

IN THE CORONERS COURT
OF VICTORIA
AT MELBOURNE

Court Reference: 4893/10

FINDING INTO DEATH WITH INQUEST

*Form 37 Rule 60(1)
Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008*

Inquest into the Death of BRADLEE JOHN MAHER

Delivered On: 23 January 2012

Delivered At: Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street
Melbourne

Hearing Dates: 23 January 2012

Findings of: IAIN TRELOAR WEST, DEPUTY STATE CORONER

Police Coronial Support
Unit (PCSU): Senior Constable Kelly Ramsey

I, IAIN TRELOAR WEST, Deputy State Coroner having investigated the death of BRADLEE MAHER

AND having held an inquest in relation to this death on 23 January 2012
at Melbourne

find that the identity of the deceased was BRADLEE JOHN MAHER

born on 3 November 1985, aged 25 years

and the death occurred on 26 December 2010

at Alfred Hospital, 55 Commercial Road, Melbourne, Victoria 3004

from:

1a. INJURIES SUSTAINED IN A FALL FROM HEIGHT INTO WATER

in the following circumstances:

1. Bradlee Maher, was a 25 year old male who resided with his partner, Ronald Syme, at Unit 1, 58 William Street, St Albans. Mr Maher had been in regular employment and at the time of his death was acting in the role of a manager of a convenience store in St Albans, whilst the owners were overseas. At the time of his death, he had no major medical issues and appeared not to be suffering any form of depression. Mr Maher was a social user of alcohol. Mr Maher and Mr Syme had been in a relationship for approximately 5 years prior to the death and were planning a holiday in Queensland in March 2011, where they had planned to go through a ceremony where the two would become married.

2. At approximately 4.36am on Boxing Day, the 26th December 2010, Mr Maher drove his vehicle up the city bound lanes of the Westgate Bridge and telephoned the "000" emergency number to inform the call taker that it was his intention to take his life by jumping from the bridge. Near the top of the bridge, Mr Maher stopped his vehicle and on exiting it climbed a temporary razor wire safety barrier and then climbed onto the top rail of a pedestrian fence on the extreme outside of the Westgate Bridge. Passing motorists observed Mr Maher's actions and called police, resulting in a number of police units and personnel attending the location a short time later. Police attempted to negotiate with Mr Maher in an effort to get him to come from behind the temporary fence, however despite these negotiations and approximately 35 minutes after police first attended, Mr Maher leapt from the Westgate Bridge into the water below. Mr Maher was pulled from the water by police who attempted to revive him, as did ambulance personnel who transferred him to the Alfred Hospital. After further attempts were made to revive Mr Maher, he was pronounced deceased at the Alfred Hospital at 7.17am.

3. No autopsy was performed in this case as the coroner, on advice from Dr Linda Iles, Forensic Pathologist with the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, directed that no autopsy was required. Dr Iles performed an external examination of Mr Maher at the mortuary, reviewed the circumstances of his death, the medical deposition and clinical notes, the post mortem CT scan and provided a written report of her findings. Dr Iles reported that in all the circumstances a reasonable cause of death appeared to be injuries sustained in a fall from a height into water. Toxicological analysis of anti mortem body fluid

was positive for alcohol with a reading of 0.12%. No other commonly encountered drugs or poisons were detected.

4. Mr Maher was not in custody at the time of his death, nevertheless as the death occurred in the presence of police members, it was felt appropriate to categorize it as "death in custody". The incident was attended by numerous police units and members and included units from Footscray, Williamstown, Altona North, the Search and Rescue Unit, the Water Police and the Critical Incident Response Team. Sergeant Gary Wilson from Altona North assumed the role of the incident controller and I am satisfied on the evidence before me that he acted professionally and appropriately. Sergeant Wilson was aware that any possible intervention by police could cause Mr Maher to become "spooked" and cause him to deliberately jump from the bridge. Sergeant Wilson could observe the 2.7 metre high temporary fence, which prevented police approaching Mr Maher and realized that any attempt by police members to go over the fence would have given away any surprise intervention on Mr Maher. Sergeant Wilson arranged for keys to the emergency access gates to be brought to the attending police, however on arrival it was realized that these access gates were either 60 metres, or 115 metres from Mr Maher and again, entry via them would have given away any element of surprise. Sergeant Wilson ensured that one police member, Senior Constable Matthew Roberts, was to be responsible for conversing with Mr Maher, as it was clear that Mr Maher was prepared to talk to him. During the course of negotiations, which lasted for approximately 35 minutes, the majority of police members were moved away from the immediate vicinity, in order that their presence would not be overwhelming to Mr Maher. Police negotiators also attended the scene and were briefed by Sergeant Wilson. Due to the complexities of the immediate location of Mr Maher, the planned police response was to talk to him in the hope that he would refrain from jumping from the bridge. Shortly before he jumped, Mr Maher dictated a note his mother, which Senior Constable Roberts wrote in his notebook, and in which he expressed his love for his mother and also his love for his partner. Senior Constable Roberts endeavoured to get Mr Maher to repeat what he had said in an effort to get him to come back from the railing, however Mr Maher said, "No, this is it, I am going" and jumped from the bridge. Mr Maher did not die immediately on impacting the water, with police members recovering him and implementing resuscitation measures, pending ambulance arrival. Mr Maher was conveyed to the Alfred Hospital where he died later in the morning.

5. Police investigations into the motive for Mr Maher taking his life raised a number of possible factors, including his level of intoxication, difficulties arising from his relationship and his sexuality and possible financial issues. It is speculative, and therefore unhelpful, to try and pinpoint what caused Mr Maher to take his life. Prior to attending the bridge he had communicated with a friend via text message and by using the phone. But although the conversation indicated difficulties he was experiencing with his relationship, it does not identify the reason why he would take his life. The friend he contacted was so concerned for his welfare after attempting to ring him back and getting no response, that she rang the "000" number to report that she believed that he was going to jump off the bridge. The call taker advised her that police would be attending the Westgate Bridge immediately and this attendance appears to have coincided in time with the calls made by observers on the bridge, who had alerted "000" to the stationery vehicle and Mr Maher climbing over the barrier.

6. I find that Bradlee Maher intentionally took his life by jumping from the Westgate Bridge. I further find that the police response, both in terms of containment and negotiation to this incident, was appropriate and did not contribute in any way to Mr Maher taking his life.

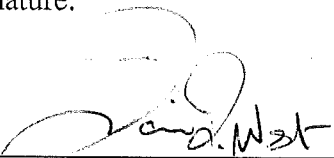
Pursuant to section 67 (3) of the **Coroners Act 2008**, I make the following comment:

Attending police members immediately involved in dealing with Mr Maher and his recovery, particularly Sergeant Gary Wilson and Senior Constable Matthew Roberts, are to be commended for their measured response and professionalism, in the face of what was clearly an extremely emotionally charged incident.

I direct that a copy of this finding be provided to the following:

- Senior Next of Kin
- Investigating Member, Victoria Police
- Chief Commissioner Lay, Victoria Police

Signature:



IAIN WEST
DEPUTY STATE CORONER

23 January 2012

