



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, have investigated the death of Jonas Havskov Pedersen

Find that:

- (a) The identity of the deceased is Jonas Havskov Pedersen;
- (b) Mr Pedersen died in the circumstances described in this finding;
- (c) Mr Pedersen died on 17 February 2014 on the shore of Lake Dulverton, Church Street, Oatlands;
- (d) Mr Pedersen died as a result of morphine intoxication due to ingestion of poppy tea;
and
- (e) Mr Pedersen was born in Esbjerg, Denmark on 17 February 1988 and was aged 26 years at the time of death; he was a single man whose occupation at the date of death was a student.

Background:

Jonas Havskov Pedersen was born on 17 February 1988 in Esbjerg to John Christen Pedersen and Ingeborg Tovborg Havskov Pedersen. He was single and had no children. Prior to him leaving Denmark he resided with his parents at Norregade 53, Gording.

Mr Pedersen had a happy and normal childhood. He was healthy and had no major illnesses and no identified mental health issues prior to his death. Mr Pedersen was very loving, happy, outspoken and highly beloved of all his friends and family. He was described by his sister as, 'always being there with a hug and a kiss'.

It appears that Mr Pedersen was involved in illicit drug taking during his life. Police obtained a report via Interpol in relation to prior convictions for Mr Pedersen. In 2007, he was charged with possession of two grams of hashish for which he was fined.

Circumstances surrounding the death:

Mr Pedersen left Denmark on 13 December 2013 to embark on a working holiday around Australia.

Upon his arrival in Australia Mr Pedersen worked at various farms performing labouring type work in exchange for food and lodging and small remunerations.

He took some work at a farm in Cobram, Victoria, approximately five weeks prior to his death, and it was there that he met German-born Pablo Hermann Kaiser, born 15 September 1984 and the two quickly became friends.

Mr Kaiser told Mr Pedersen that he was heading to Tasmania by ferry. Mr Pedersen decided to accompany him on the trip. The ferry arrived in Devonport on 2 February 2014.

The pair travelled to the north-west of the State and whilst on this leg of the journey Mr Pedersen spoke to Mr Kaiser about opium poppy plants. Mr Pedersen was able to describe the plants and knew what they looked like. Mr Kaiser believed the information had been obtained from the internet by Mr Pedersen.

On 3 February 2014 at 2:21:27 the following SMS message was sent to recipient Marcin BG via Mr Pedersen's Apple iPhone: *'It is already fantastic! It is fucking beautiful here 😊 and there is sooo many opium fields 😊 today the weather wasn't to [sic] good, but found a skatepark at the beach and skated [sic] a little bit 😊 how are you?.'*

At some point on the journey in the north-west of the State, they stopped near a field of mature poppy plants and it was here that Mr Kaiser believed that Mr Pedersen gathered some poppy caps. He did not see Mr Pedersen take them, only that he climbed the fence and entered the field. Later that same day, he observed Mr Pedersen making a 'tea' from the poppy heads and when invited to take some Mr Kaiser declined. Mr Kaiser described the method Mr Pedersen used to make the tea – he would cut the skin of the cap into small pieces then brew it up with plain water in a jug. Once the flesh was brewed it came out the colour of normal tea. Mr Pedersen avoided the seeds: however, he did not dispose of them but placed them in a bag, for reasons unknown.

Mr Pedersen pointed out many poppy fields to Mr Kaiser whilst en-route and Mr Kaiser believed Mr Pedersen had developed a good knowledge of what he was looking at.

Mr Kaiser did not speak at any great length to Mr Pedersen about the poppies and believed he had used the internet to find out how to make the tea.

Mr Pedersen told Mr Kaiser he felt warm, comfortable and good after drinking the tea.

Mr Kaiser did not wish to take part in the tea drinking as he was against drugs and the danger they posed, but Mr Pedersen brushed off the inference of 'danger' as if it were of no consequence to him.

Mr Pedersen brewed the poppy tea at least four more times on the way south and Mr Kaiser alleged that Mr Pedersen always went quiet and wasn't very social after consuming the beverage. Mr Pedersen had no signs of an adverse reaction on those occasions and Mr Kaiser did not witness Mr Pedersen vomiting or complaining of feeling poorly during those times.

On Saturday 15 February 2014, the pair left Port Arthur travelling to Richmond where they stayed overnight.

On 16 February 2014 the pair travelled through the Coal River Valley via Colebrook ending up on the Midland Highway. It was in this area they noticed an historical feature sign and they turned off the Midland Highway onto Old Jericho Road, Jericho. Whilst travelling on this

section of road they passed expansive fields of opium poppies. Mr Pedersen requested Mr Kaiser to stop the vehicle so that he could get some. He assumed that Mr Pedersen had picked some poppy heads and placed them in the pockets of the jacket he was wearing in an attempt to conceal them.

Mr Kaiser commented on how there were signs on the fences everywhere that prohibited people from entering and taking the poppy heads. Mr Kaiser knew it was wrong for Mr Pedersen to be taking anything from the fields but it was not his business and Mr Pedersen was old enough to make his own life decisions.

Once underway again the pair arrived in Oatlands and made their way to the camping area on the Esplanade around lunch time. Mr Kaiser left the camper to explore Oatlands and Mr Pedersen remained behind.

Mr Kaiser returned to the van around 2.00pm and noted Mr Pedersen was looking a bit 'stoned'. He surmised he had consumed poppy tea again. The pair talked for about an hour and around 3.00pm Mr Pedersen hopped inside the van and went off to sleep making no mention of feeling unwell.

Prior to midnight Mr Kaiser attempted to wake Mr Pedersen but found him heavily asleep.

Mr Kaiser checked to ensure he was breathing. Mr Pedersen appeared to be sleeping at this time.

Mr Kaiser prepared for sleep at around midnight. At this time Mr Pedersen stirred and sat up and began talking to Mr Kaiser. He informed Mr Kaiser he felt unwell and possibly had too much 'tea'. Mr Kaiser realised this was credible as Mr Pedersen did not look well. Mr Pedersen recognised Mr Kaiser wasn't 'right'. He had the impression that Mr Pedersen was scared. Mr Pedersen asked for water and drank about one and a half litres straight up. Mr Pedersen said he needed some fresh air and Mr Kaiser helped him out of the van, giving him more water to drink. Mr Pedersen could not stand on his own, but Mr Kaiser assisted him and together they walked a little with Mr Pedersen being supported the entire time.

After a while, Mr Pedersen was able to stand on his own and Mr Kaiser asked him if he needed any more help. Mr Pedersen told him he was fine. He just needed to 'puke'. Mr Pedersen placed his fingers in his mouth and made himself vomit. Mr Kaiser asked if there was anything further he could do. He replied that there wasn't and thanked him for his concern.

Mr Kaiser entered the van to go to sleep and Mr Pedersen did likewise. Mr Pedersen got up probably three more times to vomit and no further words were spoken between them during the night. Mr Pedersen curled up in his sleeping bag and Mr Kaiser alleged Mr Pedersen responded to him normally prior to him going off to sleep and he assumed that he was feeling better.

Mr Kaiser awoke at around 8.00am on 17 February 2014 and headed to the sliding door on the side of the van. Upon opening the door Mr Kaiser shook Mr Pedersen to awaken him but there was no response.

Mr Kaiser lifted him slightly and noted fluid coming from Mr Pedersen's nose and that he appeared 'blue'. Mr Kaiser threw all their belongings into the van and drove to the medical

centre at Oatlands to seek assistance. The doctor who examined him concluded that Mr Pedersen was deceased. Police were called and attended.

Attending police officers found Mr Pedersen lying face down with his face into his pillow. There was a small amount of what appeared to be vomit beside him on his left side and, upon raising him slightly, they noted that he had yellowish foam around his mouth and nose. Mr Pedersen's arms were folded up and his hands were near his chin. He was cold to touch and his face and lips were a purplish blue. Mr Pedersen was clothed and was blanketed by a black sleeping bag. There were no signs of violence on Mr Pedersen or in the van.

The attending police officers noted a white drinking mug containing a brown 'tea like' substance just inside the sliding door and a bag of poppy heads in the foot well. Police officers, including forensics and CIB officers, carried out an extensive examination of the van and seized all relevant exhibits for the investigation.

On 18 February 2014, Dr Christopher Lawrence, State Forensic Pathologist, performed a post-mortem examination on Mr Pedersen at the Royal Hobart Hospital mortuary. Dr Lawrence noted that toxicology revealed an elevated level of morphine in the blood. Thebaine and codeine were also detected. These are the less toxic alkaloids found in the opium poppy. Their presence indicates that the source of the morphine was the poppy tea ingested by Mr Pedersen.

Dr Lawrence formed the opinion that the cause of death was morphine intoxication due to ingestion of poppy tea.

An examination of Mr Pedersen's computer and mobile phone was conducted by a forensics officer. On all the websites searched by Mr Pedersen there are discussion threads, personal experiences, and information about opium.

The investigation has not revealed any evidence to suggest that another person is directly responsible for the death of Mr Pedersen. I am also satisfied that he did not intend to take his own life.

Mr Pedersen was fluent in English and it is apparent that he was able to read the signs which were placed on fencing surrounding poppy fields, and owing to his discussions with Mr Kaiser, he was cognisant of the risks involved.

It is unknown whether Mr Pedersen was aware of the differing varieties of poppy and the varying strengths. The identification of the poppy crop would be known only to the farmers and the companies they supply.

Mr Kaiser had full understanding of the warning signs on the fences and by his own admission he and Mr Pedersen had discussed the 'drugs' issue briefly. Mr Kaiser had declined their use.

Mr Kaiser presented to attending police officers as a caring, intelligent and credible young man. I accept that this is the case. I find that he had no involvement and gave no encouragement to Mr Pedersen in taking the poppies or making the tea.

I am satisfied that Mr Kaiser gave all the assistance he could to Mr Pedersen preceding his death. He offered numerous times to get further assistance which was declined by Mr Pedersen.

I find, accepting the opinion of Dr Lawrence and in light of all the evidence, Mr Pedersen died unintentionally from morphine intoxication due to ingestion of poppy tea. His death at a young age is a tragic outcome of his own action.

Comments & recommendations:

There have been other deaths in Tasmania involving young persons entering, without authority onto poppy plantations, removing poppy heads and extracting substances containing morphine. This activity is both illegal and dangerous. The consequences of the ingestion of any of these substances are unpredictable. The death of Mr Pedersen demonstrates the danger and serves as a warning against engaging in this activity.

The circumstances of Mr Pedersen'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 Constable Suzanne Jaenke for her high quality investigation and report.

I convey my sincere condolences to Mr Pedersen's family and loved ones.

Dated: 3 July 2015 at Hobart in the state of Tasmania.

Olivia McTaggart
CORONER