

CORONER'S COURT OF THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Matter Title: Inquest into the death of Joseph Junior Suwedi

Citation: [2025] ACTCD 10

Decision Date: 4 December 2025

Before: Coroner Archer

Findings: See [33], [36], [37]

Catchwords: **CORONIAL LAW** – manner and cause of death – road accident – multiple injuries sustained in single motor vehicle accident – intoxication – decision not to conduct a hearing – publication of findings to establish a record of road related deaths

Legislation Cited: *Coroners Act 1997 (ACT)* ss 13, 34A, 52
Liquor Act 2010 (ACT)

File Number: CD 50 of 2023

CORONER ARCHER:

INTRODUCTION

1. Mr Joseph Junior Suwedi died in a motor vehicle accident on Antill Street, Watson, in the Australian Capital Territory (“ACT”), that occurred at about 0227 hours on 21 February 2023. Mr Suwedi was 44 years old at the time of his death. I will, with respect, refer to Mr Suwedi as Joseph in these findings.
2. The accident occurred as a result of Joseph losing control of the vehicle he was driving, causing it to collide with a tree that was located near to the road. No one else was in Joseph’s car and no one else was injured in the accident.
3. I have chosen to publish my findings in this inquest as it is in the public interest to provide an accessible record of road accident deaths that occur in the ACT, so as to better facilitate consideration of road safety issues.

JURISDICTION

4. Joseph’s death was reported to the ACT Coroner’s Court on 21 February 2023, as it fell within the terms of section 13(1)(g) of the *Coroners Act 1997* (“the Act”), being a death that “appears to be directly attributable to an accident”.
5. I was required to hold an inquest¹ into the manner and cause of Joseph’s death and make findings that are required by section 52 of the Act. That section of the Act relevantly provides:

52 Coroner’s findings

- (1) A coroner holding an inquest must find, if possible—
 - (a) the identity of the deceased; and
 - (b) when and where the death happened; and
 - (c) the manner and cause of death; and
 - (d) in the case of the suspected death of a person—that the person has died.

- (4) The coroner, in the coroner’s findings—
 - (a) must—
 - (i) state whether a matter of public safety is found to arise in connection with the inquest or inquiry; and

¹ Under the Act, the meaning given to the term “inquest” varies. In this context it means a process of investigation. There can be a “hearing” for an inquest.

- (ii) if a matter of public safety is found to arise—comment on the matter.

BACKGROUND

6. Joseph was born and raised in the Republic of Malawi, where he worked as a tour guide and in the banking sector. He met his Australian partner in Malawi, and their two children were born there. Joseph moved to Canberra with his partner and children in 2017.
7. Joseph had made many friends in Canberra that he socialised with regularly. He enjoyed playing golf and travelling to see more of Australia with his family. He particularly enjoyed spending time outdoors and visiting the ocean.
8. Joseph had undertaken a variety of study, employment, and business opportunities since arriving in Canberra. He had started a removalist business, which was operating successfully until his passing. He was granted Australian Citizenship in October 2022.

EVIDENCE

9. On my behalf, the Australian Federal Police (“AFP”) conducted an investigation of the circumstances of Joseph’s death. The accident scene was examined, photographed, and a three-dimensional scan obtained for further analysis. The road was assessed for issues that may have contributed to the accident. The car involved in the collision was examined by a police mechanic. Police spoke with Joseph’s partner and examined Joseph’s phone, with telephone records produced on subpoena. Joseph’s medical records were also reviewed.
10. The AFP obtained and analysed CCTV footage from residential security cameras which had coverage of the scene. They also obtained CCTV footage from the venue where Joseph had been drinking with friends earlier that evening. Review of the CCTV footage obtained from the venue allowed Joseph’s movements on the evening of 20 February 2023 and the morning of 21 February 2023 to be reconstructed. Joseph’s friends who had been drinking with him that night were also interviewed.

CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING DEATH

Context

11. The vehicle Joseph was driving on the night of the accident was a 2012 Volkswagen Passat CC Diesel station wagon. He had purchased the car only a few days prior and had intended to refurbish it for resale.

12. On the evening of 20 February 2023, at around 2030 hours, Joseph met friends for drinks at a venue in Dickson, ACT. Before they entered the venue, Joseph asked his friend and business partner if he could park his car at the shop and collect it in the morning.
13. At 2050 hours, Joseph's partner spoke with him on the phone. Joseph expressed an intention to return home for dinner. It is unclear why he ended up staying at the venue until morning.
14. Joseph consumed about eight pints of Asahi beer over the course of the night. He purchased his last drink at 0033 hours and appears to have carried it back to the table without issue.
15. Between 0100 hours and 0200 hours Joseph was approached twice by venue staff as he appeared to be sleeping in his chair. Staff spoke to him and provided a bottle of water.
16. Joseph left the venue at 0214 hours. He walked across Badham St, Dickson towards where his car was parked. He was in the company of another friend. A few minutes later, Joseph drove his car in the direction of Antill St, Watson. His friend walked back towards the venue, got into a taxi, and left.

The Collision

17. The collision occurred at 0227 hours at the intersection of Antill Street and Fison Street in Watson, ACT.
18. Antill Street is an arterial suburban road. In the area of the collision, the road runs northeast-southwest, bisecting Watson and Hackett. The roadway comprises a single lane in either direction divided by a painted lane-width island prior to Fison Street, coming from the southwest direction. The road is straight with no bends. There is a slight hill in the road. The posted speed limit is 60kmh.
19. CCTV footage from nearby residential premises shows that Joseph was travelling on the painted island in the centre of the road, treating it as an additional lane. Police obtained a 3D scan of the area captured by the camera and its sight lines to facilitate a time over distance analysis of the footage. The result of that analysis suggested the average speed of the vehicle to be 97.38 kmh.
20. At the intersection where Fison Street meets Antill Street, Joseph lost control of the vehicle. The car entered what is known as a 'yaw', rotating clockwise around its vertical

axis. It clipped the metal pole of the bus stop sign, mounting the kerb on the left side of the road and colliding with a tree.

21. The car sustained significant damage to its front when it impacted the tree. The driver and passenger front airbags were deployed.
22. Joseph suffered severe injuries. Seatbelt bruising was identified, indicating that it was appropriately worn at the time of the collision.

Emergency Service Response

23. At 0240 hours, a resident who had been awoken by the sound of the crash located the car and made a triple zero call (000) to emergency services.
24. AFP were the first to arrive at the scene at 0249 hours, soon followed by ACT Ambulance Service ("ACTAS") and ACT Fire and Rescue ("ACTFR"). ACTAS assessed Joseph and pronounced he was deceased at the scene.

INVESTIGATION OF THE ACCIDENT

25. On 28 February 2023, the police mechanic completed a vehicle inspection. The vehicle was found to have been maintained in good condition. The tyres fitted to the vehicle were compliant with manufacturer specifications and there were no indications that the vehicle suffered any mechanical or structural failure that may have contributed to the collision.
26. The Airbag Control Module ("ACM") was unable to be downloaded. The ACM is typically able to collect and save data from a variety of sensors which calculate the speed at which the vehicle was travelling before airbag deployment.
27. On 2 March 2023, the AFP conducted skid and friction testing of the road surface. The testing suggested the speed of the vehicle when it entered the yaw was 113.28kmh. The speed of the vehicle at impact was calculated as not less than 87.72kmh.
28. The road was in good repair, and the weather conditions were dry. Streetlights are present on Antill Street and were on at the time of the collision. However, the established trees along the side of the road cast large shadows between the lights. There appeared to be a slightly raised seam in the road surface running along the edge of the painted island section.

29. Joseph had prior convictions for driving with alcohol in blood beyond prescribed concentrations in 2018 and 2021.

Eyesight

30. An injury in childhood had caused loss of vision in Joseph's left eye. He had undergone eye surgery around two weeks prior to the accident which resulted in partial recovery of peripheral vision.
31. Despite limited depth perception, Joseph was accustomed to driving with his existing field of vision. I find it unlikely that any factors relating to the eye surgery contributed to the accident.

POST-MORTEM

32. At my direction, Professor Johan Duflou, forensic pathologist, conducted a post-mortem examination of Joseph's body on 22 February 2023. The examination consisted of a CT scan, an external examination and toxicological testing. Professor Duflou attributed the cause of Joseph's death to the multiple injuries he sustained in the accident.
33. Toxicological testing of a specimen of preserved peripherally obtained blood indicated Joseph had been significantly intoxicated by alcohol at the time of his death, with a blood alcohol level of 0.196 g/100mL reported. The alcohol level is likely to have significantly compromised his ability to drive his car safely. No other intoxicating substances were detected.

DECISION TO DISPENSE WITH A HEARING

34. Pursuant to section 34A of the Act and having considered the information provided to me by members of the AFP and Professor Duflou, I was satisfied that the manner and cause of Joseph's death were sufficiently disclosed, and, as such, a hearing was unnecessary.
35. I communicated my decision not to conduct a hearing and the reasons therefor to Joseph's family on 4 November 2025. I provided them with a copy of my provisional findings and invited their comments. His family suggested minor changes to the provisional findings, some of which were incorporated in these findings.

FORMAL FINDINGS AS TO THE MANNER AND CAUSE OF DEATH

36. For the purposes of section 52(1) of the Act I find:

That Joseph Junior Suwedi died on 21 February 2023 from multiple injuries sustained in a motor vehicle accident that occurred on Antill Street, Watson, in the Australian Capital Territory.

FINDINGS IN RESPECT OF MATTERS OF PUBLIC SAFETY

37. Matters of public safety did not arise from my inquest. However, I have referred my findings to Access Canberra for consideration of whether the supply of alcohol to Joseph in the period before the accident was consistent with the licensee's obligations under the *Liquor Act 2010* (ACT).
38. As mentioned, I have chosen to publish my findings as it is in the public interest to provide an accessible record of road accident deaths that occur in the ACT.

CONDOLENCES AND POSTSCRIPT

39. I convey my sincere condolences to Joseph's family.
40. I apologise to the family for the delay in finalising my inquest.

I certify that the preceding forty [40] numbered paragraphs are a true copy of the reasons for findings of his Honour Coroner Archer.

Associate: Grace McKinley

Date: 4 December 2025