

IN THE CORONERS COURT  
OF VICTORIA  
AT MELBOURNE

Court Reference: COR 2015 01897

**FINDING INTO DEATH WITHOUT INQUEST**

*Form 38 Rule 60(2)*

*Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008*

I, PHILLIP BYRNE, Coroner having investigated the death of SHARMAINE VERA BLYTH

without holding an inquest:

find that the identity of the deceased was SHARMAINE VERA BLYTH

born on 16 February 1996

and the death occurred on 19 April 2015

at the Healesville - Kooweerup Road, just north of Lemongum Road, Yellingbo Victoria

**from:**

1 (a) INJURIES SUSTAINED IN A MOTOR VEHICLE COLLISION (DRIVER)

Pursuant to section 67(1) of the **Coroners Act 2008** there is a public interest to be served in making findings with respect to **the following circumstances:**

1. Miss Sharmaine Blyth, 19 years of age at the time of her death, resided at 25 Symons Road, Avonsleigh, with her family.
2. Mr Aaron Blyth described his daughter as a very safe driver, she drove to the conditions and was used to driving on hills and country roads.
3. Miss Blyth worked at the Balgownie Winery in Yarra Glen. On 19 April 2015 she was due to start work at 6.30am. Her father heard her leave the house that morning.
4. Miss Blyth was driving a white Ford Focus, registration number XQP574. The vehicle was in good condition and two new tyres fitted to the rear wheels some three weeks prior to the incident. She was familiar with the vehicle and had driven it for a considerable amount of time. There was a light drizzle that morning and as a result the roads were wet.

5. At approximately 6.10am a passing motorist saw the Ford Focus crashed into trees on the side of the Healesville – Kooweerup road. The incident occurred on a stretch of road that had a speed limit of 100 km/h and had a moderate right bend (when travelling north). The car appeared to have lost control on the bend and slid into a large gumtree. The car had severe damage to the driver's side, particularly the pillar between the front and rear doors. That motorist stopped and located Miss Blyth in the driver's seat of the car. A 000 emergency call was made. Ambulance paramedics and emergency services personnel attended the scene and Miss Blyth was formally pronounced deceased by the paramedics. I note the opinion of the Coronial Investigator, Leading Senior Constable Chad Bullock, that Miss Blyth was killed on impact.
6. The death was referred to the Coroner and after consulting with the duty forensic pathologist an external only post mortem examination was ordered. That examination was carried out at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine by Forensic Pathologist Dr Matthew Lynch. A post mortem CT scan revealed a subarachnoid haemorrhage, four fractured ribs and right tension pneumothorax with haemothorax. Toxicological analysis of Miss Blyth's blood revealed no common drugs or poisons and no evidence of alcohol. Dr Lynch advised that cause of death was:
  - 1 (a) INJURIES SUSTAINED IN MOTOR VEHICLE COLLISION (DRIVER).
7. Police from the Yarra Ranges Highway Patrol unit attended the scene and conducted an investigation into the death. They noted that the road was wet at the time of the accident and that visibility was poor. The area had no overhead lighting and there was very little traffic on the road at the time of the incident. As Miss Blyth was found with her mobile phone in her hand or in her lap the investigator concluded that mobile phone use may have been a contributing factor into the cause of the incident.
8. The investigation also considered the drop in level between the northbound lane and the southbound lane on the Healesville – Kooweerup road as a possible contributing factor. As the Ford Focus was a front wheel drive, dropping onto the southbound lane while rounding the bend may have pulled the steering wheel to the right causing Miss Blyth to pull back to the left. With the wet conditions this may have cause the loss of control and also the degree of rotation that occurred for the driver's side of the vehicle to collide with the gum tree.

9. I also note that the area in which the collision occurred is a rural area and there is often wildlife on the road. Prior to the site of the incident are separate kangaroo and wombat advisory signs. It is possible that Miss Blyth swerved to avoid an animal and lost control of her vehicle.
10. These hypotheses cannot be definitively established therefore I am unable to conclusively reach a view as to why exactly Miss Blyth lost control of her vehicle on that day.

### **COMMENTS**

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

1. Included in the comprehensive Coronial Brief of Evidence is an article from the Lilydale and Yarra Valley Leader newspaper where local emergency services personnel have commented on the potential hazards posed by this particular stretch of roadway.
2. The Coronial Investigator, Leading Senior Constable Chad Bullock, an experienced Highway Patrol Officer, has urged that I make certain recommendations in relation to the speed limit for the location and safety signage. He refers to a 5.5km stretch of the Healesville-Kooweerup Road, Yellingbo where collision data confirms there have been an inordinate number of collisions. I note that since this incident VicRoads have lowered the speed limit from 100kph to 80kph in the immediate vicinity of this fatality. Having regard to the number of incidents it would seem appropriate that VicRoads conduct a survey of this stretch of road. In broad terms I adopt LSC Bullock's suggested recommendations.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Pursuant to section 72(2) of the **Coroners Act 2008**, I make the following recommendation(s) connected with the death:

1. I recommend VicRoads consider reducing the 100kph speed limit to 80kph for the entire 5.5km stretch of road referred to.

2. I also recommend VicRoads consider, if it has not already done so, placing Chevron warning safety signage applicable to north bound traffic at this location.

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

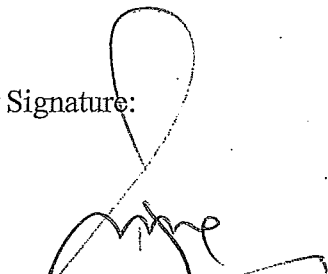
**The family of Ms Sharmaine Blyth**

**The Coronial Investigator – Leading Senior Constable Chad Bullock**

**VicRoads**

**Yarra Ranges Municipal Council**

Signature:



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PHILLIP BYRNE  
CORONER

Date: 7 September 2015

