



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 Gloria Theresa Thorpe

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

- (a) The identity of the deceased is Gloria Theresa Thorpe;
- (b) Ms Thorpe died as a result of multiple blunt traumatic injuries from a motor vehicle crash on 8 June 2014 on the Bass Highway at Rocky Cape;
- (c) Ms Thorpe died on 8 June 2014 at Bass Highway Rocky Cape in Tasmania; and
- (d) Ms Thorpe was born in Deloraine on 9 September 1956 and was aged 57 years; she was in a significant relationship, and was employed as a teacher's aide.

In making the above findings I have had regard to the evidence gained in the comprehensive investigation into Ms Thorpe's death. The evidence comprises a detailed report by crash investigators; an opinion of the forensic pathologist as to cause of death; relevant police and witness affidavits; medical records and reports; and forensic evidence.

I make the following further findings, based upon the evidence, as to how Ms Thorpe's death occurred.

At approximately 4.30pm on Sunday 8 June 2014, a three vehicle crash occurred on the Bass Highway at Rocky Cape approximately 1.7km west of the Pollards Road junction.

At this location, Mr Dhirenda Prasad was driving a Nissan Pulsar sedan in a westerly direction. As he proceeded up the hill, the sun suddenly caused a blinding glare. Mr Prasad slowed his vehicle significantly in response to his lack of sight. Mr Matthew Leonard was travelling in the opposite direction in a Toyota Hilux. Also travelling in a westerly direction some distance behind Mr Prasad was Zeb Ewington, who was driving a Toyota Echo Sedan. Mr Ewington had three passengers - Jenny Ricketts, Ricky Ricketts and the deceased, Gloria Thorpe.

Mr Ewington was travelling at about 100kph when he travelled through a dip at the bottom of a hill. He started to drive up the incline and his speed slowed a little. At this time, the sun

suddenly appeared in front of him, as it had for Mr Prasad, and caused significant sight issues. Whilst still experiencing diminished sight he became aware of Mr Prasad's vehicle in front of him travelling much slower. He braked but could not prevent his vehicle from hitting the slower-moving vehicle. After striking the rear of Mr Prasad's vehicle, his vehicle veered across the road, striking Mr Leonard's vehicle, which was travelling in the opposite direction.

As a result of the accident, Jenny Ricketts suffered severe injuries. Tragically, Ms Thorpe died at the scene.

There is no evidence that any of the drivers were not paying due attention, or travelling too fast. The brightness and strength of the sun has been confirmed by the drivers involved in the crash and other witnesses who passed that area close to the time of the crash. For example, one eye witness stated that the *"the sun was so bright , the only way I could tell where I was on the road was to look out my driver's side window and use the centre line as a guide"*.

All witnesses say the sun appeared suddenly. Mr Ewington had no reason to expect that that would be the case or that the vehicle in front of him would be travelling so much slower. When he was able to see Mr Prasad's vehicle he braked immediately. First Class Constable Adam Lloyd, crash investigator, formed the opinion that Mr Ewington could not have avoided colliding with Mr Prasad's vehicle. I accept his opinion.

There is no evidence to indicate that any of the drivers were not taking reasonable care. Unfortunately, the crash causing Ms Thorpe's death was caused by the unexpected sudden appearance of blinding sunlight.

Comments and Recommendations:

I extend my appreciation to First Class Constable Lloyd for his high quality investigation and report.

The circumstances surrounding this matter do not require me to make any recommendations pursuant to section 28 of the *Coroners Act* 1995.

In concluding, I convey my sincere condolences to Ms Thorpe's family and loved ones.

Dated:25 March 2016 at Hobart in the state of Tasmania.

Olivia McTaggart
Coroner