



MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION

Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

*Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11*

(These findings have been de-identified in relation to the name of the deceased, family, friends, youths and others by direction of the Coroner pursuant to s57(1)(c) of the Coroners Act 1995)

I, Jackie Hartnett, Coroner, having investigated the death of CR

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is CR;
- b) CR died as a result of fully suspended hanging;
- c) CR's cause of death was fully suspended hanging; and
- d) CR died between 25-27 February 2022 at Orielson, Tasmania.

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

- Police subject reports;
- Police report of death for the coroner;
- Affidavits as to identity;
- Affidavit of forensic pathologist, Dr Christopher Lawrence;
- Affidavit of Toxicologist, Juliette Tria;
- Medical records;
- Affidavits of AT, RU, NP, EJ, LO, XY, Constable Ralph Newtown, Senior Constable Rance Swinton, and Federal Agent Dannii Campbell; and
- Police Family Violence order and FVMS reports.

Background

CR was born on 16 March 1969. He was 52 years of age, employed as a truck driver and the father of one adult son when he died. At the time of his death, CR was employed by the Spectran Group.

CR was born in Adelaide and was one of four children. In about 1980 CR's father passed away. His mother remarried and the entire family moved to Tasmania in about 1981/1982.

In 1992 CR started a relationship with his first partner. They welcomed a son in 1993. The relationship ended when their son was about six months of age. Thereafter, CR's son regularly stayed with him. Although, it appears they drifted apart when his son was a teenager and reconnected for a period following CR's health scare in 2017.

In 2017, CR suffered a heart attack and had surgery (coronary artery stent) to correct the issue. He had a history of ischemic heart disease. He remained on medication for his heart at the time of his death. CR was also prescribed anti-depressant medication.

In 2015, CR commenced a relationship with EJ. At the time CR owned and lived in a house in Risdon Vale. In late 2016 early 2017, EJ and her youngest daughter moved in with CR. CR had two older children, NP, and IR. CR and EJ did not marry. EJ changed her surname to R.

In September 2019, one of CR's sisters passed away and her young daughter, OG, came to live with him and EJ. From about this time, he and EJ's relationship became strained and unhealthy for them both.

On 16 March 2021, CR decided to change the locks at his Risdon Vale home to remove EJ. EJ's older daughters assisted CR with the plan. CR had OG and CR's youngest daughter taken away from the house to avoid witnessing any tension. EJ arrived home to find the gate locked. Police attended. EJ left.

After separation, EJ made a number of serious allegations of violence and abuse by CR towards her to police. There was a pending review file relating to EJ's allegations with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions at the time of his death. CR had been contacted as part of the investigation into the allegations. He declined to take part in an interview.

On 31 May 2021 Inspector Smith issued a Police Family Violence Order protecting EJ from CR. The Police Family Violence Orders included CR vacate the Risdon Vale house. EJ moved back into the home as her place of safety. OG remained in the care of EJ. EJ made various allegations concerning the maternal family's care of OG. The allegations were disputed by CR and led to litigation concerning OG's custody after separation. OG remained in the care of EJ at the time of his death. The litigation in the Federal Court had concluded.

Following separation, there was also dispute over the Risdon Vale property and financial matters between the parties. It was a very acrimonious separation.

On 17 April 2021 CR was charged with two counts of assault against EJ. The charges were pending at the date of his death. He had pled not guilty and there was a hearing listed.

In February 2022 CR was renting a room in Old Beach.

Circumstances leading to his death.

At 5.08am on Thursday 24 February 2022, a number of Australian Federal Police (AFP) executed a search warrant at the Old Beach property where CR was renting. The search related to an investigation by AFP into the alleged transmission of child abuse product within an online chat group. The warrant related to CR. CR was present when police arrived and was shown the warrant. Police seized CR's mobile phone. CR was not arrested.

A subsequent analysis by police of CR's electronic device located child abuse images. CR was not aware at the time of his death, but authorities had determined to issue him with a caution.

At 5.15am on 24 February 2022, CR contacted his immediate manager at the Spectran Group using one of the Federal Agents phones. CR told his manager he had "*major problems*" and would not be at work that day.

At 5.30pm on 24 February 2022 CR spoke to his manager again. CR advised that "*things were not good, and he was in a fair bit of trouble.*" CR told him he could not go into detail but would be able to come to work on Friday. His manager told him to take a few days. CR replied he would return to work on the 26 February.

Following the search by the AFP, CR was evicted from the Old Beach residence on the 24 February 2022. He moved to his sisters, EB's home in Midway Point that day. It appears he did not tell his sister about the AFP search.

On 24 February, CR purchased a new mobile phone from Harvey Norman. CR spoke to his son, telling him he had a new phone and ended the call in the same way as he always did with "*catch you later.*" CR did not disclose to his son anything about the AFP search.

On Friday 25 February 2022, CR asked EB if she would go to Harvey Norman to purchase a screen protector for his new phone with him. His sister agreed. However, within 30 minutes of that request, CR suddenly left the house telling his sister he was going out to purchase smokes and he would be back. EB described CR as having "*a concerned look on his face*" as he left. CR left about 11.30am. He left without his required heart medication. He never returned.

Shortly before leaving, CR had received a phone call from NP. NP was somehow aware of the execution of the warrant and had told IR, who told her sister. NP was calling out of concern for CR. She described CR as not himself. He told her that he wasn't doing ok but denied the allegations. He told her that he had not been charged with anything and he would never do anything like that. He kept telling her that he felt sick. NP subsequently reported to police, he had told her he had enough.

CR failed to return to his sister's Midway Point home and was not contactable. Consequently, his sister and his mother contacted police. Later, on the 25 February Police made a number of enquiries to locate CR without success.

Either shortly before leaving or sometime after leaving his sister's, CR, decided to take his own life. CR was under mounting pressure arising from pending criminal charges involving his ex-partner and the very recent police search which he expressed concern about to his manager but had not mentioned to a number of family members. CR must have known or suspected at the time that his phone was taken by police that incriminating material was present on his phone.

It appears likely that the telephone call from NP cemented in his mind that it was only a matter of time before people became aware of what police had attended for and what he was facing. It was too much for him to bear.

I am satisfied that no other person was involved in his death and there are no suspicious circumstances. CR decided to take his own life.

Sometime after leaving Midway Point at 11.30am on 25 February 2022, CR drove to the side of the Tasman Highway near Orielson in an area known as Burnside Straight. He parked his vehicle facing north and locked it. He had sourced a piece of rope which he took with him.

CR walked about 250m into the bush adjacent to where he parked. It is not possible to find exactly what time but after entering the bush he selected a tree and subsequently hung himself.

On the morning of 26 February 2022 an employee from the Spectran Group recognised CR's vehicle parked on Tasman Highway and reported it to his manager, who notified police.

At about 8.45am on 27 February 2022 Police attended the location and searched bushland on both sides of the highway. Police located CR hanging with a rope around his neck in a slip knot attached to a tree. CR was fully suspended above the ground. There were marks on the bark of the tree consistent with CR climbing up the tree. At the base of the tree was his

phone, tobacco, and filters. The scene showed no evidence of the presence of another person.

Police forensics attended and an investigation commenced.

A forensic pathologist, Dr Christopher Lawrence, conducted an autopsy on CR on 1 March 2022. Dr Lawrence's opinion was CR died of a fully suspended hanging with lividity distribution suggesting he had been hanging for a period of at least seven hours. There was no atypical features or injuries found. Toxicology examination reveals duloxetine an antidepressant at therapeutic levels and cardiac medications. I accept Dr Lawrence's opinion.

Comments and Recommendations

I extend my appreciation to investigating officer Constable R Newton for his investigation and report.

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

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

Dated: 11 April 2024 at Hobart, in the State of Tasmania.

Jackie Hartnett

Coroner