



# OFFICE OF THE STATE CORONER

## FINDINGS OF INVESTIGATION

**CITATION:** **Non-inquest findings into the death of Tui Dace Tauati**

**TITLE OF COURT:** Coroners Court

**JURISDICTION:** Brisbane

**DATE:** 3 May 2016

**FILE NO(s):** 2015/3260

**FINDINGS OF:** Christine Clements, Brisbane Coroner

**CATCHWORDS:** CORONERS: Investigation, suicide, domestic violence

1. Tui Dace Tauati lived at Craig Street, Redbank Plains in Queensland. He died at his home on 22 August 2015 due to hanging. Tui, who was a Pacific Islander, was 21 years of age at the time of his death.

### **The incident**

2. On 22 August 2015 police from Goodna were contacted to attend the premises at Craig Street, Redbank Plains. There was a report that a male was deceased in the back yard. When they arrived they discovered a number of people who were the family members of Tui Tauati, as well as ambulance officers. The young man had been found hanging from a tree at the rear of the dwelling by his father, Junior Jordan. Mr Jordan grabbed a knife and cut the rope, releasing his son Tui to the ground before commencing cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Ambulance officers confirmed Tui was deceased. He was wearing a white short-sleeved t-shirt on which he had written a number of clearly legible personal messages of love and thanks to family, Edith and his son Snoop as well as others.

### **Cause of death**

3. Autopsy examination was conducted on 24 August 2015 by the forensic pathologist Dr Day (registrar) with Dr Williams.
4. It was confirmed Tui Dace Tauati died due to hanging. Toxicology testing showed the presence of the stimulant drug methylamphetamine and amphetamine which were both present at significant levels. No alcohol was detected.

### **Context and background circumstances in which death occurred**

5. Tui and his ex-partner (Ms Edith Rio) were in an 'on-again, off-again' relationship for some time, but reportedly separated in June 2015 due to the deceased's drug use. They had a young child (Snoop) together and had seemingly amicable informal custody arrangements in place. Edith reported that the pair were looking to recommence their relationship.
6. A domestic violence protection order was in place, prior to the deceased's death, which had been contravened by the deceased on three occasions in the previous three months.
7. On the night prior to Tui's death the young couple and child had gone out together at Fasta Pasta at Redbank. They discussed what would need to happen before they could resume living together as a family unit. Edith indicated Tui must stop his use of drugs, there must be no further domestic violence and he must try to find a new job. An arrangement was made so that Snoop could spend the day with Tui and his family on the next day, 22 August 2015.
8. Tui drove Edith and the child home. During this trip he started crying and Edith tried to console him and reassure him that everything would work out.
9. Tui phoned her that evening saying he was feeling very down and upset. Again she consoled him that things would improve and that he was going to see Snoop in the morning with his mother and they could talk about it more. She basically tried to cheer him up.

10. The young couple continued intermittent telephone contact throughout the night. This was interrupted from time to time when the baby was crying and Edith attended to the child before ringing him back. It was about 6:00am when the conversation finally ended. Edith then received a number of text messages from Tui which included –

‘Snoop be a good boy for mum.’

‘I’m sorry for breaking your heart, we will always have a love that no one will understand.’

‘I’m sorry.’

11. Edith tried to contact him fearing that he was probably suicidal. He did not return her calls and she sent his mother a message on Facebook. His mother responded saying she would follow up with her son. It was subsequent to this that Edith discovered Tui had died.
12. Police spoke with other people present at the scene. Tui’s mother, Noelene Tauati told police her son had been experiencing severe relationship issues with his former partner. The relationship had been tense and included incidents of domestic violence. She told police she believed her son suffered from undiagnosed depression, (but there was no information indicating any follow up or referral had occurred).
13. Tui’s father Junior Jordan spoke by phone with his son for the last time shortly after nine that morning. At that stage Tui sounded well and there were no issues of immediate concern.
14. The arrangement was that he would assist his son by accompanying him to collect the infant child Snoop for a visit with family. He was dropping his wife Noelene off to church first when she told him that their son’s former partner had just called. Edith Rio had said that she thought Tui was going to kill himself.
15. Junior Jordan immediately attended his son’s residence and discovered him, hanging in a tree.

### **Information provided by Tui’s former partner, Edith Rio**

16. Edith was 21 years of age and the mother of 21 month old Snoop Tauati who was born in June 2014. She acknowledged Tui was the father of the child.
17. They had been together since 2011 and lived at a number of residences.
18. Edith ended the relationship in July 2015 because Tui was using drugs including marijuana and ice. When she discovered this and he acknowledged it, it was decided that they would separate so that he could get himself off the drugs. Edith moved out with the child. She told police they already had a few issues including domestic violence. They had been arguing about finances and home life after he had quit his job as a forklift driver.
19. Edith moved in with her sister in the same suburb.

20. Edith said Tui would become quite aggressive and physically assault her when he was unable to express himself with words. The last incident had occurred in about June 2015 when Tui had tried to choke her and locked her out of the house. The police were called.
21. After the separation the relationship improved. Tui would visit every second day at Edith's sister's house to see the child. This arrangement continued until it was discovered that Tui had resumed use of drugs. This was about a week before Tui died and Edith again told him that he could not see the child on his own or take him out of the house while he was using drugs. She still allowed him to visit at her sister's home.
22. Edith told police he reacted well to this. He understood her reasons.

### **History of domestic violence**

23. This portion of findings is informed by research and review by the Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Unit.
24. Tui and Edith were both about 17 years old when they commenced their relationship in 2011. Their son Snoop was born on 16 June 2014. Edith told police their relationship was characterised by domestic violence throughout the whole period. The deceased would 'become quite aggressive and he physically assaulted Ms Rio when he was not able to express himself with words'.
25. A temporary domestic violence protection order was issued on 19 November 2013, with Tui named as the respondent and Edith named as the aggrieved. On this occasion, Tui was charged with Assault, Occasioning Bodily Harm after assaulting Edith on the train. Tui punched Edith in the face, grabbed her by the hair, refused to let her decamp the train, and kicked her in the stomach (whilst 9 weeks pregnant), requiring bystanders to intervene by ringing the automatic stop alarms. Tui was arrested and taken to the watchhouse.
26. At the time, Edith reported that the domestic violence was common and stated she had been assaulted on 'at least five or more occasions in the last 12 months', with the violence including episodes of strangulation.
27. In response, Tui was issued a Voluntary Intervention Order (VIO) by the Court on 26 November 2013. Tui attended the initial assessment session but failed to attend any further appointments. In retrospect it is unfortunate that there appears to have been no follow up or consequence for Tui when he failed to participate in this initial intervention program.
28. A protection order was issued with mandatory conditions on 4 February 2014, following the application being adjourned on 26 November 2013.
29. Tui was charged with contravening the protection order four times, receiving a probation order on the first breach following an episode of physical assault in public, and the charges being dismissed due to no evidence to offer on subsequent breaches.

30. The most recent breach charge was issued by police on 9 August 2015, two weeks prior to Tui's death.

### **Discussion of risk factors for suicide**

31. Tui could be identified as having a high risk of deliberately causing his own death due to a number of background circumstances.
32. He was a young male South Sea Islander. Research describes rates of suicide in Pacific Island countries as among the highest in the world. There is also American research identifying Pacific Islander youth at higher risk of depression suicidal behaviours, although no Australia specific research was cited.<sup>1</sup>
33. Examples of suicidal deaths in the context of domestic violence deaths include;
- murder and suicide by perpetrator of domestic violence
  - murder and suicide by victim of domestic violence
  - suicide by victim of domestic violence
  - suicide by perpetrator of domestic violence.
34. Tui was in the last category which apparently out numbers domestic violence homicides.<sup>2</sup>
35. Notably, Tui was a male who suicided in a post separation period following the breakdown of a personal relationship, which is a known high risk category of suicide occurring.
36. Although there was nothing in Tui's medical record which indicated he had disclosed domestic violence in his personal relationship, or that he was depressed, his mother believed her son was suffering depression. Again this is a factor where elevated risk of suicide occurs.
37. Police officers are often critical gatekeepers in detection and appropriate referral of people at increased risk of suicide, not only in the context of domestic violence. However it was noted that although Tui was in contact with Queensland police only 10 days prior to his death, there was no obvious indicator to trigger such a referral. A QPS Watchhouse Medical Screen on 12 August 2015 recorded that Tui denied any history of mental illness, suicide attempts, self-harm or current suicide ideation.
38. Whilst this death occurred within the context of domestic violence, there are no identifiable systemic shortcomings or missed opportunities for intervention that could reasonably have prevented Tui's death.
39. The only caveat is the absence of any identified follow up or consequence when

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<sup>1</sup> Booth, H. (1999). Pacific Island suicide in comparative perspective. *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 31, 433-488, and De Leo, D. & Milner, A. (2010). The WHO/START Study: Promoting suicide prevention for a diverse range of cultural contexts. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour*, 40, 99-106.

<sup>2</sup> Davis, R. (2010). Domestic violence-related deaths. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*, 2, 44-52.

Tui failed to attend the initial Voluntary Intervention Order counselling sessions after his first attendance. It is of course noted that these sessions are voluntary, but in retrospect some follow up might have encouraged Tui's engagement with the process.

## **Conclusion**

40. It is concluded that Tui Dace Tauati ended his own life due to hanging.
41. He did so at a time when he was emotionally distressed, overtired and under the influence of amphetamine.
42. Tui created a very detailed and thoughtful series of messages on the shirt he was wearing at the time of his death. This suggests a deliberate and considered action rather than a fleeting and impulsive action.
43. It was also most likely that he was suffering from undiagnosed and untreated depression resulting from the breakup of his significant relationship and separation from his partner and young child.
44. Despite not having a history of suicidal ideation or previous attempt, he was also at identifiable elevated risk of suicide as previously referred to.

Christine Clements  
Brisbane Coroner  
3 May 2016