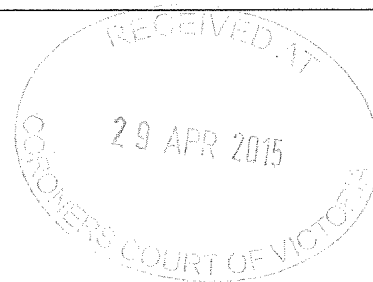


**Submission on the Karen Lee Coroners Report
(Court Ref COR 2012 005122)**



Via mail to:
Attn: Rosemary Carlin
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh St
Southbank
Vic, 3006



April 2012

Re: Response to coroner recommendations in COR 2012 005122, Investigation into the death of Karen Lee

Dear Rosemary,

The (SCUBA Divers Federation of Victoria (SDFV) is the volunteer peak-body affiliation of non-commercial dive clubs and associations in Victoria, and have been representing the interests of recreational scuba divers for the past 50 years.

We thank the Coroners Court of Victoria for providing a copy of the above-mentioned Report and for the opportunity to comment.

We note that the recommendations at hand are in response to an investigation into a drowning death which occurred on a commercial recreational dive operation. A significant amount of recreational SCUBA diving occurs outside the commercial dive charter sector, and our members clubs have impressive safety records that span many decades. In our sector, life-long safe diving (after certification) is achieved by transferring knowledge and experience through club community processes and following Codes of Practice. As a peak-body, we are therefore alert to safety proposals that unfairly affect or penalise non-commercial private and club-based SCUBA diving.

We have read and discussed the Report, but we confine our response to the recommendations only:-

1. That consideration be given by Standards Australia and relevant stakeholders to amending the Australian Standards so as to require periodic assessment of qualified SCUBA divers in key techniques including, but not limited to, buoyancy control.

We do not support the recommendation:

- We do not believe that periodic assessment could have been relied on to improve safety or prevent the drowning death in the case described in the report.
- A very high proportion (most) of the recreational scuba dives undertaken in Victoria are completed without an injurious incident. This established that current training as required by Australian Standards is adequate, and as such, there is no identified basis for proposing mandated periodic re-assessment of qualified recreational SCUBA divers.
- Periodic assessment would be impractical to implement and enforce in the current regulatory regime.



- We strongly advise that periodic re-testing of basic skills is not an appropriate means to determine the suitability of a certified diver for a given dive. The current log-book system remains the most appropriate means by which levels of experience and competence can be gauged. In the club and dive-community context, scuba divers successfully hone their core diving skills by actually diving in an inclusive and cooperative environment.
- The proposed re-assessment will attract a new testing fee. Recreational SCUBA diving already has a high entry cost, a relatively high participation cost level, and a relatively low participant retention rate. In our view, divers will actively seek to avoid the additional cost of mandatory periodic skills re-assessment, or alternatively, leave the sport because of the unnecessary cost.

2. *That consideration be given by Standards Australia and relevant stakeholders to amending the Australian Standards so as to require Dive Charter operators to ensure divers carry an SMB and are instructed to use it appropriately.*

We note that this recommendation pertains to Dive Charter operators. We are not clear if the term ‘Dive Charter’ operators pertains only to commercial recreational dive operators, or is meant to be interpreted as generic and to capture all recreational diving conducted from a boat.

In general, we do not support the mandating of specific pieces of dive equipment technologies on the basis that:

- (i) Technology factors may change,
- (ii) It may be impractical to enforce the use of the piece of equipment
- (iii) It may be inappropriate to use the equipment in some circumstances.

In the case of the SMB, we would prefer it to be integrated into the basic equipment training (*i.e.* as any other part of minimum essential SCUBA equipment is), and we recommend the use of codes of practice to recommend their use as circumstances dictate.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment. Please do not hesitate to contact us via email at sdfv@sdfv.org.au if we can help with further information in relation to the non-commercial recreational diving sector.

Regards,

Stephen Fordyce,

Chairperson, and
Vice-President – Statutory
SCUBA Divers Federation of Victoria, *Inc.*