



# OFFICE OF THE STATE CORONER

## FINDINGS OF INQUEST

CITATION: **Inquest into the death of Jane Rose STURGISS**

TITLE OF COURT: Coroner's Court

JURISDICTION: Chinchilla

FILE NO(s): COR 2283/07(7)

DELIVERED ON: 10 December 2008

DELIVERED AT: Chinchilla

HEARING DATE(s): 10 December 2008

FINDINGS OF: Ms C Cornack, Coroner

CATCHWORDS: CORONERS: Inquest – driver fatigue

REPRESENTATION:

Assisting the Coroner

Sergeant Hall

This is the Inquest concerning the death of Jane Rose Sturgiss. In relation to my responsibilities under the Coroners Act of 2003 I find that the deceased person is Jane Rose Sturgiss who was born on the 22nd of July 1955 who ordinarily resided at 89 Main Street, Bakers Creek, Queensland, 4740.

I find that Ms Sturgiss died as a result of a motor vehicle crash which only involved her vehicle and no other vehicle and that she died about 10 p.m. on the 21st of May 2007 and she died at a position approximately 50 kilometres north of Taroom on the Leichhardt Highway, that is in Queensland. What caused her to die are multiple injuries she sustained as the driver of a motor vehicle in the crash.

An Inquest has been held today to address various concerns raised by the family. I am satisfied from what I've heard that although there is a drop on the roadway that this is not likely to have been a significant contributing cause to the crash. From the investigations conducted by Sergeant Hall I reach the conclusion that on the balance of probabilities, Ms Sturgiss went to sleep while she was driving, woke up, applied correctional activity to try and bring her car back onto the road, the car crossed the roadway and left the roadway, drove through vegetation and collided with a tree.

I'm not satisfied that there's any evidence to indicate that the truck driver who found Ms Sturgiss was involved in this crash other than to find the results of the crash. I'm not satisfied that his lights startled Ms Sturgiss. The evidence really is not consistent with other lights startling Ms Sturgiss because if a light had startled her, more likely she would have driven off the left-hand side of the road rather than the right-hand side of the road.

A Coroner may, whenever appropriate, comment on anything connected with a death investigation at Inquest that relates to public health or safety and ways to prevent death from happening in similar circumstances. In this case Ms Sturgiss was a courier driver. She had worked all day. She left Mackay at about 4.55pm, went to her home at Bakers Creek and left Bakers Creek at 5.20pm and she was intending to drive almost 1,000 kilometres to Millmerran.

It is quite clear from this Inquest that fatigue was a significant factor. I'm satisfied she did have a 15 to 20 minute break at Rockhampton but satisfied that commencing such a long journey after a full day's work was a dangerous activity.

I therefore make a recommendation that Queensland Transport promote or continue to promote the risk of fatigue in motor vehicle crashes. In this case the evidence is pretty clear that Ms Sturgiss would have had to be speeding as she travelled 600 kilometres in about 5 hours and 15 minutes with a rest break. So, speed is also possibly a contributing factor so I recommend that Queensland Transport continue to promote the risk of speeding in motor vehicle crashes.

I also recommend that the Office of Workplace Health and Safety promote healthy practices about courier drivers to try to prevent similar deaths in the future by trying to encourage employers not to have unrealistic expectations of employees travelling such long distances after a full days work.

Regardless of how many stops Ms Sturgiss took that day and regardless of her experience as a courier driver I'm satisfied it was a dangerous activity that day to drive or to attempt to drive that long distance after a full day's work particularly bearing in mind that she was loaded down with heavy equipment from a mine and that she was intending to keep driving until she delivered that equipment.

I don't think I need to make any further comments as I believe I have covered all of the matters involved in this Inquest. Thank you for your assistance, Sergeant. Thank you.

C Cornack  
Chinchilla  
10 December 2008