



# 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, Duncan Fairley, Coroner, having investigated the death of Shauna Maree Macdonald

### **Find that:**

- a) The identity of the deceased is Shauna Maree Macdonald;
- b) Ms Macdonald died in the circumstances set out below;
- c) Ms Macdonald died as a result of Pentobarbital toxicity;
- d) Ms Macdonald died on 3 May 2015 at Launceston in Tasmania; and
- e) Ms Macdonald was born in Blacktown, New South Wales on 27 December 1976 and was aged 38 years; she was separated and was a disability pensioner at the date of her death.

### **Background:**

Shauna Maree Macdonald was born in Blacktown, New South Wales on 27 December 1976 to Vicki Burton and Donald Macdonald. Ms Macdonald was the eldest of 5 daughters born to the couple. She was raised in Western Sydney and completed her secondary education to year 12 level at Bidwill High School. At 19 years of age Ms Macdonald fell pregnant with her first child. She would later marry the father of her child, James Davys, and together with their daughter Jasmine, the pair relocated to New Zealand.

During 2010 Ms Macdonald returned to NSW to reside with family after the breakdown of her marriage. It was shortly after her return to Australia that Ms Macdonald began showing the early signs of Huntington's chorea, an inherited neurological disease which results in the gradual loss of cognitive and physical function. Ms Macdonald's father and one of her sisters also suffered from the condition.

In mid 2012 Ms Macdonald moved to Tasmania to reside with her sister Kimberley Macdonald before then relocating to live with another of her sisters, Amanda in the same suburb of Launceston. Amanda became Ms Macdonald's full time carer while Kimberley continued to assist as and when her own family and work responsibilities would allow. On 6 February 2013 Ms Macdonald gave birth to her second child, Lakyn Victoria Rose Macdonald.

### **Circumstances Surrounding the Death:**

On Thursday 31 April 2015 Amanda and Lakyn travelled to Sydney for a 5 day holiday. Kimberley Macdonald attended on her sister at 8 Barton Street as carer during Amanda's absence. During the evening of 2 May 2015 the pair consumed a small amount of alcohol and socialised normally. At approximately 7pm Kimberley decided to have a bath for approximately 1 hour with the intention of making the evening meal for herself and Ms Macdonald immediately after. Before retiring to the bathroom, Kimberley noted that Ms Macdonald was acting normally and observed nothing out of character in her sister's behaviour.

At shortly before 8pm Kimberley went to Ms Macdonald's room where she found her sister lying on her right hand side on the bed facing away from the door. She observed that Ms Macdonald was cold, blue and unresponsive. She immediately telephoned Tasmanian Ambulance Services.

Police and Paramedics both attended the scene. Ambulance Officers began conducting CPR and, after a prolonged period, were able to achieve a pulse. Ms Macdonald was transported to the Launceston General Hospital where she was initially taken to the Department of Emergency Management before being admitted to the Intensive Care Unit.

Despite the best efforts of the attending medical staff Ms Macdonald was pronounced dead by Dr Elizabeth Winson at 01:55 hours on 3 May 2015 at the Launceston General Hospital Intensive Care Unit.

A post mortem examination by Dr Terrence Brain (Pathologist), including a toxicology analysis, revealed that Ms Macdonald died as a result of *Pentobarbitone (Pentobarbital)* toxicity. I accept this analysis and the cause of death described by Dr Brain and find that Ms Macdonald voluntarily ingested *Pentobarbitone (Pentobarbital)* with the express intention of ending her life.

Ms Macdonald had written a number of letters to family and friends explaining that she had taken her own life. She explained that she was fully aware of the end stage symptoms of Huntington's disease and that she wished to avoid such a degree of suffering. I am satisfied that Ms Macdonald understood the gravity of her actions.

### **Comments and Recommendations:**

In the circumstances there is no need for me to make any further comments or recommendations.

In concluding, I convey my sincere condolences to the family of Ms Macdonald.

**Dated:** 20 February 2017 at Launceston in the State of Tasmania.

**Duncan Fairley**  
**Coroner**