



# 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, Robert Webster, Coroner, having investigated the death of Phillippa Helene Briggs

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Phillippa Helene Briggs (Mrs Briggs);
- b) Mrs Briggs died as a result of multiple injuries sustained in a motor vehicle accident;
- c) Mrs Briggs' cause of death was multiple (head, neck, spine and chest) injuries; and
- d) Mrs Briggs died on 6 May 2022 on the Lake Leake Highway approximately 11 km east of Campbell Town in Tasmania.

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

- The Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Affidavits as to identity;
- Affidavit of the forensic pathologist Dr Andrew Reid;
- Affidavit of the forensic scientist Mr Neil McLachlan–Troup of Forensic Science Service Tasmania;
- Records obtained from Ambulance Tasmania (AT);
- Medical records obtained from Mrs Briggs' general practitioner;
- Affidavit of Mr James Ross;
- Affidavit of Mrs Christine Puls;
- Affidavit of Ms Elizabeth Dannals;
- Affidavit of Mr Stephen Briggs;
- Affidavit of Mr Craig Vermey, police officer (rank not stated);
- Affidavit of Constable Matthew O'Neil;
- Affidavit of Constable Marcus Williams;

- Affidavit of Senior Constable Peter McCarron; and
- Accident scene sketch, photographs and forensic evidence.

## **Introduction**

On 6 May 2022 at approximately 2.05pm Mrs Briggs was driving a Toyota Land Cruiser registered number 112NX (the vehicle) west on Lake Leake Highway between Swansea and Campbell Town. At a point on the highway approximately 11 km east of Campbell Town, after Mrs Briggs had negotiated a right-hand curve, the vehicle left the highway, rolled and came to rest on the opposite side of the road, off the road surface.

Lake Leake Highway is approximately 57 km long and runs from the Tasman Highway in the east (at a point approximately 10 km north of Swansea) to Campbell Town in the west. The road surface at the scene of the crash is constructed of a coarse aggregate bitumen mix which was found by Constable O'Neil to be in good condition with no surface defects. In the vicinity of the accident scene there was 7.4 mm of rainfall that day and the maximum temperature was 9.8°C. When Constable O'Neil arrived at the scene he says the temperature was 9°C, there was light drizzle and the road was damp. The sign posted speed limit is 100 km/h.

At the crash site there is one lane for each direction of travel which are separated by a white painted single continuous line. There are also painted edge lines. The eastbound lane is 3.2 m wide and the westbound lane is 2.9 m wide. The gravel verges on each side of the road are approximately 1 m in width. There is a slight bend in the roadway for westbound traffic and there is a downhill gradient of 8.1% for westbound traffic.

## **Background**

Mrs Briggs was 51 years of age (date of birth 29 October 1970), she was married to Stephen Briggs and Mr and Mrs Briggs had a daughter and a son. At the time of the crash she resided with Mr Briggs in Swansea.

Mrs Briggs was educated at St Thomas More Primary School and then at St Patrick's College in Launceston. She met Mr Briggs in 1990 and they married in 1992.

On leaving school Mrs Briggs worked at a number of businesses in Launceston before working at Australia Post for 16 years. She was made redundant from that position. She then successfully completed an aged care course through TAFE Tasmania before commencing a career as an aged care worker.

By in or about 2018 Mrs Briggs's children had moved out of the family home so she and her husband sold that home, which was in Launceston, and moved to Swansea. She obtained employment at the May Shaw Nursing Home in Swansea.

Mrs Briggs was healthy, she was a social drinker of alcohol and she did not smoke. She was prescribed medication for high blood pressure and anxiety. Her last attendance on her general practitioner prior to the crash was on 20 January 2022.

### **Circumstances Leading to Death**

Mr and Mrs Briggs had purchased a new home in Campbell Town. Settlement in respect of the purchase was due to take place on the afternoon of 6 May 2022. On that day Mrs Briggs left the family home in Swansea after loading the vehicle with household items in order to transport them to the new property. Mr Briggs and their son helped load the vehicle and they also loaded two other vehicles with other property.

Mr Briggs says his wife left Swansea at about 1.20pm while he and their son were still packing the other vehicles. When she left she was alone but was transporting their 2 dogs. On the trip to Campbell Town the vehicle left the roadway and Mrs Briggs sustained serious injuries. Other motorists came upon the scene and emergency services were contacted.

AT received the call to attend the crash at 2.31pm. Officers drove to the scene arriving at 3.12pm. Once extricated from the vehicle Mrs Briggs was treated however she died from her injuries.

### **Investigation**

When ambulance personnel arrived the AT report indicates Police, Fire and SES were on the scene. The report includes the following entry:

*"Pt<sup>1</sup> was trapped in the vehicle with the vehicle in the ditch on the side of the road on its drivers-side up against a power pole. Pt was encased and difficult to access. Pt GCS<sup>2</sup> 3 with not (sic) peripheral*

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<sup>1</sup> Patient.

<sup>2</sup> The Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) is a clinical scale used to measure a person's level of consciousness after a brain injury. The GCS assesses a person based on their ability to perform eye movements, speak, and move their body. These three behaviours make up the three elements of the scale: eye, verbal, and motor. A person's GCS score can range from 3 (completely unresponsive) to 15 (responsive). This score is used to guide immediate medical care after a brain injury (such as a car accident) and also to monitor hospitalised patients and track their level of consciousness.

*pulses with agonal breathing. On extrication pt in asystolic<sup>3</sup> cardiac arrest and was extricated to a stretcher on the roadside where AMR<sup>4</sup> took over care/MX<sup>5</sup> of pt...*

*Pt died at scene..."*

Officer Vermey was tasked to attend this accident at 2.28pm. He arrived at 2.56pm and was the first emergency responder on the scene. He observed a number of motor vehicles parked nearby and the vehicle which was approximately 6 to 8 m from the roadway on the northern side of the road. It was resting on its right hand side and there was a large amount of debris around it. He positioned his vehicle in the westbound lane approximately 100 m east of the vehicle to protect the scene for further examination. He spoke to Mr Briggs and his son who were already on the scene. Mrs Briggs' son was comforting her by holding her hand. Mr Vermey determined there were no eyewitnesses to the crash. A short time later the road ambulance arrived and he assisted with traffic control.

Constable O'Neil arrived at approximately 4.05pm. He was briefed by Acting Sergeant Wood and he noted both lanes of the roadway had been closed to traffic. He inspected the scene and the surrounding area. Mrs Briggs was observed to be wearing a seatbelt. The vehicle was on its side with the driver's side on the ground and the undercarriage against a timber power pole. He observed a number of gouges and scrapes on the roadway which he marked with yellow paint.

Constable McCarron attended and used a drone to conduct a 3-D drone survey of the scene. Constable Williams took photographs at Constable O'Neil's direction. He then assisted Constable O'Neil to measure the scene after which Constable O'Neil prepared a sketch diagram.

On 4 June 2022 Constable O'Neil re-attended the scene with Constable Housego at which time they reviewed the road markings and measured yaw marks<sup>6</sup>. At his earlier inspection Constable O'Neil located tyre scuffing on the gravel verge of the westbound lane and tyre scuffing, scrapes and gouges in both the east and westbound lanes. The vehicle was facing north and it was perpendicular to the roadway, 4.2 m from the edge of the eastbound lane. Commencing on the gravel verge of the westbound lane, approximately 83.5 m east of where the vehicle came to rest, there were tyre scuff marks that were believed to have been

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<sup>3</sup> The heart is not beating and therefore not pumping blood.

<sup>4</sup> Aero-Medical Retrieval team.

<sup>5</sup> Management.

<sup>6</sup> Made by a tyre that is rotating and sliding parallel to that tyre's axle. In this case it resulted when the rear of the vehicle which was cornering at speed slipped sideways from the curved path of the corner it was negotiating.

yaw marks produced by the front and rear left tyres of the vehicle, as it was being steered to the right. These marks continue along the gravel verge for a distance of about 34.9 m at which point they returned to the sealed road surface. There were no visible tyre scuffs on the sealed road surface or centre lines. The yaw marks were on a path directly lining up with tyre scuff marks and gouges on the roadway, which in turn, lined up with the resting location of the vehicle on its side.

As a result of his observations of the scene Constable O'Neil was able to calculate a speed which represented the minimum calculated speed range as determined from the front left tyre, during slippage on the gravel surface after leaving the road edge to be between 57 and 80 km/h; that is below the speed limit. Constable O'Neil concludes by saying in his opinion the crash occurred because Mrs Briggs failed to take appropriate action to negotiate a downhill curve in the roadway in wet conditions. When she perceived she was overrunning the curve Constable O'Neil says she applied harsh right-hand steering which caused the vehicle to enter into a clockwise yaw and subsequently rollover before coming to rest on the opposite side of the road next to a power pole. I accept his opinion.

It was noted Mrs Briggs was very familiar with the roadway having driven the Lake Leake Highway over a period of about 20 years. Further Mr Briggs indicates his wife was a confident driver in rain and any conditions and further she was always a cautious driver. I accept what Mr Briggs says about Mrs Briggs. The file reveals Mrs Briggs was licensed to drive the vehicle which was registered and she had a good driving record.

Mr Ross is a qualified automotive technician with over 7 years' experience in the automotive industry. He is a transport safety and investigation officer employed by the Department of State Growth. He inspected the vehicle on 12 May 2022. As a result of his inspection he says prior to the crash the vehicle would have been in a well-maintained and serviceable condition. I accept his opinion.

Dr Reid conducted a post-mortem examination on 10 May 2022. As a result of that examination and his consideration of a post-mortem CT scan and both toxicology and microbiology results Dr Reid says Mrs Briggs' cause of death was multiple (head, neck, spine and chest) injuries. Dr Reid also says there was no medical history to suggest Mrs Briggs was at specific risk of sudden cardiac death or cardiac disease which would cause loss of consciousness and loss of control of the vehicle which she was driving. He says the possibility of fatigue and micro sleep causing driving attention and subsequent loss of vehicle control cannot be excluded but cannot be determined by a post-mortem examination alone. Forensic toxicology did not cause or contribute to the crash. What prescribed medication

was found on testing does not have detrimental effects on driving ability or impairment of driving performance. I accept Dr Reid's opinions.

### **Comments and Recommendations**

I am satisfied, having considered all the evidence in this matter, there were no defects in the road surface that may have caused or contributed to the crash and there was no evidence of any other vehicle, person or object being involved. The consumption of alcohol and/or drugs have been ruled out as contributory factors and speed, on its own, has not caused or contributed to this crash. The vehicle was in good condition so it did not cause or contribute to the crash. It appears from this investigation that while negotiating a wet downhill curve in the roadway Mrs Briggs has overrun the curve ending up in the gravel on the southern side of the roadway before applying harsh right-hand steering which has resulted in the vehicle entering into a clock wise yaw before it rolled over and came to rest on the driver's side off the roadway on its northern side.

I extend my appreciation to investigating officer Constable O'Neil for his thorough investigation and report.

The circumstances of Mrs Briggs' 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 Mrs Briggs.

Dated: 15 September 2023 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.

**Robert Webster**  
**Coroner**