



MAGISTRATES COURT of TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION



Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11

I, Simon Cooper, Coroner, having investigated the death of Melissa Fisher

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Melissa Fisher;
- b) Ms Fisher died as a result of multiple blunt injuries following a fall from height whilst bush walking;
- c) The cause of Ms Fisher's death was blunt injuries;
- d) Ms Fisher died on 23 March 2016 at Federation Peak in the Southwest National Park, Tasmania; and
- e) Ms Fisher was born in Launceston on 12 September 1983; and was aged 32 years at the time of her death, she was a nurse and single.

In making the above findings I have had regard to the evidence gained in the comprehensive investigation into Ms Fisher's death. The evidence comprises an opinion of the pathologist who conducted the autopsy; affidavits from Police Search and Rescue, investigation and forensic officers; and an affidavit from Ms Claire O'May, Ms Fisher's walking companion. In addition, I had the benefit of viewing photographs and a video taken at the scene.

I am satisfied that Ms Fisher died when she fell approximately 50 metres whilst attempting to summit Federation Peak in the Southwest National Park in the afternoon of Wednesday, 23 March 2016. Ms O'May did not see her friend's fall but heard it. After unsuccessfully trying to locate Ms Fisher, she made her way to an area where mobile phone reception was possible and made an emergency call to police. The pair had an EPIRB, but it was carried by Ms Fisher.

Ms Fisher's body was recovered the next day by police search and rescue officers who had been inserted by helicopter just after midnight on Thursday, 24 March 2016 onto the Bechervaise Plateau, not far from the summit of Federation Peak. The first attempt to drop the SAR team in to the area was unsuccessful due to adverse weather conditions. Although those conditions had scarcely improved the second attempt was successful.

After a difficult operation to recover Ms Fisher's body, it was transported to the Royal Hobart Hospital by helicopter and mortuary ambulance. At the hospital an autopsy was carried out by Forensic Pathologist Dr Donald McGillivray Ritchey. Dr Ritchey's opinion, which I accept, is that the cause of Ms Fisher's death was multiple blunt traumatic injuries sustained in a fall from height whilst bushwalking. Toxicological analysis of samples taken at autopsy was unremarkable.

I note the evidence was that Ms Fisher was very fit and a very experienced bushwalker. The evidence satisfied me that Ms Fisher's death was a tragic accident and there are no suspicious circumstances surrounding it. It is notorious that Federation Peak is a dangerous and extremely challenging mountain to climb. A number of deaths have occurred as a result of falls from the mountain over the last few years.

Comments and Recommendations:

The efforts of the search and rescue crew, in particular Senior Constable Peach, Sergeant Steane, Senior Constable Chris Williams, Constable Oakden and Paramedic Schwartz, is worthy of particular recognition.

The circumstances of Ms Fisher'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 Melissa Fisher on their loss.

Dated 20 April 2017 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.

Simon Cooper
Coroner