.

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

- Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Affidavits establishing identity and life extinct;
- Report – Dr Christopher Lawrence, Forensic Pathologist;
- Report – Forensic Science Service Tasmania;
- Medical Records – Tasmanian Health Service;
- Records – *Guardianship and Administration Act 1995*;
- Affidavit – Mr Ian Andrews, sworn 1 March 2023;
- Statutory Declaration – Ms Andrea Exalto, made 31 October 2022;
- Affidavit – Ms Claire Bond, sworn 14 January 2022;
- Affidavit – Mr Ian Bond, sworn 13 April 2023;
- Affidavit – Mr Jonathan Salvesen, sworn 13 April 2023;
- Affidavit – Ms Elaine Lovell, sworn 23 April 2022;
- Affidavit – Ms Vicky Humphries, sworn 13 April 2023;
- Statutory Declaration – Ms Jenny Forward, Social Worker, made 14 January 2022;
- Affidavit – Ms Adele Grace, Pharmacist, sworn 13 April 2023;

- Affidavit – First Class Constable Michael Buick, sworn 14 January 2022 (and body worn camera footage);
- Statutory Declaration – Detective Senior Constable Nicolette Munro, made 20 January 2022;
- Affidavit – Constable Nicholas Monk, Forensic Services, sworn 30 May 2022 (and photographs);
- Huonville Pharmacy Staged Supply Agreement;
- Housing Tasmania Records; and
- Fire Investigation Report (and supplementary report) – Fire Investigation Officer Timothy McKay, Tasmania Fire Service.

## **Introduction**

At the time of her death, Ms Humphries was aged 55 years. She lived alone in a unit at 3/31 Sale Street, Huonville. She is survived by her son, Mr Ian Andrews.

Ms Humphries suffered a stroke in 2017 which left her physically disabled, particularly in respect of her ability to mobilise without assistance. In addition, an intellectual disability meant she was prone to impulsive behaviour. She had been variously diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia, epilepsy, type II diabetes, and atrial fibrillation.

The evidence is she was a heavy smoker and consumer of alcohol. Ms Humphries regularly smoked inside her home and had a tendency to use any surface or nearby container to extinguish her cigarettes.

As at 14 January 2022, Ms Humphries was the subject of an order made pursuant to the provisions of the *Guardianship and Administration Act 1995*. The order, made on 11 June 2019, appointed the Public Trustee as her administrator.

## **Circumstances of death**

During the morning of 14 January 2022, Ms Humphries was seen by witnesses walking with the aid of her normal walking frame around Huonville.

At 1.57 pm a 000 call was made advising that Ms Humphries' unit was on fire. Fire service crews arrived on the scene at 2.07 pm and quickly brought the fire under control. Ms Humphries' body was found, severely blackened, near the front door of the unit.

## Investigation

Ms Humphries' body was formally identified at the scene by a police officer who knew her well. Her body was then taken by mortuary ambulance to the Royal Hobart Hospital.

On 18 January 2022, highly experienced forensic pathologist Dr Christopher Lawrence performed an autopsy. The autopsy revealed clear evidence of smoke inhalation and pink colouration of the tissue consistent with carbon monoxide exposure.

Dr Lawrence did not find any suspicious injuries at autopsy nor any signs that Ms Humphries had been the victim of violence or assault. Toxicological analysis of samples at autopsy showed a carboxyhaemoglobin saturation of 48%, within the fatal range. In addition, alcohol and various prescription drugs were identified as being present in her body. In particular, a greater than therapeutic amount of Tapentadol (a synthetic opioid receptor used in the treatment of moderate to severe chronic pain) was identified. Amitriptyline in therapeutic quantities was also identified. Alcohol and those drugs combined would have caused sedation.

I am satisfied on the evidence that Ms Humphries' cause of death was smoke inhalation.

The scene of the fire was examined by Regional Fire Investigator, Station Officer Timothy McKay of the Tasmania Fire Service.

Station Officer McKay provided a comprehensive report in which he identified the fire in the unit in which Ms Humphries died was one which had a single area of origin, namely in the lounge room on upholstered furniture within a corner of that room, specifically either a two seater couch or a single seater. He also noted the presence of numerous discarded cigarette butts in the area where the fire originated. I accept Station Officer McKay's opinion as to the likely origin and probable cause of the fire which killed Ms Humphries.

In a supplementary report Station Officer McKay confirmed that the remains of two smoke alarms were located in the burnt unit. An examination of those smoke alarms led Station Officer McKay to conclude that both were in proper working order at the time of the fire. The significance of this is that no witnesses to the fire, including close neighbours, could recall hearing any smoke alarms. Nonetheless, I am satisfied that appropriately operated smoke alarms were installed in the unit at the time of Ms Humphries' death.

**Conclusion**

There are no suspicious circumstances associated with Ms Humphries' death. I am satisfied that she died of smoke inhalation in a domestic fire caused most likely by an unextinguished cigarette butt igniting furniture.

I am satisfied on the evidence that her physical disability and probable sedation as a result of the consumption of alcohol and the ingestion of various prescription drugs meant she was slow to react to the fire and thus unable to save herself.

Finally, I am satisfied that the response of emergency services was timely. I do not consider anything could have been done to save Ms Humphries.

**Comments and Recommendations**

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

I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Ms Humphries.

**Dated:** 7 November 2023 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.

**Simon Cooper**

**Coroner**