

FORM 38

Rule 60(2)

FINDING INTO DEATH WITHOUT INQUEST

Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008

In the Coroners Court of Victoria at Warrnambool

I, Jonathan Klestadt, Coroner having investigated the death of:

Details of deceased:

Surname: Yeo
First name: Lay
*Address: C/- Singapore High Commission, 17 Forster Cres, Yarralumla
ACT

without holding an inquest:

find that the identity of the deceased was Lay Peng Yeo
and the death occurred on or about 28/1/2010
at Caramut-Glenthompson Rd, Caramut VIC
from Multiple injuries following a motor vehicle incident

***Pursuant to Section 67(2) of the Coroners Act 2008, an inquest into the death was not held and the deceased was not immediately before the person died, a person placed in custody or care; but there is a public interest to be served in making findings regarding the following circumstances:**

The deceased in this matter were a father and daughter who were travelling as part of a family group in south western Victoria in late January 2010. The family are Singaporean nationals who were visiting Australia for a holiday and were being shown around by Mr. Kevin YEO Yik Peng, the son of the deceased Kim Soon YEO and brother of Lay Peng YEO. Also present were the deceased's sister Connie YEO, her daughter Chloe LIM and her husband Lim Kok HWA. Kevin YEO had previously studied at RMIT in Melbourne and had travelled in Victoria some years ago as a student.

The family had arrived in Melbourne on Sunday the 23rd of January and had joined some organised tours to such areas as Mornington and Philip Island. On Tuesday the family had hired a Toyota Tarago van and travelled to the Healesville wildlife sanctuary, and on Wednesday 27th they had travelled via the Great Ocean Road to Warrnambool.

After spending the night in Warrnambool the family intended to visit the Grampians National Park, a scenic range of mountains approximately 150 kilometres to the north, and to that end they departed Warrnambool at approximately 9.30am. It is relevant to note at this point that the itinerary followed by the Yeo family in the days preceding the incident, whilst not inherently dangerous or extreme, involved a significant amount of driving that may have taxed the concentration and stamina of anyone other than a professional driver.

When departing Warrnambool Kevin Yeo was driving, as he had been at all times, the deceased Kim Soon Yeo was seated beside him in the front passenger seat; the deceased Lay Peng Yeo was seated behind her father on the left side of the middle row of seats with her sister Connie Yeo behind the driver. Chloe Lim was seated in the rear row of seats in the vehicle on the right hand side behind her mother, and Lim Hwa was seated beside her.

The vehicle was fitted with a GPS navigator supplied by the hire car company and this was being used to determine the route to be taken. No maps were consulted. It seems likely that the GPS unit was set up to show the shortest possible route between Warrnambool and the Grampians because it appears that the family were directed to proceed via Koroit, Woolsthorpe and Caramut to approach the Glenelg Highway and the Grampians National Park. Whilst this is a perfectly viable route it uses smaller local roads rather than the more usual route via Penshurst and Dunkeld. Indeed in his interview with police after the incident Kevin Yeo stated "...It was such a small country road, I was wondering where the hell I was."

At approximately 10.30am the Tarago was travelling north on the Caramut-Glenhompson Road approximately 10 kilometres north of Caramut when it rolled a number of times. The roadway in the vicinity of the incident is a straight, level, bitumen surface in good repair, approximately 5.5 metres wide, with a gravel shoulder on each side approximately 1.2 metres wide. The area is covered by the default Victorian speed limit of 100 kilometres per hour.

The terrain through which the road runs is basically flat, open grazing land, with isolated stands of trees and roadside shrubbery. There are no road markings on the bitumen surface but guideposts are placed at intervals along the side of the road. There is no evidence to suggest that any other vehicle was on the roadway near or in the general vicinity of the Tarago when it rolled.

The surviving adult passengers in the Tarago suffered injuries of varying degrees of seriousness and have been unable to provide any information about the movements of the vehicle immediately before the incident. The driver of the vehicle suffered a head injury and appears to have suffered from post traumatic amnesia; in answer to a question from police after the incident he replied "I have no idea what happened. One minute I was driving along and the next minute I was wondering why is my Knee opened up an why are we overturned?"

An analysis of the scene of the incident, and particularly of marks left on the roadway, has been undertaken by Senior Constable Glen Urquhart, a fully qualified investigator attached to the Major Collision Investigation Unit of the Victoria Police. In his report to the coroner he identifies certain physical evidence located at the scene and has formed the following view of how the incident occurred.

“It is my opinion that for unknown reasons the vehicle drifted off the bitumen on the western [left] side of the road onto the grass/gravel shoulder. The driver has oversteered to the right followed by an oversteer to the left. The vehicle has tripped and rolled over. At the time the vehicle left the initial tyre yaw mark it was travelling at a speed around 100kph.”

After the driver lost control of the vehicle it rolled several times along the roadway with the front facing approximately West, that is to the left of the roadway. It came to rest approximately 135 metres from where the first marks on the western gravel shoulder were observed. It was facing approximately south on the western grass verge approximately 3 metres from the western edge of the bitumen surface. The vehicle was extensively damaged but with the most significant crushing damage to the left hand side and front of the vehicle. An extensive trail of debris and personal belongings of the occupants of the vehicle were on and about the roadway. Both deceased died almost instantly as a result of multiple traumatic injuries to the head and body. Samples taken from the bodies of both deceased and from the surviving adult passengers demonstrate that neither alcohol nor drugs played any part in this incident.

The driver of the Tarago Mr. Kevin Yeo had been a licensed driver in Singapore for one and a half years. He told police that he had been driving daily to and from work in Singapore and had “clocked up” 25 to 30 thousand kilometres in that time. He said that the speed limit in Singapore was 90 kilometres per hour and that the distances he drove were limited to about 50 kilometres on the highway at that speed at any one time. He denied having been in any previous collisions.

I am satisfied that this incident occurred when Mr. Kevin Yeo lost concentration when driving north on the Caramut-Glenhompson Road and veered to his left off the bitumen surface onto the gravel shoulder. Thereafter he attempted to steer the vehicle back onto the road surface but oversteered to the right, then the left, losing control of the vehicle which rolled over with tragic results. I am satisfied that there were a number of contributing factors which lead to this loss of control.

1. Mr Kevin Yeo was a relatively inexperienced driver.
2. He was driving in conditions that he was not familiar with in terms of the nature of the roadway and its surrounding terrain.
3. He had been driving over subsequent days for longer periods than he was accustomed to.
4. He was driving a vehicle that he was not familiar with.
5. He was driving a type of vehicle that, whilst perfectly safe, required a degree of caution when being driven at speed.
6. He was unsure of his exact position and may have diverted his attention away from the tasks involved in driving to try and utilise the controls of the GPS to find out where he was.

At my request the Coroners Prevention Unit has undertaken an investigation of the involvement of international tourists in road safety incidents in Australia. From the available data the report shows that 9.2% of the deaths of International tourists are attributable to land transport crashes. The research also suggests that failure to wear seatbelts and fatigue are the leading risk factors associated with motor vehicle crashes involving international tourists.

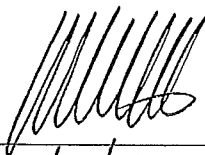
The report also shows that while a number of publications and web-based resources are available to assist tourists in distance planning and road safety generally, none are specifically tailored to international tourists. Further it seems there has been a significant amount of bureaucratic inertia amongst the various government and quasi government bodies that might have been expected to address these issues.

***RECOMMENDATIONS:**

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

1. Tourism Victoria should distribute the publication Travel Safely in Australia airside at Melbourne Airport for the purpose of providing international visitors with safety information. Australia Pacific Airports PTY Limited and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service should facilitate Tourism Victoria's distribution of safety information at this site.
2. Tourism Victoria should develop a comprehensive safety strategy for international visitors to Victoria, involving other relevant State Government agencies and the tourism sector. The strategy should focus on international visitor safety from an "all-hazards" approach, including that of road safety. The strategy should provide for a regular review of the incidence and nature of injuries to international visitors to assist in the development and targeting of further initiatives.
3. Tourism Victoria should monitor the recent proposal in South Australia to provide safety information and visual safety messaging in all rental vehicles and to consider whether a similar initiative in Victoria would be appropriate.
4. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship should consider ways to promote the distribution of the publication Travel Safely in Australia to international visitors prior to their entry into Australia.
5. Tourism Australia and Tourism Victoria should ensure that safety information, such as the publication Travel Safely in Australia should be readily available in prominent links throughout their official tourism websites.

Signature:



Date:

2/9/2011

**Delete if inapplicable*