



# 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 Jamie Damien Wheldon

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Jamie Damien Wheldon;
- b) Mr Wheldon died unintentionally in the circumstances set out in this finding;
- c) The cause of death is methylenedioxymethylamphetamine (MDMA or “ecstasy”) toxicity; and
- d) Mr Wheldon died on 29 December 2019 at Beaconsfield, Tasmania.

#### **Introduction**

In making the above findings, I have had regard to the evidence gained in the comprehensive investigation into Mr Wheldon’s death. The evidence includes:

- Tasmania Police Report of Death;
- Opinion of the pathologist conducting the autopsy;
- Toxicology report regarding analysis of Mr Wheldon’s post-mortem blood sample;
- Affidavit of Rose Williams, mother of Mr Wheldon;
- Affidavit of Samantha Hartley, friend of Mr Wheldon;
- Affidavit of Kelvin Beams, neighbour of Ms Hartley who attempted resuscitation of Mr Wheldon;
- Affidavits of two attending and investigating police officers;
- Affidavit of a Forensic Services officer attending the scene and photographs;
- Statement of an attending CIB detective regarding the circumstances of death;
- Medical records and reports for Mr Wheldon;
- Records from City Mission and Salvation Army Bridge Program regarding Mr Wheldon’s rehabilitation programs; and
- Police body worn camera footage.

## **Background**

Mr Wheldon was born in Launceston on 9 August 1974. He was aged 45 years at the time of his death. He was single, had never married, and had no children. He was unemployed. At the time of his death he was on approved Christmas leave from the Salvation Army Bridge Program where he was engaged in rehabilitation for his long-term addiction to illicit drugs.

Mr Wheldon was born to James Wheldon and Rose Williams and had two siblings. After his school education, he completed a butcher's apprenticeship and worked as a butcher in various places. He also performed as a musician playing acoustic guitar and singing both in Tasmania and interstate. Mr Wheldon was in reasonable health although he suffered from depression and anxiety which was likely linked to his drug addiction, which primarily involved methamphetamines.

Mr Wheldon had been a regular client of the Bridge Program (Salvation Army) and Missiondale (City Mission) which provided assistance for his drug addiction. Rose Williams, Mr Wheldon's mother, noted that her son would often relapse just a few weeks after being discharged from a rehabilitation program. Mr Wheldon's various counsellors described him as a man who wished to overcome his addiction and who would speak honestly about his cravings.

On 31 August 2019 Mr Wheldon attended the Launceston General Hospital with his mother, Ms Williams, as a result of suffering an acute psychotic episode caused by ingestion of illicit drugs.

On 25 September 2019 Mr Wheldon commenced the residential Bridge Program. He progressed well in the program and was abstinent from illicit drugs. Before the commencement of his intended Christmas leave on 20 December, he was assessed by the program counsellors. The notes on his file indicate that his levels of depression, anxiety and stress all fell into the normal range and this was an improvement from his last meeting. The notes also stated that Mr Wheldon had maintained his abstinence from drugs and that his cravings had reduced.

## **Circumstances of Death**

Mr Wheldon was released from the Bridge Program for leave on 20 December 2019 and was due to return on 5 January 2020. During his leave, he was to live with Ms Williams in Pipers River.

On Sunday 28 December 2019, a long-term friend of Mr Wheldon, Samantha Hartley, visited him at Ms Williams' home. Ms Hartley stayed overnight and then took Mr Wheldon back to her home in Beaconsfield, intending that he stay with her for a "couple" of days. On the trip to

Beaconsfield, Mr Wheldon remarked to Ms Hartley on more than one occasion that he wanted to “*get on it*”, meaning that he wanted to take hard illicit drugs.

At 11.30am that day, Mr Wheldon and Ms Hartley arrived at Ms Hartley’s home. Ms Hartley’s two sons were present there with two other friends. Some time between 11.30am and 1.30pm, Mr Wheldon left the residence without telling anyone and apparently his absence was not noticed. When he returned at approximately 2.00pm, Ms Hartley described him as acting strangely and stumbling around in the rear yard. He was then assisted into a chair in the rear sunroom of the property where his unusual behaviour continued. Mr Wheldon kept apologising to Ms Hartley and hit the back of his head into the window behind him. Mr Wheldon was then moved into a different chair, where he was seen to shake all over, sweat heavily, and to claw and hit at his face. Ms Hartley stated that she had only seen him in such a state on one previous occasion. When she asked him what he had taken, he laughed at her and his responses did not make sense. Mr Wheldon then proceeded to turn grey in colour and unresponsive. Ms Hartley called for an ambulance and her neighbor, Kelvin Beams, assisted with first aid until paramedics arrived. When paramedics arrived, they attempted to resuscitate Mr Wheldon for a short time before declaring him deceased. Police officers attended the scene to commence an investigation into Mr Wheldon’s death.

An autopsy upon Mr Wheldon was conducted by a pathologist on 31 December 2019. The pathologist was unable to ascertain an anatomical cause of Mr Wheldon’s death, and noted that toxicology results revealed that Mr Wheldon had reportedly fatal levels of MDMA (“ecstasy”) in his blood together with a low alcohol level. The pathologist was of the opinion that MDMA toxicity caused Mr Wheldon’s death.

### **Comments and Recommendations**

I am satisfied that Mr Wheldon died accidentally as a result of MDMA (“ecstasy”) toxicity. The evidence indicates that, as a result of cravings, Mr Wheldon decided to obtain MDMA from a person or persons who cannot be identified upon the evidence available. Nevertheless, I am satisfied that he ingested the substance voluntarily and without coercion. I cannot find exactly how, where and when he did so.

The evidence does not permit me to determine the quantity of MDMA ingested, although Mr Wheldon’s tolerance to its effects would have been reduced as a result of his period of abstinence. Over dosage with MDMA is known to result in sudden death due to the onset of one or more major acute syndromes.

I am satisfied that the investigation into Mr Weldon's death was sufficiently thorough to enable the required findings under the *Coroners Act 1995*. However, two persons who may have been able to assist me more fully determine the circumstances of death (including the source of the MDMA) declined to provide an affidavit to investigating officers. Attempts to seek their assistance have delayed the conclusion of this investigation. I do not consider that it is desirable to hold an inquest to compel those persons to provide evidence. It is clear that Mr Wheldon had the capacity to make his own decisions and knew the possible effects of taking the substance.

I extend my appreciation to investigating officer Senior Constable Dean Purdy for his investigation and report.

I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Jamie Damien Wheldon.

**Dated:** 18 November 2021 at Hobart Coroners Court in the State of Tasmania.

**Olivia McTaggart**

**Coroner**