



IN THE CORONERS COURT
OF VICTORIA
AT MELBOURNE

Court Reference: COR 2024 001433

FINDING INTO DEATH WITH INQUEST

Form 37 Rule 63(1)

Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008

Deceased:	Maxwell Brett LAWSON
Delivered on:	30 May 2025
Delivered at:	Coroners Court of Victoria, 65 Kavanagh Street, Southbank
Hearing dates:	29 May 2025 (summary inquest)
Findings of:	Coroner Sarah Gebert
Counsel assisting the Coroner:	Leading Senior Constable Clinton Smith, Police Coronial Support Unit
Key words	<i>Homicide, uncharged</i>

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Extracts - Family Impact Statement

“My relationship with Max Lawson was a loving one. He was the most devoted and affectionate partner anyone could have asked for and I was lucky we found each other. He made sure that no matter what, I was looked after and treated like a princess. He lit up any room he walked in (well, you could hear him coming from miles away). He lit up my world.

He cared and adored for me and those around him and that’s one of the many things I loved about him.

He also adored his daughter [REDACTED]. Max worked so hard to get his life in order so that he was able to see more of her and was working tirelessly to set up the spare room so that she had a room of her own when she came to stay. We were starting to have a blended family. We also had a plan to have kids of our own and even went and saw a specialist to start the process.

We were also planning on getting married and buying a house together.”¹

“My best friend Max, is gone — taken from this world in a violent, senseless act he should never have been caught up in. Every single day, I feel the weight of his absence. It hits me in unexpected ways — when I hear a joke or a song, I know he would’ve loved, when I reach for my phone to text him, only to remember he’s not there. The pain is constant, sharp, and suffocating. My world cracked the day he died, and it hasn’t stopped shaking since.

There are no words that can fully capture what Max meant to me, or what was taken from the world when his life was cut short. His laugh — big, loud, real — was the kind of laugh that filled a room and lifted everyone in it. It echoes in my mind constantly, and I would give anything just to hear it again. He brought light and joy wherever he went, never looking for conflict only peace and laughter. He lived his life fully, loved his people fiercely, and kept drama as far from himself as possible. He didn’t deserve this. He didn’t belong in that situation. And he certainly didn’t deserve to pay for someone else’s chaos with his own life.”²

“Max was not always easy - he could be angry, defiant, and hard to understand. But he was also incredibly loving. He had a huge personality, a loud laugh and the biggest hugs you could imagine. He cared deeply.

...

Shortly after his death, I had a dream. Max came to me. He told me everything is okay and that he was in a good place. That moment gave me comfort – but it hasn't stopped the grief.

Max was my son force. My first born. He was complex, yes, but also vibrant, tender, an unforgettable. I miss his hugs. I miss his voice. I missed the future he should have had. The loss of Max has left a hole in our lives that can never be filled.”³

“Max is a brother to Myself, Billi, Zoe, Jemma, Mitchell, Harry and Ruby.

Max is a son to Nikola and Brett.

Max is a father to [REDACTED] and a step-father to [REDACTED], he was incredibly proud of both of his girls and was always boasting about their recent activities or achievements.

¹ Max’s partner, Samantha Shaw

² Max’s best friend, Roxanne Hatfield

³ Max’s mother, Jane Willis

Max is a friend to many.

*Maxy continues to be loved, remembered and missed every single day. He was as easy going as it gets. He loved having a good time, alcohol, laughter, partying, x-box and camping. The simple things in life made him happy. Max loved animals, his dog Tessa for one and also standing out on the deck when he lived in Belgrave and feeding/befriending the local Kookaburra's. He always had bacon in the fridge so he could feed them and was always excited to show me when I came over. This is fitting as Max reminds me of a Kookaburra. Spiritually, the kookaburra symbolises joy, happiness, and a positive outlook on life, reminding people to find joy in simple pleasures which fits Max to a tee. The Kookaburra's distinctive call represents the power of voice and the importance of expressing oneself which Max never shied away from. Their unique laugh also reminds me of Max as we all know his laugh was something special and heard from miles away."*⁴

"I'm [REDACTED]. I'm 13, and on March 10, 2024, my dad was murdered — and honestly, my whole world just fell apart. Since that day, everything's been different. My dad meant everything to me.

He was so kind, funny, loving — the kind of person who i knew was there for me no matter what i needed, and now... he's just gone. Someone took him away, and there's nothing I can do to bring him back. I still wake up thinking maybe it was just a bad dream. I still wait for him to text me or walk through the door so I can hear his voice or get one of his big hugs. But that's never going to happen again. He's not going to be there for my birthdays, or my graduation, or to walk me down the aisle someday and that's no fair.

I won't get to hear him say he's proud of me. He's missing everything — and that hurts more than I can even explain.

What makes it worse is knowing the person who did this is still out there, just living their life while mine feels like it's been ripped apart. It's not fair. It feels like my dad's life — and everything he meant to me — doesn't even matter to the people who are supposed to bring justice. This isn't just about losing someone. It's losing my future with him. The laughs, the talks, the advice, the love — it was all taken from me.

I feel angry, heartbroken, confused... and sometimes just numb. No matter how hard I try to stay strong, the pain's still there. I'll never stop missing him. I'll never stop loving him. And I'll never stop hoping that one day, there's justice — for my dad, for everyone who loved him, and for me.

*Because I still need him. So much.*⁵

⁴ Max's sister, Darian Jones

⁵ Max's daughter, [REDACTED]

INTRODUCTION

1. Maxwell Brett Lawson⁶ was born on 24 September 1988 and was 35 years old at the time of his death. Max resided with his partner, Samantha Shaw. He had a daughter, [REDACTED], to his ex-wife Stephanie.
2. Max worked full-time at PlastaMasta in Bayswater, and casually as a plasterer with his father, Brett Lawson. When he was 25 years old he was diagnosed with Marfan Syndrome.
3. Tragically, Max passed away at the home address of Luke Blanchfield (**Mr Blanchfield**) in Belgrave on 10 March 2024. Max had attended the property and confronted Mr Blanchfield. Max produced a telescopic metal vacuum cleaner pipe, following which he was stabbed with a kitchen knife wielded by Mr Blanchfield during an altercation between the pair. Mr Blanchfield told police that he acted in self-defence at the time the fatal injury was inflicted.

THE CORONIAL INVESTIGATION

4. Max's death was reported to the Coroners Court as it fell within the definition of a reportable death in the *Coroners Act 2008* (**the Act**) which include deaths that appear to be unexpected, unnatural or violent or to have resulted from accident or injury.

OTHER INVESTIGATIONS

Criminal Investigation

5. Given the circumstances surrounding Max's death, the investigation initially proceeded as a criminal investigation. During this time, the coronial investigation was suspended.
6. The criminal investigation was conducted by Detective Leading Senior Constable Jarrad Brookman (**DLSC Brookman**) of the Homicide Squad who was also the Coronal Investigator.
7. The Office of Public Prosecutions (**OPP**) advised the Homicide Squad by letter dated 16 December 2024 that, having considered the evidence provided about the circumstances surrounding Max's death, its opinion was that there were no reasonable prospects of conviction regarding a charge of murder against Mr Blanchfield. In reaching this view, it was noted that the prosecution would struggle to prove the element of intention beyond a

⁶ Referred to in my finding as 'Max' unless more formality is required.

reasonable doubt. As such, they did not consider it necessary to consider the defence of self-defence for a murder charge.

8. Further, and in the alternative, the OPP did not consider there are reasonable prospects of a conviction regarding a charge of manslaughter, noting that if self-defence is raised by Mr Blanchfield, the prosecution would struggle to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the accused was not acting in self-defence.
9. A decision was ultimately made not to prosecute Mr Blanchfield for any offence, following which the coronial investigation resumed under the Act.

The coronial role

10. Coroners independently investigate reportable deaths to find, if possible, identity, cause of death and the surrounding circumstances of the death. Cause of death in this context is accepted to mean the medical cause or mechanism of death. Surrounding circumstances are limited to events which are sufficiently proximate and causally related to the death.
11. Under the Act, coroners have an additional role to reduce the number of preventable deaths and promote public health and safety by their findings and making comments and or recommendations about any matter connected to the death they are investigating.
12. When a coroner examines the circumstances in which a person died, it is to determine causal factors and identify any systemic failures with a view to preventing, if possible, deaths from occurring in similar circumstances in the future.
13. In the coronial jurisdiction, the standard of proof applicable to findings is the balance of probabilities.⁷

⁷ Subject to the principles enunciated in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336. The effect of this and similar authorities is that coroners should not make adverse findings against, or comments about, individuals unless the evidence provides a comfortable level of satisfaction as to those matters taking into account the consequences of such findings or comments.

“The seriousness of an allegation made, the inherent unlikelihood of an occurrence of a given description, or the gravity of the consequences flowing from a particular finding, are considerations which must affect the answer to the question whether the issues had been proved to the reasonable satisfaction of the tribunal. In such matters “reasonable satisfaction” should not be produced by inexact proofs, indefinite testimony, or indirect inferences ...”. (pages 362-363)

Mandatory inquest

14. An inquest into Max's death was mandatory as the death appeared to be the result of *homicide*⁸, where homicide is given the ordinary meaning of being an act in which a person causes the death of another person.
15. The Act does provide for certain exceptions including where a person has been charged with an indictable offence in respect of the death being investigated by the coroner⁹, however this exception was not relevant given the OPP decision not to prosecute.

Criminal Liability

16. It is important to note that the Act provides that a coroner must not include in a finding or comment any statement that a person is, or may be, guilty of an offence.¹⁰ That is, the Act prohibits the express statement that a person may be guilty of an offence, or that the found facts were committed without lawful excuse.
17. A coroner must however determine the identity of any person who contributed to the death as part of the obligation to find the circumstances in which the death occurred. As noted in *Priest v West*,

*If, in the course of the investigation of a death it appears that a person may have caused the death, then the Coroner must undertake such investigations as may lead to the identification of that person. Otherwise the required investigation into the cause of the death and the circumstances in which it occurred will be incomplete; and the obligation to find, if possible, that cause and those circumstances will not have been discharged.*¹¹
18. To resolve the potential conflict between these obligations, coroners focus on finding the relevant facts without making any statement about the legal effect of those facts (that is, legal conclusions or consequences).
19. A coroner can also comply with the prohibition on findings or comments that a person may be guilty of an offence by avoiding making any statement about the state of mind of the person who contributed to the death.

⁸ Section 52(2)(a) of the Act.

⁹ Section 52(2) of the Act.

¹⁰ Section 69 of the Act.

¹¹ [2012] 40 VR 521, p. 525 at para 9.

Sources of evidence

20. As part of the coronial investigation, DLSC Brookman prepared a comprehensive coronial brief. The brief comprises statements from witnesses, the forensic pathologist who examined Max, ambulance paramedics, investigating police officers, as well as other documentation such as a map of the Belgrave address, photographs (including scene photos), Close Circuit Television (CCTV), Body Worn Camera (BWC) footage, audio recordings (Triple Zero calls) and video recordings (such as a crime scene video and video-recorded police interviews).

Summary Inquest

21. Following a review of the coronial brief, I determined that the inquest should hear evidence from DLSC Brookman. Present during the inquest was Max's family members including his partner, daughter, stepmother and sister, and many of his friends.

BACKGROUND

Events leading to the fatal incident

22. Max was a close friend of Cameron Ploeg (**Cameron**) and Breannan Ploeg (**Breannan**) Ploeg who were married with three children, but had separated in March 2023. Max described Cameron and Breannan as *his best friends and his family*.
23. In April 2023, Breannan met and formed a relationship with Mr Blanchfield. He proposed to her in October 2023.
24. In early 2024, Mr Blanchfield and Breannan's relationship began to deteriorate as she had re-initiated contact with Cameron, particularly around facilitating contact with their children. Cameron was in a relationship with Emily [REDACTED] (**Emily**) at the time.
25. In the weeks leading up to the fatal incident, Max's stepmother recalled a conversation with Max where he spoke about Mr Blanchfield in a heightened manner. She stated, *Max was carrying on how much he hated him, I don't think he specifically said he was going to do anything. ... He said he hated him, he was an arsehole, not in an aggressive manner but in a heightened manner, like he was being firm about something. I did know who he was talking about was Bree's new partner.*
26. Mr Blanchfield and Max had never met before.

27. The evidence suggests that Max, had little to no sleep on the night of 9 to 10 March 2024, noting that he arrived at Cameron's house via Uber at about 2.30-3.00am on 10 March and later spent time at the Baxter Tavern for an hour or two sometime around 8.00am.

Events of 10 March 2024

28. During the afternoon of 10 March 2024, Breannan applied fake tan and shaved her legs in preparation for a trip to Gumbaya World the following day. She also placed bathers for her children and towels in a shopping basket on the dining table. Mr Blanchfield became upset and accused Breannan of trying to look good for Cameron.
29. At about 3.14pm, Max called Breannan and asked what was for dinner as they were planning to come over to her home which was located at [REDACTED], Belgrave (**the Belgrave address**). Max was with his partner Samantha as well as Cameron and Emily.
30. A short time later, Max, Samantha and Cameron left Cameron's home and travelled towards the Belgrave address. Emily said that she and Cameron were arguing as Cameron had been on and off the phone with Breannan that morning, and she was unclear about the state of their relationship.
31. At about 3.43pm, Breannan said to Mr Blanchfield that she was over everything, and couldn't be bothered *with this shit anymore*. She left the Belgrave address with her children, attended a bottle shop followed by a car wash.
32. Breannan advised Samantha via Snap Chat, that she was over everything and had left the house with her children.
33. Mr Blanchfield, who remained at the Belgrave address, messaged Breannan's mother saying, *"I won't be coming over. Brea going off with cam some where now supposedly."* Earlier in the day, there was an arrangement made for Mr Blanchfield, Breannan and her children to attend for dinner at her mother's that evening.
34. At about 4.06pm, Mr Blanchfield left the Belgrave address and purchased alcohol at a local bottle shop.
35. At about 4.10pm, Breannan messaged Mr Blanchfield and said, *"Have you left"*. Mr Blanchfield responded, *Why would I leave my supposed house, So get your partner to remove me if that's what ya want cuz I'm ready to fight again.*

36. At about 4.15pm, Breannan and her children, met up with Cameron, Samantha and Max at the Burrinja Cultural Centre in Upwey. It was a very hot day and shortly after it was decided to take the children to their father's home for a swim in his pool. At the time, Melbourne was experiencing a heat wave and temperatures were noted to be in the late 30s.
37. Breannan said she had the bathers ready on the table at the Belgrave address and Max offered to get them. She said that she asked him not to go but he insisted. One of Breannan's children asked to go with him but he refused. Breannan told police at the scene, *And Max took my car and said I'll sort him out, though he was intoxicated.*
38. Around this time, Samantha sent a Snap Chat message to Emily saying that they were all coming back to Cameron's house, so she had to pack up and leave. Emily called Cameron and asked if this was true, during this call Breannan yelled from the background, *"We're getting back together bitch"*. Emily said to Cameron that she wished them all the best and ended the call.
39. Max then drove Breannan's vehicle (a Nissan Patrol) to the Belgrave address. Breannan said that there was no metal pole or pipes in her car at the time.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH

40. At about 4.35pm on 10 March 2024, Max arrived at the Belgrave address. CCTV footage captured the Nissan Patrol's front passenger window open with a metallic object on the passenger seat as he drove through the gate.
41. At about 4.36pm, Max parked the vehicle and walked towards the side of the house out of CCTV view. The CCTV system is motion activated and cut out shortly afterwards.
42. The evidence suggests that Max entered the unlocked rear door, following which he confronted Mr Blanchfield at the master bedroom door. Mr Blanchfield was laying on the bed at this time. Max told him to leave, but he refused to do so.
43. At about 4.37pm, Max returned to the Nissan Patrol and reached through the front passenger window. Max retrieved a telescopic vacuum cleaner pipe and returned towards the side of the house. At this time, Max is observed to manually extend the pipe to a larger length.
44. At 4.37.59pm, Max walked around the side of the house out of CCTV view.

45. Mr Blanchfield said he feared Max would return with a weapon so retrieved a large knife from the block in the kitchen and placed it in the back of his shorts.
46. Mr Blanchfield went outside the house and saw Max carrying a large metal pipe. He said that Max lunged at him with the pipe and he blocked it with his left arm. However, Max used his left arm to place Mr Blanchfield in a headlock and attempted to pull him to the ground. They spun around the garden a number of times. In fear for his life or the risk of serious injury, Mr Blanchfield stabbed Max, but did not know the number of times. He soon noticed Max bleeding at which time he returned the knife to the kitchen bench and rang emergency services.
47. Indistinct but raised and aggressive male voices are captured on the CCTV but the clip ends at 4.38.44pm. At 4.39.25pm, the CCTV system recommenced and captured a banging-metallic noise, and male voices.
48. At inquest, the Coroner's Investigator stated in relation to the origin of the metal pipe, that Max likely obtained it from hard rubbish at the side of the road after he left the park. It was described as being about a metre long, with a dent in it. The Coroner's Investigator said the dent was likely caused when Mr Blanchfield was struck during the altercation.

The Triple Zero Call

49. At 4.41pm, Mr Blanchfield made a call to Triple Zero and related that a male had been stabbed and required urgent medical attention.
50. Extracts from the Triple Zero call included the following conveyed by Mr Blanchfield,
- *"I need police and an ambulance. I just stabbed someone."*
 - *"I had a fight with my missers, and then she got someone's come - come after me. He came to the house with a bat and threatened me and I had a knife on me and I - I stabbed him."*
 - *"... He just fuckin' came to me - came to me in my room in the house but he had a fuckin' metal bat. He had - he threatened me more and more and he was going to hit me and I got scared - - -."*
 - *"And then he - then he went to hit me and I - I pulled out the knife."*

51. The Triple Zero operator transferred the call to police, and the following was conveyed by Mr Blanchfield,
- *“...he came into the – he came into the bedroom first.”*
 - *“And he threatened me. And he said - I said, "Who the fuck are you? I'm not leaving anywhere. I don't know who the fuck you are.”*
 - *“Then I walked - walked outside, and I said, "Who the fuck are you?" Again.”*
 - *“And he - he had that thing in his hands, and he said, "Don't make me fucking do this. Just leave. I don't wanna do this. Just - like, just leave.”*
 - *“I said, "I'm not leaving anywhere until Brea tells me herself.”*
 - *“And then – and then - he went - he went to swing it at me. I had to myself.”*
 - *“I - I knew he was going to the car to get something so I picked up the knife then.”*
 - *“I had it in – in the back of me shorts.”*
 - *“And - I grabbed it..... took the knife out and stabbed him. I don't know how many times I stabbed him....”*
52. Whilst on the phone, Mr Blanchfield opened the front gate to wait for assistance to arrive.
53. At approximately 5.01pm police officers arrived at the scene. Mr Blanchfield was arrested, cautioned and advised of his rights. He was also secured in handcuffs and his hands were placed in paper brown bags.
54. Police located a person, later identified as Max, laying on his back by the side of the house. He was holding the vacuum cleaner pipe in his right hand. He was moved to the garden bed where first aid was commenced.
55. Ambulance Victoria paramedics arrived at approximately 5.03pm and following their examination they determined that he was unable to be assisted. Max was subsequently declared deceased.

56. Whilst at the scene Detective Sergeant Paul Edyvane conducted a field interview with Mr Blanchfield who gave the following version of the events on BWC¹²,
- *"I was lying in bed watching telly and then the - Bree's car rocked up and I thought it was Bree coming to talk to me. And then some man came in and he's like, "Get the fuck out of the house." Yeah, "This is your last warning. Get the fuck out of the house," and then – then he walked outside and then he's gone to pick up a weapon, so I ran into the kitchen and picked up a knife and put it into me shorts. And then when I came outside and he's like, "This is my last chance. Don't make me do this. This is my last chance," and then -then he went to swing at me and I - I tried to block him, and then I just got the knife and stabbed him."*
 - *"Because he – he swung the bat at me - - - and I tried to block it and then I just pulled the knife - - - 'cause I was either – it was either my life or his life."*
 - *"Well, she - we had a fight before and that was fine, but then she told me that she was going to meet Cameron and whoever this person is. I said, "Don't bring 'em here because I don't want trouble." Said, "If they're coming to threaten me, I – I don't need trouble."*
57. Mr Blanchfield was transported to the Lilydale Police Station for interview at approximately 6.10pm.
58. At about 7.20pm, Crime Scene Examiners from the Victoria Police Major Crime Scene Unit attended the Belgrave address. The scene was video recorded, photographs were taken and items seized including a Samsung mobile phone in a blue case, a metal tube, a bloodstained black cap, shirt button, a bloodstained knife, Swann CCTV box and twenty-two blood swabs.
59. At approximately 8.14pm on Mr Blanchfield was interviewed by DLSC Brookman. The interview was video recorded. During the interview Mr Blanchfield said that he saw Breannan's car return to their home through the master bedroom window and initially presumed she was the occupant.
60. Mr Blanchfield said he saw Max at his bedroom door and told him to leave the house. Mr Blanchfield refused, stating he didn't know who he was, and that Breannan could tell him

¹² Appendix D, Conversations with Mr Blanchfield BWC – Detective Sergeant Paul Edyvane, Time 5:45pm.

herself. Max then left and walked towards the car. Mr Blanchfield said he was scared and thought Max was going to get a weapon, so he armed himself with a knife which he retrieved from the kitchen and concealed down the back of his shorts. Mr Blanchfield went outside the house and saw Max carrying a metal pipe which he believed was vacuum pipe about a metre long.

61. Mr Blanchfield said he felt like he was in danger and thought if the pipe hit him in the head, it would kill him or cause serious damage (*the bar would have killed me if he would have hit me in the head*). Max lunged at him and Mr Blanchfield said he went into *fight and flight mode*. He said, “*I kind of got straight into defence mode 'cause I didn't know what was gunna happen*”. He said that Max pulled the pole back ready to take a swing, noting that Max he was much larger than him. Mr Blanchfield said he blocked the pipe with his left arm, but Max used his left arm to place him in a headlock and attempted to pull flip him around and put him on the ground. They were spinning around the garden. At this time, Mr Blanchfield was holding onto the pipe with his left hand and freed his right hand. He then drew the knife with his right hand from his shorts and stabbed Max. He did not know how many times he stabbed Max, but said that it was his intention to scare or hurt Max in order to get him to leave the property. He said “*...it was just instincts where I tried to protect myself.*”
62. Mr Blanchfield said they both fell to the ground and he noted that Max was bleeding. Following which he returned to the kitchen, placed the knife on the counter and called emergency services. He said he was in a distressed state crying until police arrived.
63. Mr Blanchfield said that he was not *trying to kill him*, but *trying to hurt him and protect himself*.
64. He denied stating, “*If anyone messes with me, I'll fucking show'em what's what, I'll kill them*”, which Breannan told police when she arrived at the scene.
65. Mr Blanchfield said he did not have enough time to lock the back door to prevent Max from re-entering and that the door will only lock with a key which he thought was in his car in the driveway.
66. He also said that there was a considerable difference in size between himself and Max, describing himself as 5 feet 8 inches and Max as being a foot taller. At inquest, Max's relatives indicated to the Court that Max was about 6 feet 7 inches.

67. Mr Blanchfield was examined by a Forensic Nurse Examiner at about 11.30pm, who documented the following injuries:
- a. Three small red marks to the left upper bicep with yellow bruising.
 - b. One red mark approximately 30mm in size to left upper bicep.
 - c. One semi-circular/arched open injury approximately 30mm x 20mm in size with partial skin peeling to outer left bicep and surrounding blue bruising.
 - d. One open injury approximately 17mm in length with superficial linear extension to left lower posterior forearm.
 - e. One scabbed open injury to right lower shin.¹³
73. Mr Blanchfield was not tested for alcohol or drugs after the incident. At inquest, the Coroner's Investigator explained that Mr Blanchfield did not present as either alcohol or drug affected during his dealings with police. Police did however ascertain that he had consumed about 6 alcoholic drinks.
74. Following his interview, Mr Blanchfield was released without charge at 3.15am on 11 March 2024.

IDENTITY OF THE DECEASED

68. On 14 March 2024, Maxwell Brett Lawson, born on 24 September 1988 was formally identified via fingerprint comparison.

CAUSE OF DEATH

69. On 11 March 2024, Dr Victoria Francis, Forensic Pathologist at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (**VIFM**), conducted an autopsy and prepared a written report of her findings dated 30 August 2024.
70. The postmortem examination revealed a stab wound to the left lower back which transected rib 10, perforating through pleura, perforated the left lower lobe and causing tension pneumothorax, incising the anterior twelfth thoracic vertebral body anteriorly and
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¹³ Mr Blanchfield was also examined by ambulance paramedics whilst at the police station.

perforating and partially transecting the descending thoracic aorta, perforating through-and-through the inferior vena cava, and extending 2cm into the posterior liver. This injury caused a tension pneumothorax and would be expected to result in significant and rapid blood loss and is considered to be the injury causing the death.

71. There were three penetrating injuries on the left lateral chest and abdomen which perforated into the pleural and peritoneal cavity, resulting in splenic transection, left kidney injury, small and large bowel injuries and liver injury. These injuries were not associated with any haemorrhage within the peritoneal cavity.
72. There was a shelved and relatively superficial sharp force injury to the posterior left forearm which may represent an offence/defence type injury.
73. Dr Francis also found natural disease present. There was moderate coronary artery stenosis and a remote, focal left frontal cortex infarct. Risk factors for coronary atherosclerosis include increasing age, smoking, hypertension, family history, diabetes mellitus, obesity, male sex and other factors such as hyperlipidaemia (high cholesterol). Given his relatively young age, a referral to the Institute's family counselling program was initiated.
74. His lungs were emphysematous with chronic asthma/bronchitis. His left pleural cavity showed blebs, bullae, adhesions and there was a remote stapled suture line.
75. Toxicological analysis of blood showed methylamphetamine¹⁴ (~0.1mg/L), cocaine¹⁵ (~0.05mg/L) and its metabolites including cocaethylene (a metabolite of cocaine and alcohol) and a blood alcohol level of 0.14g/100 mL with a vitreous humour alcohol level of 0.21g/100 mL.
76. Dr Francis formulated the cause of death as *1(a) Stab wound to the back*.

¹⁴ Adverse effects of methylamphetamine use include dizziness, headache, restlessness and tremor. Overdose may cause anxiety, cardiac arrhythmias, circulatory collapse, coma, confusion, convulsions, hallucinations, hypertension and hyperthermia (Baselt, 2020). Users of methylamphetamine may develop psychosis, particularly a paranoid psychosis that is oftentimes indistinguishable from schizophrenia. This can often lead to irrational or violent behaviour and is a frequent factor in serious assault implicating methylamphetamine use (Drummer and Odell, 2001).

¹⁵ Adverse effects of cocaine include agitation, anxiety, confusion, diaphoresis, hypertension, hyperexcitability, irritability, mydriasis and tachycardia (Baselt, 2017).

CONCLUSION

75. The jurisdiction of the Coroners Court is directed at prevention. In general terms, a coroner looks for systemic issues in order to make recommendations to prevent future loss of life. This case does not deal with systemic issues but Max's death was clearly preventable.
76. The incident involved aggression and the use of force to resolve a domestic situation. However having made that observation, Max and Mr Blanchfield had not met before. On this occasion Max appears to have acted to help out close friends who he regarded as family.
77. Toxicological analysis of Max's blood showed the presence of methylamphetamine, cocaine and a high level of alcohol which may have contributed to his decision to confront Mr Blanchfield and retrieve the weapon from the vehicle. It also appears the Max had not slept on the night before the incident.
78. There is no doubt that the presence of weapons, and in particular a large knife, during the incident significantly increased the risk that someone would be injured or killed and that risk tragically eventuated. However, Mr Blanchfield said he responded to a threat, which was largely unknown, and feared for his safety and his life. In addition, he said that it was not his intention to have ended Max's life.
79. Max should not have lost his life on 10 March 2024 and his death was entirely avoidable.

FINDINGS

80. Pursuant to section 67(1) of the Act I find as follows:
 - (a) the identity of the deceased was Maxwell Brett Lawson, born on 24 September 1988;
 - (b) he died on 10 March 2024 at [REDACTED], Belgrave, Victoria, from
1(a) Stab Wound to the back; and
 - (c) the death occurred in the circumstances described above.
81. I find that Luke Blanchfield caused the death of Maxwell Brett Lawson on 10 March 2024 by a stab wound to Maxwell Lawson's back. The injury was inflicted by a knife Luke Blanchfield took from the kitchen at his home address.

I again convey my sincere condolences to Max's family and friends for their loss and acknowledge the sudden and traumatic circumstances in which his death occurred.

ORDERS

Pursuant to section 73(1B) of the Act, I order that this finding be published (in redacted form) on the Coroners Court of Victoria website in accordance with the rules.

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

Samantha Shaw, Senior Next of Kin

Detective Leading Senior Constable Jarrad Brookman, Coroner's Investigator, Victoria Police

Signature:



SARAH GEBERT

Date: 30 May 2025

NOTE: Under section 83 of the ***Coroners Act 2008*** ('the Act'), a person with sufficient interest in an investigation may appeal to the Trial Division of the Supreme Court against the findings of a coroner in respect of a death after an investigation. An appeal must be made within 6 months after the day on which the determination is made, unless the Supreme Court grants leave to appeal out of time under section 86 of the Act.
