



# MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

## CORONIAL DIVISION

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### **Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)**

*Coroners Act 1995  
Coroners Rules 2006  
Rule 11*

I, Leigh Mackey, Coroner, having investigated the death of Dennis Robert Pashen

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Dennis Robert Pashen (date of birth 19 April 1949). He was married to Victoria Sheedy and had a daughter, Anna, from a previous marriage. Dr Pashen and Victoria moved to live in Tasmania in 2013 and settled in Middleton. Dr Pashen was a medical practitioner and Professor of Medicine at the James Cook University. After moving to Tasmania he worked principally as a medical locum in regional areas. He was in good health.
- b) Dr Pashen and Victoria purchased a 36-foot wooden yacht “Andromeda” in approximately 2020 with a plan to use it for short sailing trips in Tasmania. On 23 November 2023 they sailed their yacht from its mooring at Kettering to South Bruny Island and in the mid-afternoon anchored in Great Taylors Bay near Kingfisher Beach. They used the yacht’s inflatable dinghy to travel to shore with their dog and walked along the beach. As they were returning from their walk, approximately 15 minutes later, they noticed the dinghy had drifted out into the water and was approximately 70m to 100m offshore. To retrieve it Dr Pashen decided to swim out to it. He was a competent and confident swimmer. The weather conditions were warm and calm. He stripped down to boardshorts and t-shirt waded out and then swum toward the dinghy. From where she was on the shore observing his efforts, Victoria noticed the dinghy drifting further away from him and he did not appear to be getting closer to it. She then observed him to appear to be in difficulty and called emergency services.

In response to her call for assistance the rescue helicopter (POLAIR) was mobilised and arrived at the scene within approximately 40 minutes. In the interim a call was made on maritime radio for the assistance of any

vessels in the area. Mr Stephen Conran and his wife, Debra Conran, were on board their yacht "Stray Cats" in Mickeys Bay, 2.3 nautical miles north to northeast of Kingfisher Beach. They were experienced sailors and had been living and travelling on their yacht for the past eight years. They heard the Tas Marine radio issue a "securite" call<sup>1</sup> advising of a swimmer in distress and a dinghy gone adrift on Kingfisher beach. Mr and Mrs Conran immediately prepared to assist, and Mr Conran departed on his tender within 10 minutes of the call being received.

Mr Conran first arrived at and checked the Andromeda and did not identify anything untoward. He then made his way to the dinghy. As he did so POLAIR arrived at Great Taylors Bay. On its arrival POLAIR located Dr Pashen floating face down in the water off the western end of Kingfisher Beach approximately 500m from where he had entered the water to retrieve the dinghy at its eastern end. He was winched from the water and found to be deceased.

Mr Conran arrived at the dinghy and noted that its painter<sup>2</sup> was inside the dinghy. He observed the helicopter winch a body from the water as he towed the dinghy back to Andromeda where he secured it to her stern. Whilst they had been at anchor at Mickeys Bay the sensor on Mr Conran's yacht recorded the surface level temperature of the water to be 15.3 degrees Celsius both before and after his involvement in retrieving the dinghy.

I find that the dinghy had not been secured to the shore by using the painter, an anchor or any other mechanism for holding it fast whilst at the beach. Whilst the dinghy was pulled to some extent up the beach upon landing at Kingfisher Bay the distance was insufficient to account for the water movement resulting in it drifting out into deeper water and away from shore. There is no evidence of the involvement of any other person in Dr Pashen's death, and I find he died due to accidental drowning.

- c) An autopsy was conducted on Dr Pashen's body by Dr Ritchey, forensic pathologist, to assist investigate the cause of his death. Dr Ritchey identified atherosclerotic coronary vascular disease and opined that Dr Pashen's cause of death was drowning due to hypothermia and exercise

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<sup>1</sup> The international maritime safety signal used to broadcast important messages, third on the list of priority calls behind mayday and pan-pan.

<sup>2</sup> A rope attached to the bow of a tender used for towing, mooring or securing it.

caused exhaustion. He was unable to exclude the possibility of an acute coronary event contributing to the death. I accept Dr Ritchey's opinion and find that Dr Pashen died from drowning.

d) Dr Pashen died on 23 November 2023 at South Bruny, Tasmania.

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

- The Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Affidavits confirming identity;
- Opinion of the forensic pathologist regarding cause of death;
- Toxicology affidavit dated 10 January 2024;
- Affidavits of members of Tasmanian Police involved in the matter and body worn camera footage;
- Medical Records of Queenstown General Practice;
- Medical Records of the Royal Hobart Hospital;
- Affidavits of Victoria Sheedy sworn 25 November 2023 and 23 February 2026;
- Affidavit of Stephen Conran sworn 24 November 2023;
- Garmin watch data;
- Weather observations; and
- Information concerning Andromeda.

### **Comments and Recommendations**

I extend my appreciation to investigating officer Constable Ashley Hopwood for his investigation and report. I also acknowledge the efforts of Mr Conran in responding to the securite call and coming to the assistance of Dr Pashen without hesitation.

The circumstances of Dr Pashen'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 Dr Pashen.

**Dated:** 27 March 2026 at Hobart, in the State of Tasmania.

**Leigh Mackey**  
Coroner