



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 Danielle Alisha Clayton

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Danielle Alisha Clayton, date of birth 20 December 1999.
- b) Ms Clayton was aged 22 years at the time of her death and lived with her parents at Hadspen. She was not married and did not have children. She had just started employment as a receptionist with a firm of solicitors in Launceston. Ms Clayton had represented Australia in boxing, although she had not boxed in the 12 months before her death due to a back injury. On 7 March 2022, four months before her death, Ms Clayton was driving a vehicle and crossed the centre line of the road to collide head-on with another vehicle. She was due to be charged with minor drug (cannabis) and traffic offences as a result of causing this crash. Two months before her death, she had undergone spinal surgery and was prescribed various medications to manage her pain. She held a full Tasmanian driver's licence.

At about 7.30pm on 27 July 2022, Ms Clayton was driving her father's Holden Commodore sedan motor vehicle (fitted with a V8 fuel injected petrol engine) alone and in a southerly direction on an uphill stretch of the Midland Highway at South Launceston, 200 metres north of the Westbury Road overpass. At that location, Ms Clayton lost control of the vehicle whilst travelling at very high speed in the right hand traffic lane. The vehicle entered a sideslip and travelled across the left hand traffic lane, narrowly missing a vehicle travelling in that lane at the 90 km/h speed limit. Ms Clayton's vehicle then left the roadway and crashed into the rock face at the side of the highway. Ms Clayton, who was not wearing her seatbelt, was thrown inside the vehicle and sustained fatal injuries. She was pronounced deceased upon arrival at the Launceston General Hospital.

A comprehensive investigation was conducted into the crash by an experienced crash investigator. I find, as a result of the evidence in that investigation, that when Ms Clayton lost control of her vehicle she was travelling at a speed of 174 km/h. She was also affected by numerous illicit and prescription drugs, including methamphetamine and cannabis, which significantly impaired her driving ability. It is also possible that she was distracted by operating her mobile phone to stream music at the time of the crash but I am not able to make a positive finding in this regard. I am satisfied that Ms Clayton's loss of control of the vehicle was not intentional and I am also satisfied that no external factors contributed to the crash.

- c) Ms Clayton's cause of death was multiple blunt trauma injuries.
- d) Ms Clayton died on 27 July 2022 at Launceston in Tasmania.

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

- The Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Affidavit confirming identity;
- Opinion of the forensic pathologist regarding cause of death;
- Toxicology report of Forensic Science Service Tasmania;
- Ambulance Tasmania records;
- Affidavits of three motorists who were witnesses to the crash and surrounding circumstances;
- Affidavit of a Transport Safety and Investigation Officer regarding condition of the Holden Commodore vehicle;
- Affidavits and photographs of Forensic Services officers;
- Drone footage of the crash scene;
- Affidavit of first police officer at the scene and associated body worn camera footage;
- Report, affidavit and diagrams of crash investigator, Senior Constable Michal Rybka; and
- Data from Ms Clayton's mobile phone.

Comments and Recommendations

The only cause of Ms Clayton's death was her own reckless driving at almost twice the speed limit for the road, impaired by her ingestion of drugs. Despite prominent public campaigns aimed at preventing crashes due to speeding and drugs, such needless deaths

continue to occur. The death of Ms Clayton represents the loss of life of a talented young woman and highlights the lasting impact on her family, loved ones and community.

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

I am grateful to crash investigator, Senior Constable Michal Rybka, for his very thorough investigation and analysis.

I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Ms Clayton.

Dated: 31 May 2023 at Hobart Coroners Court in the State of Tasmania.

Olivia McTaggart

Coroner