



# 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, Olivia McTaggart, Coroner, having investigated the death of Jacinta Fay Vanderfeen

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Jacinta Fay Vanderfeen, date of birth 6 March 1968.
- b) Mrs Vanderfeen was 54 years of age and lived with her husband in Railton. Mr and Mrs Vanderfeen have two sons and, at the time of her death, Mrs Vanderfeen worked as a manager for the University of Tasmania.

At about 3.45pm on Saturday 11 June 2022, Mr and Mrs Vanderfeen, together with a friend, Peter Ransom, drove to the home of Jane Beaton in Beulah to provide her with assistance. Mrs Beaton had called them and said that a tree had just fallen on her house in the high winds. Mrs Beaton was a close friend of Mrs Vanderfeen and her husband had passed away two weeks previously. When they arrived at Mrs Beaton's house to help her, the wind was extremely strong, in line with the Bureau of Meteorology forecast. The Bureau of Meteorology, in fact, reported at that time in Sheffield there were gusts of 111 km/h, this weather station being only 6 kilometres from Mrs Beaton's house.

Upon arriving at Mrs Beaton's house at about 4.30pm, Mr and Mrs Vanderfeen and Mr Ransom went into the house and started to assist with safety tasks and retrieving personal items for Mrs Beaton. Mrs Vanderfeen and her husband then left the house to return to the car, intending to leave the property quickly due to the severity of the wind. As they exited the house, a very large gumtree fell, its branches striking and pinning down Mrs Vanderfeen and injuring Mr Vanderfeen. Mr Ransom, hearing the crash of the tree from inside, went out of the house and found Mrs Vanderfeen trapped under a branch and unresponsive, with only the faintest pulse detectable. Mr Ransom, a firefighter, administered CPR to Ms Vanderfeen and cleared her airways. Emergency services were called and, initially, Tasmania Fire Service and State Emergency Service volunteers arrived at the scene. Police officers subsequently arriving assessed that the severity of the wind

at the time of their arrival made the situation clearly dangerous. It was particularly noted that another four or five trees of a similar size as those already fallen were moving excessively in the wind. Ambulance paramedics attended and determined that Mrs Vanderfeen was deceased. I am satisfied upon the evidence that she died rapidly after the tree impacted her body. With difficulty, Mr Vanderfeen was able to be evacuated. He was treated in hospital for two weeks with numerous injuries.

The attending police officers and emergency services personnel decided to remove all persons from the scene due to the danger. Mrs Vanderfeen was unable to be removed from under the tree in a timely manner and she was extracted and transported to the Launceston mortuary the following day.

- c) Mrs Vanderfeen died as a result of blunt trauma of the head and chest caused by being crushed by a falling tree.
- d) Mrs Vanderfeen died on 11 June 2022 at Beulah, Tasmania.

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

- Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Affidavits confirming identification;
- Opinion of the forensic pathologist regarding cause of death;
- Toxicology report of Forensic Science Service Tasmania;
- General practitioner records for Mrs Vanderfeen;
- Two affidavits of Mr Kenneth Vanderfeen, husband of Mrs Vanderfeen;
- Affidavit of Constable Timothy Ford, police officer who attended the scene;
- Affidavits of two Forensic Services officers, including photographs and drone footage;
- Affidavit of Jane Beaton, property owner; and
- Affidavit of Peter Ransom, friend at the scene.

### **Comments and Recommendations**

I acknowledge the efforts of all those who assisted and placed themselves at risk at what was both a dangerous, difficult and tragic scene.

I also extend my appreciation to investigating officer, Sergeant Gavin Thomas, for his investigation and report.

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

I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Mrs Vanderfeen.

**Dated:** 23 May 2023 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.

**Olivia McTaggart**  
Coroner