



FINDING OF INQUEST

An Inquest taken on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at Port Augusta and Adelaide in the State of South Australia, on the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 13th, 14th, 15th and 29th days of May 2013, by the Coroner's Court of the said State, constituted of Anthony Ernest Schapel, Deputy State Coroner, into the death of Jason Neil Richards.

The said Court finds that Jason Neil Richards aged 28 years, late of Lansborough Street, Ballarat North, Victoria died at Coondambo Station, Glendambo, South Australia on or about 21 June 2011 as a result of gunshot injury of head. The said Court finds that the circumstances of his death were as follows:

1. Introduction and reason for Inquest

- 1.1. These are the Court's findings in relation to the cause and circumstances of the death of Jason Neil Richards. At the conclusion of the Inquest the Court delivered preliminary extempore findings. The findings did not deal with every issue that was ventilated during the Inquest, but were confined for the most part to matters of narrative and formality. Those preliminary findings are incorporated within this document. In some instances this document expands upon and explains the reasons for some of the findings and observations that are set out in the extempore findings. In this document I will also deal with the matter of the police response to Mr Richards' reported disappearance.
- 1.2. In this Inquest the Court examined the cause and circumstances of Mr Richards' death and in particular whether Mr Richards whether had deliberately caused his own death, whether any other person may have been involved in Mr Richards' death, the role in Mr Richards' death of illicit substances, in particular methamphetamine or amphetamine, the source of any such substances, the date of Mr Richards' death, the

adequacy of the police response to his disappearance and whether Mr Richards' death may in any have been way prevented.

1.3. The Court's extempore findings, edited to correct immaterial errors of fact, grammar and syntax, were as follows:

'These are the Court's preliminary findings in respect of the death of Jason Neil Richards who was aged 28 at the time of his death. Mr Richards' decomposed remains were located at a remote location on Coondambo Station which is north of the Stuart Highway between Glendambo and Pimba. His remains were located on Saturday 30 July 2011. Mr Richards' utility had been located the day before, approximately 500 metres from where his body would be located.

Mr Richards' remains were subjected to a post-mortem examination that established that his cause of death was gunshot injury of head. I find that to have been Mr Richards' cause of death. There were no features in respect of Mr Richards' circumstances to suggest the wound was anything other than self-inflicted. The size and shape of the wound to the forehead just above the eyebrow line was consistent with having been caused by a .22 projectile. Although Mr Richards' vehicle was located several hundred metres away from his body, a .22 pump action rifle was located approximately 4 metres from his body. Post-mortem examination also revealed that methamphetamine and amphetamine were in Mr Richards' liver. Methamphetamine is a well known illicit substance. It has a tendency to stimulate a person and to suppress the urge to sleep. The amount of methamphetamine and amphetamine would not have been sufficient to have accounted for Mr Richards' death, but it indicates that at the time of his death both of these substances were present in his body. The presence of both methamphetamine and amphetamine is consistent either with metabolism of methamphetamine, as originally consumed, to amphetamine post-consumption of methamphetamine, or with consumption of an illicitly obtained source that had both substances as components. The fact that methamphetamine and amphetamine were present in similar quantities in Mr Richards' remains is consistent with the passage of a significant period of time between the consumption of the substances and his death.

No traces of methamphetamine, amphetamine or any other illicit substance were located in or around Mr Richards' vehicle or person.

There is no evidence that Mr Richards was a regular consumer of illicit substances, including methamphetamines. There is also no evidence that Mr Richards suffered from any mental illness. He did have a criminal record in Victoria that included offences involving firearms.

Mr Richards normally resided in Ballarat in Victoria with his partner and children. However, in the period immediately prior to his death he had been staying with his sister and her husband at their home in Darwin in the Northern Territory. Mr Richards had been working in Darwin as a glazier with a local glass replacement business known as Ezy Glass Services. He was a well regarded employee in that business.

Mr Richards ultimately decided to end his employment in Darwin and return to Ballarat. The evidence demonstrates beyond any doubt that Mr Richards was determined to travel alone in his utility from Darwin to Ballarat in the shortest time possible and with a

minimum of rest along the way. He was keen to get home for a number of reasons. The obvious route for him to travel was the sealed Stuart Highway via Alice Springs, Coober Pedy, Port Augusta and from there to Victoria.

Mr Richards set out from Darwin at approximately 9pm on Sunday evening 19 June 2011. His only travelling companion was his dog, Amy, which was accommodated on the vehicle in a purpose-built enclosure affixed to the rear of the tray of the utility.

Mr Richards had acquired a large quantity of fuel which was contained in drums situated on the tray of the utility. This meant that Mr Richards would not for the immediate future need to refuel at service stations along the way. Mr Richards also had a quantity of food and water at his disposal. The vehicle itself was in good working order, consistent with the manner in which Mr Richards had customarily maintained the vehicle. The utility set out from Darwin towing a boat and trailer. Mr Richards had acquired the boat and trailer in Darwin. The boat and trailer had been stolen. It was beyond the scope of this inquiry to investigate whether Mr Richards had personally been responsible for its theft. The utility was registered in Victoria and bore Victorian registration plates. The trailer was not registered. As I understand the evidence, Mr Richards' sister's husband provided him with a Northern Territory trailer registration plate that was affixed to the trailer for the purposes of Mr Richards' journey to Ballarat.

When Mr Richards set out from Darwin he was in possession of a .22 pump action rifle and ammunition. He would maintain possession of that weapon until his ultimate death. It is beyond argument that this was in fact the weapon that inflicted Mr Richards' fatal head wound.

Mr Richards' determination to travel as quickly as possible involved a further determination on his part to remain awake for as long as possible. To this end Mr Richards acquired some No-Doz and Mother energy drinks. As well, it is plain that he also acquired a quantity of methamphetamine for the same purpose. These substances were apparently sourced prior to him leaving Darwin.

For the first part of Mr Richards' journey, and it seems as far as Coober Pedy, he maintained contact with members of his family. The evidence suggests that Mr Richards had reached Coober Pedy by late evening on Monday 20 June 2011. This indicates that Mr Richards had travelled the approximate 2100 kilometres from Darwin in approximately 25 hours. This strongly suggests that he had virtually travelled non-stop between Darwin and Coober Pedy and had little or no rest or sleep in the course of that journey.

Mr Richards' last contact with any member of his family occurred at approximately 10:30pm on Monday evening 20 June 2011, at which time he sent an SMS from his mobile phone to his sister in Darwin. He said he had just arrived in Coober Pedy. The following morning, Tuesday 21 June 2011, he had unsuccessfully attempted to call his sister's husband. Attempts by his sister to contact him during that day were also unsuccessful. A missed call on the Tuesday morning was the last any member of his family had heard from him. Concern about Mr Richards' circumstances escalated over the next 48 hours.

Mr Richards' journey, once he had arrived in Coober Pedy, naturally would have taken him in a southerly direction along the Stuart Highway towards Glendambo and then

Pimba near Woomera. From Pimba the journey would normally have taken him along the Stuart Highway in a southerly direction towards Port Augusta. The distance from Coober Pedy to Pimba is approximately 370 kilometres. At Pimba there is a roadhouse known as Spuds. Also at Pimba is a T-junction between the Stuart Highway and a sealed road that heads north to Woomera, which is only a few kilometres from Pimba, and then proceeds towards Roxy Downs further to the north. As it so happened, at that time Mr Richards' father, Mr Wayne Richards, resided in Roxby Downs. Mr Richards' mother resided in Ballarat.

During the week commencing Monday 20 June 2011 Mr Richards was sighted on three separate occasions in the Pimba/Woomera area. I find that all of these sightings occurred on the morning of Tuesday 21 June 2011. In my formal findings I will deal with the possible order of these sightings, but the evidence demonstrates that all three sightings occurred sometime between 8am and 9am that day. There is no doubt that Mr Richards was the subject of all three sightings. On each of those occasions Mr Richards was alone, save and except for his dog. He was either in or in the immediate vicinity of a utility on each occasion. At each of these sightings the boat and trailer with which Mr Richards had set off from Darwin was not present. The trailer and burnt out boat would be located on a dirt track in the Pimba/Woomera area on or about 23 June 2011 on which day its finding was notified to Woomera Police. It appears that by the time Mr Richards was sighted on 21 June 2011 on three occasions, he had either burnt and abandoned the boat and trailer at the location where it would ultimately be located, or had temporarily unhooked it from his utility with the possible intention of return to its location. The former scenario is the more likely.

Two of the sightings of Mr Richards were separately made by employees of a local civil construction and building company based at Woomera called PA&CI Martin Company. In each instance the sightings were made by two men and the men resided in the region. The other sighting was made by a truck driver employed by Linfox. The sightings made by the PA&CI Martin employees both occurred on the Pimba to Roxby Downs Road in the Woomera vicinity. On each occasion Mr Richards evinced unusual behaviour. In one of the sightings he was seen to be driving the utility erratically, moving from one side of the road to the other. At one point he conducted a U-turn and drove straight towards the vehicle of the two men.

At the other sighting in this vicinity Mr Richards appeared as if he had not slept for some time, his eyes were glazed and very wide open. He gave the impression that he was under the influence of a substance. He made paranoid comments in an agitated way and in very strong language to the effect that the observers' mates should leave him alone. At one point one of the observers saw Mr Richards move to the interior or towards the interior of his utility and the thought crossed the observer's mind that Mr Richards was going to pull a gun out of the vehicle. The observer and his companion then sped off in their own vehicle.

The remaining sighting which was made by the Linfox truck driver occurred on the Stuart Highway approximately 5 to 10 kilometres south of the Pimba to Roxby Downs T-junction. The truck driver was driving his rig in a northerly direction along the Stuart Highway when he observed Mr Richards' vehicle approaching from the north along the Stuart Highway. The driver of the vehicle was flashing the vehicle's lights continually and was indicating to the truck driver that he should stop. The truck did stop. Mr

Richards drove the utility strangely in a full loop around the truck before stopping. Again Mr Richards evinced paranoid behaviour and said something to the effect that 'he's in the back and he's trying to kill me'. There was no other person in or around the utility. The truck driver could see the dog at the rear of the utility. It occurred to the truck driver that the man may have been on amphetamines, and in his original statement to police he described the man's behaviour as 'paranoid'.

None of these sightings were reported to police on the day they occurred. They would be reported to police at the conclusion of the week commencing Monday 27 June 2011, by which time Mr Richards had been reported as a missing person and in respect of whom there had been some media publicity to that point. This had prompted the reporting of those sightings. The sightings that I briefly described here are the last known sightings of Mr Richards.

Concern for Mr Richards' whereabouts were communicated to South Australia Police by Mr Richards' mother on 22 June 2011. This communication was made to Coober Pedy Police. On 23 June 2011 he was formally reported as a missing person by his father. A missing person report was taken by Roxby Downs police. On the same day police were advised of the finding of Mr Richards' boat and trailer on a dirt access road, some kilometres off the Pimba to Woomera Road. This location was in the general area in which Mr Richards had been sighted on 21 June 2011. The boat was burnt out for reasons that were not obvious. Of course on the day in question, namely 23 June 2011, police were not in possession of any information that Mr Richards had been physically sighted two days prior to that.

On 10 July 2011 Mr Richards' dog, Amy, was located in an emaciated condition near the Coondambo Station homestead. It is estimated by a veterinary surgeon that the dog had not been nourished for approximately two weeks, perhaps less. Two weeks prior to 10 July was approximately 26 June 2011.

On 29 July 2011 Mr Richards' vehicle was located at a remote location on the Coondambo Station and on the following day his remains were located 500 metres from his vehicle.

Evidence was adduced before the Court from a Professor of Pharmacology, Dr Jason White, concerning the effects of methylamphetamine and amphetamine on the human brain and its effect on human behaviour. I will recite this evidence in greater detail in my formal findings, but it is sufficient to say here that Mr Richards' observed behaviour on 21 June 2011 was highly consistent with methamphetamine and/or amphetamine consumption. It is not known how much methamphetamine or amphetamine he had consumed, but it is worthy of note that he covered the 2100 kilometres from Darwin to Coober Pedy in 25 hours and that would mean that he probably had very little sleep, a matter consistent with the consumption of methamphetamine or amphetamine. Evidence was given that methamphetamine withdrawal can give rise to depressed mood and at times suicidal ideation, even in persons who have evinced no previous history of the same. It is clear and I find that Mr Richards had consumed methamphetamine and possibly amphetamine and that this, possibly in combination with sleep deprivation, accounts for his behaviour as observed on 21 June 2011. The fact that no illicit substances were ultimately found in his vehicle or on his person is consistent with his supply having become exhausted some time prior to his death. It is possible that by 21

June 2011, or in the days following, he was coming down from methamphetamine and/or amphetamine consumption or was suffering withdrawal. To my mind his unexpected suicide is very much in keeping either with the effect of a drug induced psychosis or with depression by reason of methamphetamine withdrawal.

Mr Richards' father, Wayne Richards, told the Court of a conversation that he had with his other son David following Jason Richards' death and location of his remains. Following the location of Jason Richards' remains, David Richards who is also now deceased, told Wayne Richards of a prediction that would come to pass that it would be established that Jason had consumed drugs. David Richards told his father that Jason had sourced the substance from an unidentified person connected to the glass replacement company for whom Jason Richards had worked in Darwin. Major Crime Squad detectives from South Australia travelled to Darwin and took statements verified by affidavit on oath or affirmation from relevant members of management and staff of that company. Suffice it to say no evidence was gathered in respect of the identification of any source of methamphetamine from persons connected with that company.

It is clear and I find that Mr Richards must have died on a day prior to the finding of his dog on 10 July 2011 and probably well before that date. The precise date of Mr Richards' death cannot be established with complete certainty. Dr Langlois, the pathologist who performed Mr Richards' post-mortem examination, was unable to identify a precise date of death. He suggested the condition of Mr Richards' remains was in keeping with death having occurred several weeks prior to the locating of his remains, but also acknowledged that he may have been still alive on, say, 25 June 2011. Telephone records and examination of Mr Richards' bank accounts had not established any relevant fact identifying the date of Mr Richards' last activities that was inconsistent with the day of his last sighting in the Pimba/Woomera area on Tuesday 21 June 2011. It is clear that at some point he made his way to the Coondambo Station in the Glendambo area. It is not known by which route he took to get to that location, and in particular whether that part of the journey was on the sealed Sturt Highway, or whether in its entirety it was across country. The Coondambo Station is approximately 100 kilometres from Pimba. Mr Richards was not seen in the Coondambo or the Glendambo area, but that is not surprising because of the remote location to which he had driven his vehicle. One suspects, although one cannot be completely certain, that Mr Richards took his life on Tuesday 21 June 2011 or within days of that date.

For the purposes of these findings, and therefore for death registration purposes, I conclude that Mr Richards died on or about 21 June 2011 which was the last day that Mr Richards can be shown to be alive. However, the actual date of death may have been on a day after that.

Evidence from the officer in charge of the Woomera Police Station suggested that if any of the sightings of Mr Richards had been reported to police promptly on Tuesday 21 June 2011 and Mr Richards had remained on major roads, such as the Stuart Highway or the Pimba to Roxby Downs Road or in the vicinity of those roads, it is likely that police would have located him. If he had been located, to my mind the behaviour as reported by those who had seen him would probably have resulted in Mr Richards' voluntary detention, arrest or possible detention under the provisions of the Mental Health Act 2009. In either case he would have received appropriate treatment. Accordingly, if his whereabouts had been advised to police promptly on Tuesday 21 June 2011 Mr Richards'

death may have been prevented. I will deal with the question of the police response to his disappearance in my formal findings to be delivered at a later date.

My findings can be summarised as follows:

- 1) The cause of death of Mr Richards was gunshot injury of head.
- 2) Mr Richards caused his own death with a self-inflicted gunshot wound. No other person was involved.
- 3) The taking of his own life was substantially precipitated by the effects of methamphetamine and/or amphetamine.
- 4) Mr Richards died on or about 21 June 2011.
- 5) If Mr Richards' activities on the morning of 21 June 2011 had been promptly reported to police, his death may have been prevented.

Finally, these findings should serve as a warning to anyone contemplating using methamphetamine or amphetamine as a means of combating fatigue or remaining awake. This case yet again underlines in a dramatic way the pitfalls associated with abuse of these substances.

The other matter that the public should take from these findings is that sightings of persons acting dangerously or irrationally in the bush should be taken very seriously and be brought to the attention of the authorities, and in particular the police, without delay. The wellbeing of the person concerned and the safety of members of the general public may well depend on it.'

2. The date of Mr Richards' death

- 2.1. As indicated above, Mr Richards' last actual or attempted telephone communication with any person occurred at approximately 5:30am on Tuesday 21 June 2011. I have found that the last known sightings of Mr Richards all occurred later that same morning. I have also found that Mr Richards died on or about 21 June 2011. I now provide my detailed reasons for so finding.
- 2.2. The dates and days of the week on which the three separate sightings of Mr Richards had occurred were inconsistently described in the various witnesses' statements. Mr Riley Martin and Mr Peter Ash, who had seen Mr Richards driving in an erratic and dangerous manner on the Pimba to Roxby Downs Road in the vicinity of Woomera, said in their respective statements that the incident they had witnessed occurred on the morning of 21 June 2011. Riley Martin's statement¹ was taken by police on Friday 1 July 2011. Mr Ash's statement² was taken on Saturday 2 July 2011. Neither statement, as part of its respective narrative, purported to establish with absolute

¹ Exhibit C10a

² Exhibit C51

precision the reason why 21 June 2011 had been assigned as the day on which this incident had occurred except to the extent that Riley Martin believed that the incident had occurred on the second day of an employment stint in the Woomera area, the first day having been Monday 20 June 2011. When both witnesses gave evidence in May 2013 neither was able convincingly to establish Tuesday 21 June 2011 as the date on which the incident had occurred.

- 2.3. Mr Paul Martin, together with a colleague by the name of Geoffrey Spargo, witnessed another incident on the Pimba to Roxby Downs road in the vicinity of Woomera in which Mr Richards had made strange and paranoid statements to the effect that Mr Martin's mate should leave him alone and in which the thought had crossed Mr Martin's mind that Mr Richards was about to produce a gun from the vehicle. Mr Paul Martin stated in his police witness statement³, which was taken on Sunday 3 July 2011, that this incident had occurred on Wednesday 29 June 2011. Geoffrey Spargo, whose police witness statement⁴ was taken on Tuesday 5 July 2011, said in that statement that the incident had occurred on Wednesday 22 June 2011. Neither Paul Martin's statement nor Geoffrey Spargo's statement identify any reason as to why they were of the view that the incident they had witnessed had occurred on the dates set out in their statements. Their oral evidence at the inquest did not advance the matter.
- 2.4. To my mind Mr Paul Martin's originally stated date of the incident, being Wednesday 29 June 2011, can be safely discounted. By that date there had already been some considerable media publicity concerning Mr Richards' disappearance. Mr Paul Martin neither purported to state that the incident that he and Mr Spargo witnessed had occurred at a time after publicity about a man's disappearance had emerged nor purported to say that the incident must have occurred only a few days prior to giving his statement or in the immediately preceding week .
- 2.5. Leaving aside the precise date for the moment, in my opinion it is clear that the incident witnessed by Peter Ash and Riley Martin on the one hand and the incident witnessed by Paul Martin and Geoffrey Spargo on the other occurred on the same day and within a short space of time of each other. This is demonstrated by the fact that the four men, who all knew each other, discussed with each other their respectively

³ Exhibit C53

⁴ Exhibit C12a

witnessed incidents on the morning in which they had occurred and at a time not long after both had occurred. It was understood among the four men that the incidents they had witnessed had only just occurred that very morning. The notion that the incidents occurred on the same day is naturally supported by the location and timing of both incidents.

- 2.6. The Linfox truck driver who saw Mr Richards on the Stuart Highway 5 to 10 kilometres south of the Pimba to Roxby Downs turnoff was a man by the name of Colin Swaeney. Mr Swaeney was an impressive witness. In his original statement to police⁵ taken on Thursday 30 June 2011 he stated that the incident that he had witnessed had occurred on Tuesday 21 June 2011. His statement did not identify a reason for him assigning that date to the incident. However, during Mr Swaeney's oral evidence at the Inquest it emerged that he still possessed documentary evidence of his trucking movements in relation to that period. After Mr Swaeney gave evidence, he made available to the Court his National Driver Work Diary daily sheet.⁶ It convincingly demonstrates that on the morning of 21 June 2011 Mr Swaeney was driving his rig on the Stuart Highway north of Port Augusta travelling north. It is therefore clear that the incident that Mr Swaeney witnessed occurred on Tuesday 21 June 2011, the date he identified in his police statement.
- 2.7. There were geographical associations between the incidents observed by the four PA & CI Martin employees on the one hand and the incident as described by Mr Swaeney on the other. The incident witnessed by Mr Ash and Mr Riley Martin occurred on the Pimba to Roxby Downs road just north of Woomera. Mr Ash said in his statement to police that the incident occurred at about 8am. Mr Riley Martin in his original statement suggested that the incident occurred sometime that morning after 7am. The incident observed by Mr Paul Martin and Mr Spargo occurred on the same road but on the section between Pimba and Woomera. In Mr Paul Martin's statement to police he suggested that the incident occurred shortly after 8:30am. In Mr Spargo's original statement he suggested that the incident occurred at about 7:30am. There are obvious discrepancies in these times. However, given that they are rounded estimates not supported by any documentation and were in the nature of estimates made more than a week after the event, such discrepancies are not surprising. In any event, the estimates are all in the same general period of the morning. Mr Swaeney said that he

⁵ Exhibit C52

⁶ Exhibit C52a

observed Mr Richards in his utility on the Stuart Highway approximately 5 to 10 kilometres south of the Pimba to Roxby Downs turnoff and that Mr Richards' vehicle was approaching from the direction of that turnoff. It is known from the observations of the other gentlemen to whom I have already referred that Mr Richards had been on that Pimba to Roxby Downs road in the vicinity of Woomera. Mr Swaeney suggested the incident that he described occurred at about 8am and this time is to an extent supported by his daily work sheet which suggested that he set off from Port Augusta that morning sometime around 7am when he did his pre-trip check.

- 2.8. There are certain features of commonality between the three incidents given that they all involve strange behaviour on the part of Mr Richards and that in two of them, namely those involving Mr Paul Martin and Mr Swaeney, Mr Richards made comments that evinced a delusional belief on his part that a person was either following him or intending to cause him harm. Other features of commonality include the fact that at that point Mr Richards was not towing the boat and trailer in any of these incidents. The boat and trailer would be located on a dirt access road not significantly distant from the Pimba to Roxby Downs. The only point of difference in respect of these incidents is that whereas the men who saw Mr Richards on the Pimba to Roxby Downs road say that Mr Richards' dog was in the enclosure at the rear of the utility, Mr Swaeney was of the view that the dog was situated on a swag just behind the cabin of the utility. To my mind this does not in itself dictate that the Pimba to Roxby Downs road incidents took place on a day that was different from the day on which the incident involving Mr Swaeney occurred.
- 2.9. Of the four witnesses who observed Mr Richards on the Pimba to Roxby Downs road, it appears from Mr Riley Martin's statement given to police on Friday 1 July 2011 that he had the most accurate recollection of the day and date of the incident. Although in his oral evidence he was vague about this matter, his original police statement suggests that he remembered that on Monday 20 June 2011 he had travelled with his uncle from Port Augusta to Woomera where it was intended that he would work for a number of days and that the incident that involved his sighting of Mr Richards occurred on the second day of that working period. No doubt this juxtaposition of events would have been fresher in his memory on 1 July 2011, the day he gave his original statement to police, than they were when he gave his

evidence. There is no identifiable reason to doubt that Riley Martin remembered things accurately when he gave that statement.

- 2.10. When all things are considered, to my mind the evidence suggests to a very high degree of probability that all of the incidents in which Mr Richards was sighted occurred on the morning of Tuesday 21 June 2011. It is not possible to be certain as to the order of these sightings. Whereas it might be said that it is possible that Mr Swaeney's sighting is the last of these sightings due to the fact that Mr Richards was seen to be heading south towards Port Augusta at that time, a direction in keeping with his intended ultimate destination, this means very little having regard to the fact that his remains would ultimately be found far to the north of this location. In any event, in my view the precise order of these sightings is of no material consequence.
- 2.11. As indicated earlier, these three sightings are the last known and confirmed sightings of Mr Richards.
- 2.12. Mr Richards' telephone records reveal that the last telephone communication, or attempt at communication, he had with any person on his mobile phone was also on the morning of Tuesday 21 June 2011. At one point in the investigation since these events, it was believed that on Friday 24 June 2011 Mr Richards had accessed or had attempted to access his voicemail, but I am satisfied from enquiries conducted of the service provider Optus that the record upon which this belief was formed does not in fact demonstrate this at all. Bank account records would also reveal no relevant activity.
- 2.13. The finding of Mr Richards' boat and trailer was notified to police on Thursday 23 June 2011 by Mr Darren Harris, an electrical linesman. The evidence did not demonstrate with complete certainty the day on which the trailer and boat had been located. Mr Harris gave a statement to police on 1 July 2011⁷. He also gave oral evidence. I detected a measure of uncertainty in his mind as to whether he had located the boat and trailer the day before he reported it to police or on that very day. However, the precise day is of no materiality as both days post-date Mr Richards' last known sighting on Tuesday 21 June 2011. I think it is highly likely that by the time Mr Richards was sighted on 21 June 2011 he had already burnt the boat and had abandoned for all time the boat and trailer at the location where it would ultimately be

⁷ Exhibit C54

located. He may well have done that on Tuesday 21 June 2011. This would account for his sightings that morning on the nearby Pimba to Roxby Downs road without the boat and trailer.

- 2.14. It is not known why Mr Richards burnt the boat and abandoned both boat and trailer. There are a number of possible explanations including the following. Firstly, it will be recalled that the boat was stolen, although there is no evidence as to whether or not Mr Richards was responsible either for its theft or its unlawful handling after it had been stolen. Secondly, if Mr Richards had intended to drive cross-country, the trailer and boat would have been a hindrance. Thirdly, however, the burning of the boat in and of itself is an act redolent of disordered thinking, very much in keeping with Mr Richards' known demeanour on the morning of Tuesday 21 June 2011. Save and except for the finding of the abandoned trailer and boat, no trace of Mr Richards was detected between 21 June 2011 and 10 July 2011 when his dog Amy was located near the homestead of the Coondambo station.
- 2.15. On Monday 11 July 2011 the dog was examined by a veterinary surgeon in Port Augusta. The dog was observed to be very underweight with superficial abrasions along one flank and a deeper cut on a hind leg. The front paw pads were cracked and dry and the rear paw pads were cracked with sores within the cracks suggesting that the dog may have walked long distances on hard surfaces. The dog had been pregnant prior to these events but at the time she was found she was no longer pregnant. The veterinary surgeon, Ms Naomi Best⁸, suggested that the dog had given birth approximately one week prior to her examination. It was Ms Best's opinion that if the dog had been in good condition, it may have taken approximately two weeks of food deprivation for her to have reached the condition she was currently in. That timeframe could be less having regard to the fact that she had been carrying puppies. An approximate two week period prior to 10 July 2011 would have commenced on or about 25 June 2011. However, having regard to the nature of this evidence and the fact that it is naturally based upon estimates and matters that cannot be established with precision, I would not use this evidence as a reliable guide as to whether or not Mr Richards had been alive as late as 25 June 2011.
- 2.16. The finding of the dog was the only trace of Mr Richards that was detected since 21 June 2011. It is theoretically possible that Mr Richards abandoned the dog, just as it

⁸ Exhibits C22 and C22a

is theoretically possible that the dog abandoned or became accidentally separated from a still alive Mr Richards, thereby allowing for the possibility that Mr Richards may still have been alive on the day of the dog's finding. However, Mr Richards had travelled to Darwin in the first instance with the dog. It had remained with him for the entire time that he had been in Darwin. The dog had also remained with him during the course of his journey from Darwin at least as far as the Pimba/Woomera region where it was seen by all observers on 21 June 2011. That the dog would have abandoned Mr Richards in those circumstances does not seem likely. That Mr Richards may have abandoned the dog deliberately or accidentally in an irrational state cannot be discounted, but having regard to all of the circumstances, including the condition of Mr Richards' remains when found, it does not seem at all likely that having done so he would remain alive for any appreciable period of time thereafter. To my mind the most likely explanation for the finding of the dog in the condition it was in and at the location it was found is that the dog abandoned Mr Richards and left the site of Mr Richards' death at a time after his death. In my view it can be safely concluded that Mr Richards had died at a time prior to the dog being located, therefore prior to 10 July 2011. This notion is reinforced by the fact that Mr Richards and his vehicle were located in the general Coondambo area where the dog was located. There appears to be little or no evidence that Mr Richards had spent any appreciable period of time at that location prior to his death. For example there is no evidence of consumption of food or drink at that location as might have been indicated by empty food or drink containers outside of the vehicle itself. Everything points to the fact that Mr Richards arrived at that location and ended his life very soon after his arrival. The dog then departed that location and was ultimately found perhaps two or more weeks later still in the general area.

- 2.17. As indicated earlier the vehicle was located on 29 July 2011 and Mr Richards' body was found the day after. The evidence of the pathologist, Dr Langlois, was that Mr Richards had been deceased for several weeks although he could have been alive on 25 June 2011.
- 2.18. To my mind all of the above points to a date of death being on or within a few days of Tuesday 21 June 2011. The fact that Mr Richards was seen acting irrationally on 21 June 2011 and was not heard of again after that date is very much in keeping with him having ended his life sooner after that date than later. If he had remained in the Pimba

area or at least had remained for any appreciable time on main roads or in the vicinity of main roads, it is likely that he would have been seen again, especially after the extensive media coverage of the disappearance that was generated on and after 24 June 2011.

- 2.19. For all of the above reasons I have found that Mr Richards died on or about 21 June 2011. However, as indicated earlier, his death may have taken place on a date subsequent to that.

3. The possible effects of methamphetamine on Mr Richards

- 3.1. I have already referred to the evidence of Professor Jason White who is a pharmacologist. Professor White provided a report⁹ concerning the possible effects of methamphetamine on Mr Richards. He also gave oral evidence at the Inquest.
- 3.2. To summarise Professor White's material, the adverse effects of methamphetamine include increased confidence and risk taking, increased arousal leading to agitation and hyper excitability, irrational thinking and paranoia. At very high concentrations hallucinations may occur. Driving behaviour may become apparently irrational and erratic and there may be an increase in speed and other manifestations of risk taking. There is also likely to be a high degree of unpredictability about driving behaviour. It will be remembered that Mr Ash and Mr Riley Martin described such driving behaviour. Methamphetamine usage may be accompanied by aggression and psychosis, delusions and paranoia. A person in this state may be aggressive as a result of their fears. In most people the symptoms resolve after some hours but in some individuals psychosis may persist for days, weeks or longer.
- 3.3. As far as the possible effects of methamphetamine on Mr Richards are concerned, in Professor White's view the descriptions from the witnesses who interacted with Mr Richards on 21 June 2011 clearly indicated that he was experiencing more pronounced symptoms that, on the assumption Mr Richards was not someone who experienced schizophrenia, would have been due to the consumption of methamphetamine. In particular his behaviour as observed by Mr Swaeney evidenced hallucinations, delusions and paranoia. In the interaction with Mr Paul Martin he was delusional and paranoid. It was revealed in the course of this investigation that Mr

⁹ Exhibit C63

Richards had removed the SIM card from his phone. In Professor White's view, this together with the attempt to burn the boat was not unusual for people experiencing methamphetamine induced paranoia. Such people may form a belief that their brain is being influenced by some other person through their phone or that their phone is being used to follow them or that their conversations are being recorded.

- 3.4. Professor White stated that also to be considered was the possible interaction between methamphetamine consumption and sleep deprivation. Although the amount of sleep deprivation that Mr Richards may have experienced by the morning of 21 June 2011 would not have been sufficient to account for psychotic behaviour at that time, he could have been more markedly sleep deprived by the time of his death. Professor White expressed the view that it was therefore possible that at the time of his death Mr Richards' mental state was markedly influenced by a state of profound sleep deprivation that could itself have been sufficient to cause psychosis or could have exacerbated methamphetamine induced psychosis.
- 3.5. Professor White also referred to the possibility that at the time of his death Mr Richards was experiencing withdrawal symptoms if he had stopped using the drug through exhaustion of supply or for other reasons. Methamphetamine withdrawal can include a state of depression that can be pronounced and be accompanied by an associated risk of suicide. It is also possible that such a state of withdrawal with depression can coexist with psychotic symptoms that persist after the effects of the drug have declined.
- 3.6. For all of the above reasons to my mind it is clear, and I so find, that the consumption of methamphetamines (and possibly amphetamines) was a significant factor underlying Mr Richards' behaviour on the morning of 21 June 2011. In addition, to my mind it is also clear that Mr Richards' intent to take his own life had as a significant component methamphetamine consumption, possibly in combination with sleep deprivation and possibly as a result of psychosis or the effects of withdrawal including depression. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that there is no evidence of any previous psychiatric disturbance in Mr Richards that had included any suicidal ideation or intent to self-harm. Self harming behaviour was a matter that as totally out of character for him.

4. Investigations as to the source of methamphetamine

- 4.1. There is no evidence that Mr Richards was a regular drug user, although it seems that from time to time he was a casual cannabis consumer. There is certainly no evidence that Mr Richards had a supply of methamphetamine that he had brought with him from Victoria in the first instance. The probability is that he sourced the substance that he would consume on his return journey in June during his time in the Northern Territory.
- 4.2. I have already referred to the evidence of Mr Wayne Richards in respect of his conversation with his other son, David, following the location of Jason Richards' remains. This conversation occurred within a day or so of Jason's death and of course at a time before his autopsy was performed and the toxicological results evidencing methamphetamine consumption were known. In this conversation with his father David Richards alluded to the probability that it would be established that his brother's cause of death was drug related. David Richards had said to his father, 'drugs, they'll find that he took drugs'. David Richards had gone on to say that at a time before Jason had left Darwin, Jason had told him that after he had finished his employment on the Friday evening there had been a drinks function. Jason had told David that when Jason had gone to leave the drinks function, and when walking to his utility, a person offered him drugs. Jason's immediate response had been to say that he did not want it as he did not use drugs. The person had then said to Jason:

'It might help you on your way home (to) keep you awake and if you don't use it all you can sell it. You'll get \$400 for it in Victoria.'¹⁰

- 4.3. Although this evidence cannot be corroborated by David Richards as he is now deceased, I accept Mr Wayne Richards' account of this conversation with his son David. In addition, there is nothing inherently unlikely about the notion that Jason Richards would have told his brother David that he had sourced a drug that would keep him awake during his long journey back to Ballarat. In the event, as the toxicological analysis would show, things would transpire generally in accordance with David Richards' account of his conversation with his brother. Although what Mr Wayne Richards told the Court is hearsay, I find that Jason Richards told David Richards that he had encountered a source of a drug that would help to keep him awake. It is not possible to know how truthful Jason Richards had been in respect of

¹⁰ Transcript, page 206

the details during his conversation with his brother David, but the implication that Mr Wayne Richards would no doubt derive from his own conversation with David was that Jason had accepted the drugs, that the drugs possessed the property of assisting in remaining awake, such as an amphetamine, and that the person who had offered and supplied the drugs had a connection with the firm for whom Jason Richards had worked and had been present at the drinks function.

- 4.4. In April 2013 SAPOL Major Crime Squad detectives travelled to Darwin in the Northern Territory where they took statements from a number of persons connected with the company Ezy Glass Services for whom Mr Richards worked. Since these statements were taken, affidavits have been sworn by all of those persons attesting to the truth of what is contained in their witness statements. All of those persons have denied any knowledge of Jason Richards having obtained any illicit drugs from a source connected with Ezy Glass Services or at all. One of those persons has stated on oath that although that person has used drugs in the past including 'speed', which is a reference to amphetamines, he at no time gave Jason Richards any drugs. He asserts that he never had any conversation with Jason Richards about drugs and in particular denies that he had any conversation with Jason of a kind as described by David Richards to his father.
- 4.5. Of the three employees who have been identified as having been present at the Friday night drinks function, one person states that in answer to a loaded question posed by him to Mr Richards as to whether or not Mr Richards when pig hunting would keep awake by using speed, Mr Richards had admitted that he had. This employee himself admitted that one night after work he had once smoked synthetic cannabis with Mr Richards but that is the only time he had used any drug with Mr Richards. Another employee stated that at one time Mr Richards had asked him whether he could possibly obtain some speed. The employee had replied that he did not know where to get it. Another employee states that he had never heard Mr Richards talk about drugs and that he had never seen him in possession of drugs.
- 4.6. The coronial investigation did not identify the source of the methamphetamines that Mr Richards had undoubtedly consumed prior to his death.

5. The police response to Mr Richards' disappearance

- 5.1. South Australia Police (SAPOL) did not become aware that Mr Richards' family was concerned about his welfare until the evening of Wednesday 22 June 2011. At approximately 8:00 that evening, Senior Constable Jemyer Lomman¹¹ of the Coober Pedy police received a phone call from Mr Richards' mother, Ms Yvonne Richards. Ms Richards stated that Mr Richards had left Darwin for Ballarat on the Sunday and that he no longer could be reached. She stated that it was believed that by then Mr Richards would have already travelled through Coober Pedy. Senior Constable Lomman conducted certain checks that included an analysis of vehicular accidents that had recently occurred. She also asked several questions of Ms Richards concerning Mr Richards' mental health, his job and relationships. Ms Richards indicated that she did not believe her son to be suicidal. Senior Constable Lomman advised Ms Richards of her checks and Ms Richards appeared to be content with the inquiries that had been made to that point.
- 5.2. The following day, Thursday 23 June 2011, Mr Richards's father, Wayne Richards, who resided in Roxby Downs, made a formal missing person report at the Roxby Downs police station. The missing person report¹², timed at 1200 hours on 23 June 2011, included information concerning Mr Richards' recent communications and movements since he had left Darwin and the fact that he could no longer be contacted which was out of character for him. It mentioned his intended destination. It also included a description of his vehicle including an incomplete but, as far as it went, accurate registration number, and the fact that he had a dog and a dog enclosure on the rear of the vehicle. The original report does not mention anything about a boat being towed. However, further inquiries timed at approximately 1:30pm that day reveal that the officer who took the report at Roxby Downs, Senior Constable First Class Donna Waldhuter, spoke to Mr Richards' sister, Danielle, and established that her brother had been towing a boat¹³.
- 5.3. The finding of the deceased's boat and trailer in the Pimba/Woomera area was reported to police on 23 June 2011, the same day that the formal missing person's report was made by Mr Wayne Richards. Senior Constable Waldhuter made an entry in her investigation diary timed at 1333 that day to the effect that although the finding

¹¹ Exhibits C40 and C40a

¹² Exhibit C61a

¹³ Exhibit C61, the MP investigation diary, page 32

of the boat might be a coincidence, she would investigate the matter after receiving further information about the boat. The possibility that the boat and trailer were those of Mr Richards was therefore at that early point in time in the mind of police. Of course, police did not have any information at that time about the sightings of Mr Richards made two days earlier in the same general location as where the boat and trailer had been found.

- 5.4. As part of their missing person investigation, police conducted the usual enquiries concerning recent use of bank accounts and telephones. These would reveal nothing of relevance beyond confirmation of the fact that Mr Richards had last been heard of at about 5:30am on the morning of Tuesday 21 June 2011 when he had unsuccessfully attempted to call Danielle Richards' husband.
- 5.5. An Australia wide criminal record check was conducted. This established that Mr Richards had convictions in October 2006 for offences involving a firearm and in August 2010 for further convictions for offences involving a firearm. The offences for which Mr Richards was convicted in October 2006 in the Ballarat Magistrates Court included assault with weapon, carry/use loaded firearm in populous place, possess a silencer without permit, carry firearm under influence of alcohol, possessing cannabis, entering an intersection against a red traffic light and exceeding the prescribed concentration of alcohol. Mr Richards had been placed on a 6 month suspended sentence of imprisonment. The Court appearances in August 2010, also in the Ballarat Magistrates Court, included exceeding the prescribed concentration of alcohol whilst driving, possessing a controlled weapon without excuse, possessing ammunition without a licence, prohibited person possess a firearm and carry a firearm under the influence of alcohol. On this occasion Mr Richards received fines and a licence disqualification. Mr Richards also had a Court appearance in September 2007 in the Ballarat Magistrates Court for intentionally causing an injury for which he was fined without conviction. This information would have been available to police on 23 June 2011.
- 5.6. For reasons that are far from clear, further information concerning the precise circumstances of the firearm offences was not sought at any time during the missing person investigation. This information would also have been readily available. This material would have informed investigating police that the matter in respect of which the deceased had been convicted of firearm offences in October 2006 had allegedly

involved Mr Richards pulling up at traffic lights in a vehicle and then pointing a .22 rifle at pedestrians in the street. Another person may also have been involved in this incident. When police intervened they had located a loaded .22 rifle in the vehicle together with a shotgun and cartridges. The other firearm matter that Mr Richards was dealt with in August 2010 had allegedly involved him being stopped at a random breath testing station in Ballarat while driving his utility. A search of the vehicle had revealed a .22 calibre rifle located behind the seats along with an ammunition belt with unused shotgun cartridges. The matter in 2007 in which Mr Richards had been fined for intentionally causing an injury to a person, had allegedly involved him and two other males confronting another person and the deceased then having 'king hit' that person knocking him unconscious.

- 5.7. Police would be informed that Mr Richards left Darwin in possession of a .22 rifle. This information would have been readily available on the day the missing person's report was taken, namely Thursday 23 June 2011, as a number of members of Mr Richards' family knew about this.
- 5.8. The burnt out boat together with its trailer would soon be positively established as those that Mr Richards had been towing.
- 5.9. At an early stage of this investigation, an available profile for Mr Richards would have comprised an unexplained disappearance, a mysterious abandonment of and attempt to destroy his boat and trailer and a criminal record that had involved the indiscriminate use of a loaded firearm, albeit 5 years previously, and unlawful possession of a firearm more recently as well as other alleged violent behaviour. In addition, it was known or should have been known that at the time of his disappearance Mr Richards was in possession, possibly unlawfully, of a firearm and ammunition. All of that gives rise to a strong case for concluding that locating Mr Richards should have been a matter of some importance if not priority.
- 5.10. Tendered in evidence was the statement verified by affidavit of Stephen Patrick Kameniar¹⁴ who was the Operations Inspector of the Media Section of SAPOL. His statement and the material attached outlines the measures undertaken by SAPOL to inform the general public of Mr Richards' disappearance. It is fair to say that this material demonstrates that there was a great deal of media coverage generated by

¹⁴ Exhibits C38 and C38a to C38f

SAPOL concerning Mr Richards' disappearance with the public being urged to notify police if Mr Richards was sighted. There were several regular media releases prior to Mr Richards' discovery, and these appear to have been taken up through all media outlets including television and radio. There were also a number of press conferences held by the Officer in Charge of the Major Crime Squad. The disappearance would be declared a major crime on 28 June 2011. The first media release by SAPOL occurred at 4:30pm on Friday 24 June 2011. It stated:

'Media Release – SA Police News/Facebook and Twitter

Roxby Downs Police are appealing for public assistance to help locate missing man Jason Neil Richards. Mr Richards is believed to have travelled from Darwin to Coober Pedy on Monday 20 June 2011. Mr Richards is 28 years old, Caucasian, of slim build and about 178cm tall. He has short brown hair, a light brown complexion and brown eyes. He has a tattoo on the left side of his neck that says 'Jack' and another tattoo on one of his lower arms that says 'Monique'. He is travelling in a navy blue 1991 Toyota Hilux Ute, registration Vic ODV-747 together with his pet dog. He is towing an aluminium dinghy and the vehicle also has a dog crate on the back. Police and family are concerned for his welfare. Police ask anyone who sees a man matching this description to contact the police assistance line on 131 444 or BankSA Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.'¹⁵

At the time of this release it had not yet been established with complete certainty that the boat and trailer that had been located earlier in the week belonged to Mr Richards. This might explain why it is implied in the terms of the release that Mr Richards was at that time still towing an aluminium dinghy. In any event any sightings that may earlier have taken place could conceivably have involved the vehicle being driven whilst still towing a trailer and boat, even if by the time of the media release this was no longer the case. A further media release timed at 2:35pm on Monday 27 June 2011 referred to the fact that a boat and trailer had been located and abandoned in the Pimba area and had been partially burnt out.

- 5.11. At the time of the first media release on 24 June 2011, the sightings that had occurred on 21 June 2011 had not been made known to police. Those sightings would not be made known to police until 30 June 2011, the day Mr Swaeney came forward, and in the days following. I am not certain as to precisely what it was that ultimately prompted these men to come forward and at the time that they did. Mr Swaeney in his statement said that the day before he approached police with his information he had seen a picture of the missing person posted at the Olympic Dam mine. Mr Ash

¹⁵ Exhibit C38b, Running Sheet Friday 24 June 2011, page 4

had seen a photograph at Spuds Roadhouse at Pimba. Mr Riley Martin in his statement said that he was contacted by Mr Ash who had told him that the person being spoken about on the news was the person they had seen during the Pimba to Roxby Downs road incident.

- 5.12. On Friday 1 July 2011 SAPOL issued a media release timed at 3:10pm that referred to Mr Swaeney's sighting of Mr Richards on 21 June 2011. The media release described the circumstances of the sighting including the fact that the driver of the truck had told police that Mr Richards was 'acting erratically and he was incoherent'. The release went on to say as:

'We continue to be concerned for Mr Richards' safety and welfare. Police have information from Mr Richards' family that he may have a firearm with him. While police currently believe Mr Richards does not pose any danger, the public are asked that they contact police rather than approach Mr Richards directly.'¹⁶

Although information that Mr Richards may have a firearm was, or at least ought to have been, available on the day that Mr Richards' disappearance was reported, namely Thursday 23 June 2011, the media release of 1 July 2011 was the first occasion that Mr Richards' possible possession of a firearm was shared with the public. An inference is available that the mention of the firearm in this release was prompted for the most part by Mr Swaeney's report of Mr Richards' erratic and incoherent demeanour.

- 5.13. If there were any shortcomings with the content of earlier media releases prior to 1 July 2011 it is arguably the lack of any reference to Mr Richards having a firearm and the absence of advice that the public should contact police about the man rather than approach him directly. While it is to be acknowledged that to begin with police did not have the benefit of information relating to Mr Richards' unusual behaviour on 21 June 2011, it had been established at an early time that his boat and trailer had been set fire to and abandoned, that he was in possession of a firearm and on the day that his disappearance was reported it could have been established in some detail that he had a chequered history in relation to firearm use and possession. If the initial media release had been couched in stronger terms that included mention of his possession of a firearm and a warning to the public that they should not approach the man but should report his sighting to police, arguably such a release may have had greater impact on anyone who had already sighted Mr Richards by that time, but was

¹⁶ Exhibit C38b, Running Sheet Friday 1 July 2011, page 6

undecided as to whether or not they should report that sighting, or upon anyone who might see him in the future. The one thing that augured positively about the prospect of Mr Richards' being recognised by a member of the public was that he was a readily identifiable target. His motor vehicle was distinctive because of the dog enclosure and also because of the presence of the dog itself. All that said, there is force in the submission of Mr Keane, counsel for and on behalf of the Police Commissioner, that reasonable minds might differ as to whether a release in stronger terms to begin with would have been appropriate and whether it would have had any greater impact. However, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that police should have researched Mr Richards' background more thoroughly, thereby establishing at an early point in time Mr Richards' propensities as far as firearms and erratic behaviour with them was concerned, and that this information should have been taken into consideration in determining the vigour that needed to be brought to bear on the investigation.

- 5.14. As far as the physical searches for Mr Richards are concerned, on 26 June 2011 there was a search of the Pimba/Woomera area using the position at which the boat and trailer were located as its focal point. The search was conducted both on foot and from the air. There were further searches conducted by air that took in the Glendambo area, particularly after Mr Richards' dog was located in that area. An Aboriginal tracker was also used in a commendable but unsuccessful attempt to track the dog's movements in the hope of being led to Mr Richards' location. Any searches of the Glendambo area were very much at a disadvantage from the fact that it was such a large area to be searched on foot. Secondly, an aerial search which did take in the relevant area would have been hampered by the fact that the vehicle was ultimately located next to, and would have been obscured to an extent by, vegetation. It is not surprising that Mr Richards' vehicle was ultimately located only by chance by a fox hunter. To my mind everything that the police reasonably could have been expected to do was done.
- 5.15. The other feature that is relevant to the question of the effectiveness of the dissemination of public information and the conduct of physical searches and their possible impact is that if, as is likely, Mr Richards had taken his own life on or in the next few days following 21 June 2011, no amount of media coverage or physical searching conducted in the period after the report to police of his disappearance was made could have altered the outcome.

- 5.16. However, the Officer in Charge of the Woomera police station, Brevet Sergeant Neil Wasley, gave evidence to the effect that if Mr Richards' sightings on 21 June 2011 had been reported on the day of those sightings it is likely that Mr Richards would have been located had he remained on or in the vicinity of the main roads. Brevet Sergeant Wasley gave this evidence having regard to his own duties that day and also taking into account local police resources. It is difficult to be dogmatic about the chances of finding Mr Richards that day as there is no certainty that Mr Richards stayed on or in the vicinity of the Stuart Highway or the Pimba to Roxby Downs road for a period of time that might have allowed for his sighting by police and his interception. All that can be said is that Mr Richards might have been located. Brevet Sergeant Wasley was of the view that if Mr Richards had been located police could either have taken Mr Richards voluntarily for a medical assessment or, if need be, have arrested him for offences that he had reportedly committed to date, including traffic offences, or have detained him under the Mental Health Act 2009. In that event there is little doubt that Mr Richards would have undergone medical assessment and treatment. It may well be in those circumstances that his psychosis could have been treated. In any case the chain of events that ultimately led to his death would have been significantly interrupted.
- 5.17. The conclusion the Court reached is that if Mr Richards' observed behaviour on 21 June 2011 had been reported to police on that day, his death may have been prevented.

6. General commentary

- 6.1. The Court has not found it necessary to make any formal recommendations in this matter. However, I would make the following general observations.
- 6.2. Firstly, this case has demonstrated that there is a need for police to research thoroughly the antecedents of a missing person during the course of any investigation into that person's disappearance. Although a thorough research of Mr Richards' criminal history may not have altered the outcome in this particular case, it is conceivable that it might do so in respect of missing person investigations in the future. Clearly, the more information that is known about a missing person and the person's propensities and habits, the better.

- 6.3. Secondly, as already indicated in the Court's extempore findings, the public should be reminded of the deleterious effects of substances such as methamphetamines and amphetamines. The circumstances of Mr Richards' case serve as a graphic warning to the public of the folly of using substances such as these, either recreationally or as a means of combating fatigue. The safety of the individual concerned and of members of the public generally is very much at risk when persons on the road and at large are affected by these substances and also by their by-product, sleep deprivation.
- 6.4. Thirdly, although I am not critical of any of the individuals who witnessed the deceased's behaviour on 21 June 2011 as the significance of what they had seen may not at first have been obvious to them, the circumstances of this case once again demonstrate that police investigations are to a significant degree reliant upon the cooperation of and input from the general public. It is not only in the interests of the individual concerned or of the family of that individual that he or she be located as soon as possible, there are also wider public interests to be served, not the least of which are public order and safety and the need to avoid the deployment of the limited resources of police and of other emergency services for unduly excessive periods of time. The general public should be aware that successful missing person investigations rely upon information promptly being made available by members of the public to police. Furthermore, regardless of whether such an investigation is in existence or has yet to be introduced into the public domain, it is as well for the public to be reminded that irrational and dangerous behaviour of persons, especially in the outback, should be taken very seriously and brought to the attention of police without delay.

Key Words: Outback Driving; Stimulant Drugs

In witness whereof the said Coroner has hereunto set and subscribed his hand and

Seal the 29th day of May, 2013.

Deputy State Coroner