



MAGISTRATES COURT of TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION



Record of Investigation into Death (without inquest)

*Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11*

I, Stephen Raymond Carey, Coroner, having investigated the death of Connan Taiaroa Bronson

Find That:

- a) The identity of the deceased is Connan Taiaroa Bronson ("Mr Bronson");
- b) Mr Bronson died in circumstances described in this finding;
- c) Mr Bronson died on 29 July 2014 at Collins Cap Road, Molesworth;
- d) Mr Bronson died as a result of multiple blunt injuries following a fall from a cliff;
- e) Mr Bronson was born in Wellington, New Zealand on 25 October 1954 and was aged 59 years at the time of his death;
- f) Mr Bronson was single and was unemployed at the time of his death; and
- g) No other person contributed to Mr Bronson's death.

Circumstances Surrounding the Death:

Mr Bronson was initially named Harry Taiaroa Pene but had recently changed his name. He initially came to Melbourne, Australia, in 1973 from New Zealand, lived there for some time and had a relationship with Ms Virginia Harrison. They had a child, Rebecca Hunt (DOB 26/06/1978). Mr Bronson worked in the music industry and after the breakdown of this relationship he relocated to Darwin in the late 1970s. Whilst in Darwin he commenced a de facto relationship with Ms Sandra Vicki Harris (DOB 02/12/1958). There were three children born of this relationship: Kane Mason Pene (DOB 08/06/1980), Nathan Waka Lo Pene (DOB 09/05/1982) and Aaron Harry Nui Pene (DOB 08/11/1985).

Mr Bronson was an abuser of illicit drugs during most of his adult life and at one time in Darwin he took part in a methadone program.

In approximately 1992 Mr Bronson's relationship with Ms Harris ended and Ms Harris moved to Tasmania with the children. Mr Bronson returned to Tasmania approximately 3 years later and resided with his ex-partner and their children at Glenorchy. He obtained his own residence in which he lived between 1996 and 1998, at that time residing with his youngest son, Aaron. During this period Aaron noted that his father was using illicit substances ranging from methamphetamines to cannabis and that due to this addiction his father was

having trouble keeping up with normal household expenses and this led to financial difficulties.

After approximately 2000, Mr Bronson commenced an itinerate type lifestyle relying upon friends and acquaintances to provide him with accommodation. In approximately 2009 he moved in with a male by the name of "Kenny" (identity unknown) who lived at an address in New Town and they became close friends. In June 2014 Mr Bronson was obliged to return to his itinerate lifestyle after the death of "Kenny". At some stage Mr Bronson moved to a property at Collins Cap Road, Molesworth where a friend, Mr Gary Nicholls, provided him the opportunity to use a bus located on that property. This bus was used as storage space by Mr Nicholls but did contain a double bed.

Mr Bronson was not known to have any identified medical conditions during his life. It was reported that he had only been to see a doctor approximately three to four times in the last 10 to 15 years.

During the time he stayed at his property, Mr Nicholls reported that Mr Bronson was:

"Travelling very hard, being emotional and very distant."

Mr Nicholls did what he could to keep Mr Bronson occupied however he remained in low spirits. On the evening of 25 July 2014, Mr Bronson visited the home of his son Aaron who offered for him to move in with him to allow him to "get back on his feet". Aaron believed that his father seemed depressed and thought that the isolation of living at Collins Cap Road was not helping his emotional state. Aaron was concerned as to the poor conditions in which his father was living and tried to persuade him to move in with him; however Mr Bronson responded that he did not want to let his son down by living with him. Aaron also encouraged his father to seek his driver's licence which would provide him with more independence; however Mr Bronson responded that he was depressed and not interested in getting a licence.

On 28 July 2014 Mr Bronson visited his son Nathan at his residence. During their time together Nathan attempted to have his father move in with him as it was his belief that he needed somewhere more stable to live other than at Molesworth. Once again Mr Bronson refused.

On 29 July 2014 Mr Bronson had breakfast with Mr Nicholls. There was little conversation which was not unusual and Mr Nicholls then left the property. At about 1450hrs that day, Mr Kevin Midgley, who also lives at 918 Collins Cap Road with Mr Nicholls, was assisting Mr Matthew Higgins to unload some used tyres which Mr Higgins was delivering for Mr Nicholls that were to be used to build a retaining wall. As they were doing this they noted Mr Bronson walk towards a cliff located on the property. The distance to the cliff face from the bus from which Mr Bronson exited was approximately 15m. There was no conversation between those present and Mr Bronson walked straight towards the cliff face and jumped.

Messrs Higgins and Midgley immediately ran to the cliff face. They located Mr Bronson, noting him to move, and were able to have Mr Bronson respond to their calls to him. Police and ambulance were contacted immediately. The attending police officer and a paramedic, Mr Stephen Evans, descended the cliff face via a dirt track and across rough terrain and after about 10 to 15 minutes managed to get to Mr Bronson's location. The weather at the time was poor with rain and strong winds. It was quickly determined that Mr Bronson was critically ill but conscious and he required immediate medical attention. An assessment was done that the police rescue helicopter would be required to remove him from the location where he was found. The helicopter arrived at the scene at 1620hrs, landing close by whilst intensive efforts were made to stabilise Mr Bronson's condition prior to evacuation. Mr

Bronson's condition continued to deteriorate and a decision was made to evacuate him by winching his stretcher into the police helicopter. This process occurred at 1735hrs, it was dark at this time and it was necessary for those involved to use night vision equipment. The winching operation was successful; however an assessment carried out on Mr Bronson in the helicopter determined that he had died.

A police investigation in relation to this matter did not identify any suspicious circumstances.

The post-mortem concluded that Mr Bronson had suffered severe traumatic injuries predominantly of the thorax and abdomen internally where there was extensive bruising of the chest wall, fractured ribs, internal bleeding and mediastinal and retroperitoneal haematoma. It was also identified, however, that Mr Bronson had significant health issues being severe emphysema and active respiratory bronchiolitis (lung diseases caused by smoking) and marked atherosclerotic and hypertensive and cardiovascular disease. Microscopic sections of the lungs revealed crystalline foreign debris consistent with a history of intravenous drug use. Finally there was inflammation of his liver consistent with the history given of hepatitis C virus exposure.

The results of the investigation of this matter lead me to conclude that Mr Bronson took this action with the intention to end his life. Unfortunately it is clear that he was suffering depression or some other form of mental illness that resulted in him taking this action.

Comments and Recommendations:

I have decided not to hold a public inquest hearing into this death because my investigations have sufficiently disclosed the identity of Mr Bronson, the date, place, cause of death, relevant circumstances concerning how his death occurred and the particulars needed to register his death under the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1999*. I do not consider that the holding of a public inquest hearing would elicit any significant information further to that disclosed by the investigations conducted by me.

I commend the efforts and endeavours of the attending police, ambulance officers and the crew of the Police Rescue helicopter who all performed their duties to the highest level in what were clearly arduous conditions.

I wish to convey my sincere condolences to Mr Bronson's family.

Dated: 18 March 2015 at Hobart in the state of Tasmania.

Stephen Raymond Carey
CORONER