



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 Glenn Thomas Wood,

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Glenn Thomas Wood;
- b) Mr Wood died as a result of accidental drowning whilst fishing off a pontoon in the circumstances described below;
- c) The cause of death was drowning; and
- d) Mr Wood died between 8.00pm on 14 June 2019 and 7.05am on 15 June 2019 at Quoiba, Tasmania.

In making the above findings I have had regard to the evidence gained in the comprehensive investigation into Mr Wood's death. The evidence comprises the Police Report of Death for the Coroner, an opinion of the pathologist who conducted the autopsy, toxicological evidence, family, police and witness affidavits, medical records and reports and forensic evidence.

Background

Glenn Thomas Wood was born in Launceston on 8 May 1963 and was aged 56 years. He had been in a relationship with his wife, Helen Patricia Wood, for 25 years. He was a father of ten children. At the time of his death he was staying with his wife and his four youngest children in a caravan at the Horsehead Creek camping ground at Quoiba, Tasmania. He was a retired call centre employee.

In March 2018, Mr Wood and his family commenced travelling around the state in a caravan, staying at places for varying periods of time. On 7 June 2019, they set up at the Horsehead Creek camping ground at Quoiba. Mr Wood enjoyed fishing at Horsehead Creek, and he fished from the rocks at the water's edge.

In about 2011 Mr Wood was diagnosed with bipolar affective disorder and was prescribed medication to assist, which he took in accordance with instructions. He was under the regular care of his general practitioner, whose records also indicate that he suffered from borderline

cognitive impairment, sleep apnoea, a fatty liver, asthma and GORD (gastro-oesophageal reflux disease). He suffered left leg injuries in 2017 after being struck by a car. The injuries required surgery. In May 2018, Mr Wood had an operation upon his sinuses as he was having trouble breathing.

On occasions, Mr Wood consumed significant amounts of alcohol. This caused him to become violent and disgruntled, particularly when combining alcohol with his medication. In May 2019, after Mr Wood and his wife had been drinking, a physical altercation took place. Police were called and both were arrested. A Police Family Violence Order was issued to each of them against the other with protective conditions.

Circumstances Surrounding the Death

At 7.00pm on 14 June 2019 Mr Wood left the caravan park to go fishing at the river. He returned momentarily at 8.00pm to get a knife before leaving again. At 2.00am, Mrs Wood noticed that her husband had not returned. Both she and her daughter were not able to locate him in his usual spot. Mrs Wood rang police at 2.36am due to her concerns for his safety. Police officers attended and located fishing gear belonging to Mr Wood on a pontoon on part of a boat ramp complex within the Mersey River (adjoining Horsehead Creek). Search and Rescue officers were deployed in a vessel just after 4.00am. Mr Wood was located at 7.05am face down in the river, about 400 metres from the pontoon. He was deceased.

A full investigation into Mr Wood's death subsequently took place. The police officers attending the scene were of the opinion that there were no suspicious circumstances at the scene indicating the involvement of any other person in Mr Wood's death. Specifically, one of Mr Wood's rods was set in the water. The fly of his trousers was also noted to be unzipped.

Mr Wood was formally identified by his wife. He underwent autopsy, conducted by forensic pathologist, Dr Terry Brain, who concluded that the cause of his death was drowning. Dr Brain noted the presence of fluid in his throat and lungs. He reported that there was no sign of significant natural disease, and no sign of inflicted violence.

Toxicological analysis revealed Mr Wood had a very high blood alcohol reading of 0.188g/100mL with therapeutic levels of his prescription medication present. In this regard, Mr Wood's wife stated that Mr Wood consumed 2-3 cans of alcohol before going fishing, although, in view of the alcohol present in his blood, it is likely that he consumed a greater quantity.

In his affidavit, Mr Wood's brother-in-law described an incident in 2000 where Mr Wood jumped into the water from a boat whilst fishing at Beauty Point. He had become submerged

and needed to be rescued by those on the boat. Other affidavit evidence confirms that he could not swim to any degree.

I am satisfied that Mr Wood accidentally fell from the pontoon whilst fishing. It is possible that he may have stood on the edge of the pontoon to urinate into the water. His level of intoxication was high and the water was cold – about 9 degrees Celsius. These factors, together with his poor swimming ability, resulted in his death by drowning.

Comments and Recommendations

The death of Mr Wood was avoidable. He was fishing alone at night in winter. He was intoxicated and was not wearing a PFD (personal flotation device). In these circumstances, a fall into the water would almost inevitably result in death. Although coroners continue to warn of the dangers of drowning in similar circumstances, the risks do not appear to be fully appreciated by some members of the community.

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

I extend my appreciation to Constable Ebony Foster for her thorough and timely investigation.

I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Mr Glenn Thomas Wood.

Dated: 11 March 2020 at Hobart Coroners Court in the State of Tasmania.

Olivia McTaggart
Coroner