



**STATE CORONER'S COURT
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

Inquest:	Inquest into the death's of Geoffrey Francis Hunt Kim Jeannine Hunt Fletcher Austin Hunt Mia Isobel Hunt Phoebe Amelia Hunt
Hearing dates:	6-9 October 2015
Date of findings:	9 October 2015
Place of findings:	NSW State Coroners Court, sitting at Wagga Wagga
Findings of:	Magistrate Michael Barnes, NSW State Coroner
Catchwords:	CORONIAL LAW – manner and cause of death; filicide; impacts of mental illness and acquired brain injury; family
File number:	2014/267678,2014/266683,2014/266621, 2014/266598,2014/266634
Representation:	Ms Peggy Dwyer, Counsel Assisting the Coroner instructed by Ms Peita Ava-Jones Ms Elizabeth McLaughlin instructed by Ms Janine Wilson for Lifestyle Solutions Mr Andrew Stone SC instructed by Mr Ian Donald for Jenny Geppert and the Blake Family
Non publication order:	<i>Pursuant to s75(5) I order that all of these findings may be published</i>

<p>Findings:</p>	<p>The identity of the deceased</p> <p>The persons who died were Geoffrey Francis Hunt; Kim Jeannine Hunt, Fletcher Austin Hunt; Mia Isobel Hunt; and Phoebe Amelia Hunt.</p> <p>Date of death</p> <p>All of those persons died on 8 or 9 September 2014.</p> <p>Place of death</p> <p>They died at Watch Hill farm near Lockhart, New South Wales.</p> <p>Cause of death</p> <p>Each of the deceased died from a single gunshot wound to the head.</p> <p>Manner of death</p> <p>Geoffrey Hunt deliberately shot his wife, Kim, and their three children Fletcher, Mia and Phoebe with the intention of killing them. He then deliberately shot himself with the intention of ending his own life.</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p>	<p>None</p>

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The Coroners Act in s81 (1) requires that when an inquest is held, the coroner must record in writing his or her findings as to various aspects of the death. These are the findings of an inquest into the deaths of Geoffrey Francis Hunt, Kim Jeannine Hunt, Fletcher Austin Hunt, Mia Isobel Hunt and Phoebe Amelia Hunt.

Introduction

At about 7.30pm on 8 September 2014, the Disability Support Worker who assisted Kim Hunt with general household chores and personal care was preparing to leave the Hunt family farmhouse at the end of her shift. All of the family members were present in the house going about normal activities for that time of day. As she was leaving Geoff Hunt thanked her and said “See you tomorrow.”

The support worker returned the next day at about 2.45pm. When she walked into the yard surrounding the farmhouse she found Kim lying on the ground with a man’s jacket over her head. On removing the jacket the support worker saw that Kim had suffered a severe head injury. She ran inside to call an ambulance. As she was talking to the 000 operator, she walked back outside to where Kim was lying and on this occasion she saw a spent gun cartridge case on the ground near Kim and she also saw that Kim’s head injuries were unsurvivable. She realised Kim was dead.

When police arrived, they found the bodies of the three Hunt children each in different rooms of the house. They too had suffered gunshot wounds to the head.

The next day, Geoff Hunt’s body was found in a stock dam approximately 450 hundred metres from the farmhouse. He also exhibited what appeared to be a gunshot wound to the head. A shot gun was found in the dam near him.

As a result of a detailed investigation, detectives from the Homicide Squad concluded that no third party was involved in the deaths. As a result of examining the brief of evidence I came to the same view. However, as it was obvious a multiple homicide had occurred, an inquest was mandatory. It focussed on determining who had caused the deaths and whether there were any missed opportunities to intervene and prevent them.

The evidence

Social history

Geoff Hunt

Geoff was born in March 1970 to John and Lynette Hunt. He was the second of four sons – Doug, Allen and Ian are the others. He grew up on the family farm, completed a degree in Agricultural Science and returned to work in farming with his brothers.¹

In 1996 Geoff met Kim Blake at the Lockhart Picnic Races and they married in October 2001.² They had three children, Fletcher born in 2004, Mia born in 2006 and Phoebe born in 2008.

¹ John Hunt, tab 70.

² Jenny Geppert, tab 76; paras 8 & 10.

Geoff was a top tennis player, footballer and golfer.³

Overwhelmingly the witness statements describe Geoff as personable, a devoted husband and father, easy going, outgoing and positive.⁴ According to some, he was a perfectionist⁵, and a decent and honest man.⁶ His friend Robert Richards said he was a bit like a closed book and put a positive spin on everything.⁷ In contrast, Ian describes his brother as a “*very dominant and calculated person. It was either Geoff’s way or no other way...Geoff was extremely controlling, to the point there was no reasoning with him about anything.*”⁸

These last quoted comments may reflect the sad fact that there was a breakdown in the relationships between the brothers. Doug left the family trust in 2004 and, in hindsight, Allen acknowledges this may have created problems between Doug and Geoff.⁹ In 2012, Ian broke away from Geoff and Allen to run his farm as a separate business.¹⁰ During this split, Geoff became concerned about what he considered to be financial irregularities. This caused a bitter rift between Geoff and Ian.¹¹

At the time of the deaths, Geoff Hunt and his immediate family were living at Watch Hill - a 3000 acre property about 20kms from Lockhart, one of a number of properties jointly owned by the families of Geoff and Allen Hunt.

Farming is weather and market dependent and accordingly it can be very stressful. However the Hunt family was very well established in agri-business; they held large productive parcels of land; and Geoff and his brother had relevant tertiary qualifications and a work ethic that equipped them to succeed in primary industry. There is no basis to suspect financial pressures played any part in these deaths.

Kim Hunt

Kim was born in December 1972 to Kerry and Heather Blake. In 1975 her younger sister Jenny was born. Kim grew up on the family farm in Tumbarumba about 160kms east of Lockhart.¹²

Kim studied at Wollongong University and became a registered nurse. She worked at a few different hospitals before taking up a position in the Intensive Care Unit at Wagga Wagga Hospital.¹³ From time to time she would also work at Lockhart Hospital.¹⁴

³ John Hunt, tab 70; para 20.

⁴ See, for example, statements of Allen Hunt (tab 72) and Renae Hunt (tab 73).

⁵ Doug Hunt, tab 74; para 7. See also John Hunt, tab 70; para 20.

⁶ Jenny Blake, tab 76; para 27.

⁷ Robert Richards, tab 84; para 5.

⁸ Ian Hunt, tab 75; para 12.

⁹ Allen Hunt, tab 72,; paras 18 & 19.

¹⁰ Doug Hunt, tab 74; para 10.

¹¹ Jenny Geppert, tab 76; para 23.

¹² Jenny Blake, tab 76.

¹³ Jenny Blake, tab 76; para 6. See also Renae Hunt, tab 74; para 5.

¹⁴ Jenny Blake, tab 76; para 12.

Kim's personality at this time is described by her family and friends as highly strung¹⁵, extremely determined, knowledgeable and driven.¹⁶ She set high standards for herself and those around her. However, she was also very generous and warm and very community minded. She loved helping people.

Kim loved cooking, gardening, water skiing and horse riding.¹⁷

She suffered a traumatic brain injury in a car accident in 2012 that reportedly changed her personality. According to her sister, she could be unpleasant to people (particularly Geoff), would fixate on issues that troubled her and lost her ability to filter information.¹⁸ She was frustrated by her physical limitations, including the impaired functioning of her right hand.

Prior to the accident Kim had seemingly boundless energy and would work double and triple shifts at work.¹⁹ Feeling fatigued post-accident was a source of frustration for her. Kim would complain of feeling unsupported by Geoff.²⁰

Before her accident, Kim had been very excited by the prospect of building her dream home on the farm²¹ and that enthusiasm continued after she was discharged from hospital care.²² To help fund the project she sold her home in Wagga and was the driving force for the whole project.²³

Kim was troubled by the split in the Hunt family after Ian's departure from the family business in 2012.²⁴ She referred to it on occasion in counselling²⁵ and ruminated about it to Lorraine Bourke in the hours before her death.²⁶ The inquest has not sought to investigate whether her concerns about this had any validity – that is irrelevant to its purpose, and indeed Ian Hunt denies any allegation of impropriety. However, it is undeniable that for Kim, after her brain injury, her belief that there had been financial impropriety by Ian became an obsession on which she became fixed and would hound Geoff endlessly.

¹⁵ Noreen Richards, tab 85; para 7.

¹⁶ Jenny Blake, tab 76; para 26

¹⁷ Jenny Blake, tab 76; para 26.

¹⁸ Jenny Blake, tab 76; para 66.

¹⁹ Jenny Blake, tab 76; para 26.

²⁰ For example Paula Olymbios email dated 17/04/14, tab 59; page 1004.

²¹ Jenny Blake, tab 76; para 22.

²² See Dr Jeffery's notes, tab 97 pages 11 – 12 in which he refers to Kim purchasing a kitchen in 2013; and also statement of Craig Fletcher, tab 83; para 16 in which he refers to the Hunt's submitting a development application in 2014. Also Lorraine Bourke; tab 65; para 37.

²³ See generally Renae Hunt, tab 73; para 14; Jenny Blake, tab 76 paras 21 & 22.

²⁴ Jenny Blake, tab 76; para 23.

²⁵ For example see Clive Murphy counselling notes of 6/06/13, tab 62.

²⁶ Lorraine Bourke, tab 65; para 17.

Kim's mood seemed to broadly improve once she returned to work in April 2014 as a nurse educator for 8 hours per week.²⁷ However, as detailed below, she continued to suffer from wild mood swings.

Fletcher

Fletcher was born in 2004. He was a boisterous and loud child²⁸ with lots of energy²⁹.

He could be challenging at times, probably due to the behavioural condition ADHD. Kim lost some patience for Fletcher after her accident and described their relationship to psychologist Kylie Irlam as a “disaster combination”.³⁰ Kim and Fletcher’s personalities were a lot alike.³¹

Fletcher liked Australian rules football and riding his motorbike. He was 10 when he died.

Mia

Mia was born in 2006. She was the quietest of the three siblings.³² She suffered some anxiety after Kim’s lengthy hospitalisation but responded well to treatment by psychologist Kylie Irlam.³³

She enjoyed reading and her own company.³⁴ Mia often did Fletcher’s homework.³⁵ She was 8 when she died.

Phoebe

Phoebe was the youngest born in 2008. Like Fletcher, she was boisterous and would talk loudly.³⁶ Phoebe started her first year at school in 2014.³⁷ She was 6 when she died.

The family dynamic

Geoff and Kim Hunt, then Kim Blake met at the Lockhart Picnic races in October 1996 and started dating a few months later. They were married on 20 October 2001. Between 2004 and 2008, the couple’s three children were born. In 2012 Kim had a very serious car crash that had a major impact on all family members and indeed is likely to have been pivotal in their deaths.

²⁷ See, for example, the reports of Dr Jungfer at tab 59; see also statement of Jane Blake, tab 81; para 25.

²⁸ Heather Blake, tab 80; para 27.

²⁹ Jenny Blake, tab 76; para 68.

³⁰ Kylie Irlam tab 64A 1st session with Fletcher

³¹ Jenny Blake, tab 76; para 68.

³² Heather Blake, tab 80; para 27.

³³ Kylie Irlam statement dated 1/10/14, tab 64C; page 1165.

³⁴ Kylie Irlam notes, tab 64B; page 1134.

³⁵ Heather Blake, tab 80; para 27.

³⁶ Heather Blake, tab 80; para 27.

³⁷ Lorraine Bourke, tab 65; para 11.

Pre-crash

While some family members like to remember the marriage as happy and stable before it was sadly blighted by the crash, it seems this might not be an accurate depiction.

In 2009, a family member noted that the marriage between Geoff and Kim was becoming strained.³⁸ Geoff appeared to be dispirited and he remarked that he did not know if he and Kim would make it to their 10th anniversary.

Renae Hunt is married to Geoff's brother Allen. She was very close to both Kim and Geoff. Unlike some others who knew the couple, Renae reports unhappiness in the marriage well before Kim's accident. According to her, for a number of years Kim was hyper-critical of Geoff and that this caused him deep distress. After Kim suffered the brain injury she was less able to conceal her contempt for her husband and frequently belittled and harshly criticised him in front of others.

In December 2011, Kim left home for a night after an argument and Geoff called family friend Noreen Richards because he did not know where she was. Noreen was able to contact Kim, who reassured her that she was fine and had just needed to cool off. That year the couple confided in the Richards family, who were their close friends and neighbours, in relation to marital stressors caused by disagreements about how to raise the children.

A psychiatrist who treated Kim after the crash offered the opinion that before her acquired brain injury she was probably already suffering from bi-polar disorder.

There may be a history of depression in the Hunt family: Allen Hunt refers to feeling depressed in the past³⁹ and it appears Kim told psychologist Robyn Slade that Allen was prescribed medication resulting in an increase to his mood.⁴⁰ Conversely, Lynette Hunt denies a history of depression.⁴¹ On the material available, Geoff does not appear to ever have been treated for mental health issues.

However, on a number of occasions Geoff made comments that could be indicative of suicidal ideation. In mid-2009, when discussing marital difficulties, with his sister in law Renae, Geoff apparently said that he didn't care if he lived anymore. A couple of weeks before his death Renae was talking in oblique terms about suicide/feeling suicidal to avoid the children in the back of the car overhearing them when Geoff said: *"Yes I know all about that"*. In mid-2010 he said to his brother Ian: *"If I die, I hope Fletcher dies with me because I would hate for him to be trying to run the farm with Kim telling him what to do."*

According to some of her friends, Kim had always been highly strung and having three young children and working full-time understandably caused her considerable stress.

³⁸ Renae Hunt, tab 73 at para 7.

³⁹ Allen Hunt, tab 72; para 67.

⁴⁰ Robyn Slade notes dated 19/01/10, tab 63; page 988.

⁴¹ Lynette Hunt, tab 71; para 32.

In January 2010, she saw psychologist Robyn Slade for symptoms of anxiety and depression.⁴² She had no diagnosed mental health history prior to this.⁴³ Ms Slade suggested Kim needed an antidepressant which her general practitioner Dr Jeffery prescribed.⁴⁴

Kim met with psychologist Ms Slade on three occasions in 2010.⁴⁵ At her first consultation she referred to Fletcher causing her “grief”, that he is cruel to animals and aggressive.⁴⁶ She also spoke about the farm being in drought and some disgruntlement with adult family members including her sister, parents and father-in-law.⁴⁷ Kim was commenced on a program of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, relaxation strategies and time management techniques.⁴⁸ It appears Kim’s depression and anxiety was managed well on antidepressants⁴⁹ and she did not receive any further psychological counselling.⁵⁰

Post- crash

Kim was involved in a motor vehicle accident on 17 July 2012 in which she sustained major injuries. She was initially not expected to survive. Kim suffered a significant brain injury and cervical fractures.⁵¹ She was left with permanent physical disabilities as a result of the accident including general weakness of her entire right side⁵² and decreased strength and functionality of her right hand.⁵³ Kim fatigued easily⁵⁴ and required daily (or near to daily) sleeps to avoid her mood and frustration levels escalating.⁵⁵ She struggled adjusting to her injuries and changed circumstances.⁵⁶

On 22 February 2013, Kim returned home under the care of the South West Brain Injury Rehabilitation Service Outreach Team. She needed daily assistance to cope with activities at home, including the care of the children. A government agency, the Lifetime Care and Support Authority funded a private provider, Lifestyle Solutions, to

⁴² Robyn Slade statement, tab 63; pages 2 – 3.

⁴³ Mental Health Assessment by Dr Jeffery, tab 63; page 992.

⁴⁴ Dr Jeffery notes, tab 97; page 18.

⁴⁵ Robyn Slade statement, tab 63; pages 2 – 3.

⁴⁶ Robyn Slade notes, tab 63; page 988.

⁴⁷ Robyn Slade notes, tab 63; page 988 – 989.

⁴⁸ Robyn Slade statement, tab 63; page 3.

⁴⁹ Discharge Summary - Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit, Liverpool Hospital dated 7/11/12, tab 97; page 64.

⁵⁰ No evidence of psychological counselling from 24/03/10 to after the car accident in the brief material.

⁵¹ Statement of Dr Jeffery, tab 61; page 5.

⁵² South West Brain Injury Rehabilitation Service progress report dated 29/02/13, tab 97; page 105; see also statement of Lorraine Bourke, tab 65; para 6.

⁵³ Report from Amy Geach, Riverina Hand Therapy, dated 14/03/13, tab 97; page 116; see also statement of Jenny Geppert, tab 76; para 70.

⁵⁴ Jenny Geppert, tab 76; para 40.

⁵⁵ Lifetime Care & Support, Care Needs Report dated 26/8/13, tab 100; page 6.

⁵⁶ See, for example, statement of Lorraine Bourke, tab 65; para 7; and report of Dr Louis Baggio dated 15/05/13, tab 97; page 126.

send daily disability support workers to assist with tasks like preparing the children for school, cleaning and cooking meals. Initially this was for 12 hours per day seven days per week but when the youngest child started school in 2014 the weekday hours were cut back to about 3.00pm to 8.00pm.

After her accident, Kim found Fletcher's behaviours increasingly challenging – both because the behaviours escalated and her injuries impacted on her ability to manage them.⁵⁷ In August 2013, paediatrician Dr Kit Chee diagnosed him with combined type ADHD.⁵⁸ Fletcher was commenced on Ritalin.⁵⁹

Between 20 November 2013 and 28 April 2014, Fletcher had seven sessions with child psychologist Kylie Irlam due to his challenging behaviour and struggling with the changes in his family following Kim's accident. Kylie attempted Cognitive Behavioural Therapy with him but it was largely unsuccessful.⁶⁰

Kim commenced seeing a psychologist after her accident to assist with acceptance and adjustment.⁶¹ She continued using the antidepressant Cipramil with an increase in dosage from 20mg to 40mg daily around May 2013.⁶²

At Geoff's insistence⁶³, the couple commenced therapy with counsellor Clive Murphy. Their first session was a joint session in June 2013.⁶⁴ Kim went on to see Clive by herself on 6 June 2013.⁶⁵ At her individual session, Kim said on numerous occasions that she wished she had died in the car accident and that she would take her own life if she could. Reported stressors in Kim's life at that time were financial⁶⁶, her belief that Geoff's brother had defrauded the family business, and not being able to do the things she previously enjoyed such as water skiing.⁶⁷ She said she had nothing to live for. She did not attend on Mr Murphy again.

On 14 June 2013, a telephone counsellor from the Access Welfare Line called Kim as a result of a request from her case manager at Lifetime Care and Support Authority. During the conversation Kim acknowledged that she had had thoughts of suicide in the previous weeks and that there were guns in the house. In accordance with their protocols the counsellor relayed this to local police who then visited the farm at about 9.30 that night. When police attended, Kim assured them she was at no risk of self-harm. As a matter of precaution the officers wisely arranged for

⁵⁷ Dr Jeffery statement, tab 61; page 969.

⁵⁸ Dr Jeffery statement, tab 61; page 969.

⁵⁹ Kylie Irlam notes, tab 64A; page 1098.

⁶⁰ Kylie Irlam statement, tab 64C; page 1166.

⁶¹ Report of Dr Louis Baggio dated 15/05/13, tab 97; page 126.

⁶² Report of Dr Louis Baggio dated 15/05/13, tab 97; page 126.

⁶³ Clive Murphy notes, tab 62, session dated 6/06/13. See also Renae Hunt's statement at tab 73; para 24, who suggests Geoff would benefit from counselling with Mr Murphy.

⁶⁴ Clive Murphy notes, tab 62, session dated 4/06/13.

⁶⁵ Clive Murphy notes, tab 62, session dated 6/06/13.

⁶⁶ Specifically having to pay for groceries herself and all Geoff's money going back into the farm.

⁶⁷ Clive Murphy notes, tab 62, session dated 6/06/13.

ambulance officers to attend and assess Ms Hunt. The paramedics concluded she was not in need of treatment.

The officers then inquired as to the firearms and Geoff Hunt showed them that he had two long arm rifles secured in a gun safe. There was also an ammunition locker in the safe. He advised his wife did not have access to the key to the safe as he kept it in a high cupboard and her residual injuries prevented her accessing it. Nevertheless the officers took possession of the firearms – a .22 calibre rifle and a W. Cashmore double barrel 12 gauge shotgun with a serial number 18022.

On 18 June 2013 Kim declined services offered by a counsellor from the Wagga Wagga Community Health Services who had called as a result of the Access Welfare Line notifying them of the incident a few days earlier. Kim assured the counsellor she had extensive current supports in place, including psychologist Katrina Andrews.⁶⁸

A few weeks later, one of the officers telephoned Geoff Hunt and confirmed that his wife was not at risk of self-harming. On 31 August 2013 the two firearms were returned to Mr Hunt.

Family and friends observed that Kim's personality was altered due to her brain injury and she lost her filter, could be aggressive and abusive and would often publicly criticise Geoff.⁶⁹ Things appear to have reached a crisis point later in June 2013 when, on a drive to Sydney, she *"became suddenly and explosively upset with Geoff and yelled at him persistently for 45 minutes."*⁷⁰ Kim was urgently referred to Sydney based psychiatrist Dr Stephen Rosenman whom she met with on 21 June 2013.⁷¹ Dr Rosenman noted in his report that Kim had increasingly had difficulties with angry outbursts and disinhibition, and loss of empathy and comprehension of the impact of her anger.⁷²

Based on her presentation, Dr Rosenman did not believe Kim was depressed anymore and recommended she be weaned off her antidepressant.⁷³ As to her ongoing psychiatric care, he emphasised the need for someone with experience in brain injuries.⁷⁴

Kim was very close to her cousin Jane all of their lives. They had lived on adjoining properties when they were children and Jane followed Kim into nursing. She lived in Kim's house when both were nursing in Wagga Wagga. She described Kim in mid-2013 as repeatedly reverting to an unconstructive analyses of old issues. *"These same issues consumed her and she could not find peace in her life. At times Kim*

⁶⁸ Wagga Wagga Community Mental Health notes, tab 98; page 5

⁶⁹ See, for example, statement of Jenny Geppert at tab 76; para 41.

⁷⁰ Dr Jeffery notes, tab 97; page 11.

⁷¹ Report of Dr Rosenman dated 21/06/13, tab 58; page 1.

⁷² Report of Dr Rosenman dated 21/06/13, tab 58; page 1.

⁷³ Report of Dr Rosenman dated 21/06/13, tab 58; page 2.

⁷⁴ Dr Jeffery notes, tab 97; page 11.

would work herself up into a frenzy more often than not directed at Geoff. Kim was often out of control and depressed although with occasional pockets of joy.”⁷⁵

Kim was referred to a neuro-psychiatrist, Dr Patricia Jungfer. Her referring GP advised that “Kim is struggling with irritability, disinhibition, fixation on particular thoughts, episodes of rage and decreased empathy/insight into other people’s feeling.”

Her first appointment with Dr Jungfer was on 18 July 2013. Kim identified to Dr Jungfer that she has difficulties with frustration, problems with her physical limitations and feels that her personality has changed. Dr Jungfer noted that Kim’s depression has re-emerged and suggested she re-commence using antidepressants.⁷⁶ She also recommended that Kim’s psychologist be changed to someone who has more experience treating acquired brain injuries.⁷⁷ Kim was referred to psychologist Paula Olymbios for assessment and treatment.⁷⁸

On 16 August 2013, Kim was seen by Ms Olymbios who diagnosed adjustment disorder with depressed mood as a direct consequence of the car accident.⁷⁹ Kim’s engagement with Ms Olymbios was irregular at first⁸⁰, but then settled into a pattern of monthly reviews.^{81 82}

Geoff Hunt attended on the counsellor Mr Murphy in September 2013. He told him he had a lack of motivation, was avoiding people and was not enjoying being with his children although he rated them as the persons most important to him. Geoff told the counsellor that his worst fear was “*Being on my own.*”

By email dated 17 April 2014, Ms Olymbios reported that Kim is “*progressing well*” but was feeling very unsupported by Geoff.⁸³

Kim also saw Dr Jungfer regularly either in person or via Skype on ten occasions between 2013 and 2014. The reintroduction of an antidepressant was noted to be beneficial but she reported ongoing problems coping with Fletcher.⁸⁴ Conversely, at her appointment with Dr Jungfer on 4 June 2014, she reported that Fletcher was better.⁸⁵

Despite Dr Jungfer’s optimistic report, in the week beginning 29 June 2014, things did not appear good for the couple. They spent the week with Kim’s cousin Jane

⁷⁵ Jane Blake tab 81 para 21

⁷⁶ Report of Dr Jungfer dated 22 July 2013, tab 59; pages 1054 – 1055.

⁷⁷ Email to case manager Donna King dated 22 July 2013, tab 59; page 1053.

⁷⁸ Email from Dr Jungfer to case manager Donna King dated 22 July 2013, tab 59; page 1050.

⁷⁹ Report of Paula Olymbios, tab 59, pages 1034 – 1038.

⁸⁰ Report of Dr Jungfer dated 9/09/13, tab 57; page 1028.

⁸¹ Notes of Dr Jungfer dated 3/09/14, tab 57; page 997.

⁸² Paula Olymbios’ file not produced to the CSO.

⁸³ Email of Paula Olymbios dated 17/04/14, tab 57; page 1004.

⁸⁴ Dr Jungfer report dated 10/10/13, tab 59; page 1023.

⁸⁵ Dr Junger notes, tab 59; page 1000.

Blake. Kim confided, amongst other things, that she had no love for Geoff and was not attracted to him. Geoff appeared to have a low mood and Jane encouraged him to return to the counsellor. Two weeks later, Jane Blake spoke with the couple again – Kim sounded more positive and Geoff mentioned that Kim had recently had an episode that lasted about 2 weeks.

Kim's last appointment with Dr Jungfer was on 3 September 2014. Dr Jungfer reported that Kim was functioning very well and her mood was stable.⁸⁶ Her notes indicate that Kim enjoys going to work (she returned in April 2014), her home life was great and they were socialising more as a family.⁸⁷ She was discharged from active follow-up but maintained on mood stabilising medication and anti-depressants and was to continue to see her psychologist.⁸⁸

In addition to Kim's brain injury she continued to suffer from physical impairments. She had regular falls because of balance problems and her right upper limb was severely disabled. On 30 October 2013, Kim underwent surgery to her right hand.⁸⁹ As at September 2014, Kim was wearing a forearm based thermoplastic splint at night. The splint was aimed at improving Kim's finger positioning. When wearing the splint, her hand function was significantly limited. On 2 September 2014, a physiotherapist she had been consulting since the operation measured her right hand grip strength as 1kg compared to 21 kgs in the other hand and her right hand pinch strength as 0kg compared to 2 kgs in her left hand. Kim scored herself 49 on an assessment of her hand/arm/shoulder disability scale where 0 is normal and 100 is completely disabled.⁹⁰

Jenny Geppert is Kim Hunt's younger sister and only sibling. They have always been very close. In a detailed statement that candidly acknowledges the unattractive and unpleasant behaviours of her sister as a result of Kim's acquired brain injury, Jenny denied any knowledge of any domestic violence occurring in the Hunt's marriage. She said; "*Kim had never mentioned to me anything about Geoff being violent whether it be physical, mental or psychological.*"

Ms Geppert was also close to her brother in law Geoff Hunt. She said that he had never indicated to her that he would ever take his own life and she formed the impression that he felt it was essential that he needed to be around to care for his wife and children.

Based on all of the accounts received in evidence it seems that Geoff made a significant contribution to running the house and caring for the children even before the car crash and even though he was often very busy on the farm. After the accident, Kim had significant physical and neurological impairments that even with the assistance of a disability support worker restricted her ability to care for her children and pursue her career.

⁸⁶ Dr Jungfer report dated 8/09/14, tab 59; page 996.

⁸⁷ Dr Jungfer notes dated 3/09/14, tab 59; page 997.

⁸⁸ Dr Jungfer report dated 8/09/14, tab 59; page 996.

⁸⁹ Dr Michael Tonkin report dated 30/10/13, tab 97; page 161.

⁹⁰ Ex 2 Statement of Susan Dunn paras 8 -10.

She was persistently, stridently and vociferously critical of Geoffrey. While Geoff on most occasions seemed to be able to rise above the criticism and let it wash off, there is evidence that over time, this carping disparagement caused deep distress. Witnesses report that when Kim would abuse him Geoff would usually not respond but would remove himself from her immediate presence. He had on occasions made off-hand comments suggestive of his doubting the durability of the relationship but there is no evidence that he took active steps to explore this possibility.

Events immediately preceding the death

On Sunday 7 September, Fletcher played in an under 14s football game. His father acted as a goal judge. There was some controversy in the game because the scores were close and Geoff awarded a minor score to the opposition team - a behind - when some of that team's supporters believed it was a major score - a goal. After the game one of the opposition supporters abused Geoff about the decision and had to be shepherded away.

After the football, Kim and Geoff and their children and Geoff's brother Allen, his wife and their children and another couple went to lunch at a local vineyard. After lunch the three couples and their children went to a park nearby. They all left and headed to the respective homes at about 5:00pm. Allen said there were no issues of concern during the day and that both Kim and Geoff seemed to be their usual selves. Kim made a few terse comments, mostly aimed at her husband, but everyone including Geoff seemed to accept that was her way since the car crash.

The next day, Monday 8 September, the children went to school, their mother went to her part-time job at the Wagga Wagga Hospital and Geoff Hunt was engaged for most of the day farrowing at one of the properties the brothers farmed, about 10 kms from the Watch Hill homestead.

During the day, Renae Hunt spoke with Geoff and thought he sounded "exceptionally happy"⁹¹ although they spoke of some difficult issues. Geoff confided that he worried about Fletcher's future but he seemed relieved when Renae gave him examples of farmers with ADHD who have done well in life.

Around midday, a friend by the name of Craig Fletcher (T 83 at [13]) contacted Geoff to make sure he was okay after the incident at AFL on the weekend.⁹² They spoke for around 24 minutes. Geoff was shocked and upset by the incident, but he said nothing that made Mr Fletcher concerned.

Phone records confirm that at 4.13pm, Geoff called the mobile of Luke Trevaskis to check that he was still available to play tennis two days later, on Wednesday 10 September. It was a short conversation in which Geoff told Mr Trevaskis that he would prepare a tennis roster and send it out in the next week or two.

The disability support worker, Lorraine Bourke, arrived at Watch Hill between 2.30 and 3.00pm. Kim was tidying up and using a ride on mower in the garden. Ms Bourke went into the house and attended to housework.

⁹¹ Renae Hunt tab 73 at para 43, 44

⁹² Craig Fletcher tab 83 at para13

At around 3.45, Kim drove to the front gate and collected the children from the school bus.

The children had some afternoon tea and Kim helped Fletcher with his homework. At some stage he mentioned that some of the children at school had teased him about the umpiring issue from the football game the day before and called an expletive which rhymed with his last name. Some of the other children also called his father a cheat.

At about 5.00pm, Geoff came home. After wrapping some father's day presents for their grandfather, the children went with Geoff into Lockhart where his parents lived.

According to his father; *"Geoffrey appeared no different than any other time. He was talking to us fine and appeared happy."* His mother however considers he was less happy than usual. She said to her husband after her son and grandchildren had left *"Geoffrey had no smiles today."* She said his father replied; *"No, he hasn't smiled for a week."*⁹³ Geoff mentioned the disputed goal at the football the day before but his mother said it didn't seem to be of any concern to him. They left at about 6.00pm.

While Geoff and the children were in Lockhart, Kim and Ms Bourke went to a neighbours' property that Kim was looking after while the owners were away. They watered the garden and picked some fruit before returning to Watch Hill.

When the two women got back to the farm house the children were eating dinner that Geoff had prepared. Kim disapproved of the meal and expressed her views forcefully to Geoff. Ms Bourke described Kim as being *"cranky"*. She followed Kim into the back yard and attempted to calm her down. That was unsuccessful and *"Kim went on a bit of a rant about her usual things: that Geoff was lazy; that Ian and Sally (Geoff's brother and his wife) had stolen money from the family trust..."* etc.

When Ms Hunt and Ms Bourke returned into the house the children were having or had had their baths and were in pyjamas. Mr Hunt was making their school lunches for the following day.

Ms Bourke considered that Mr Hunt seemed quieter than usual and she asked Ms Hunt whether he was depressed. His wife responded in the negative and told Ms Bourke that she was angry with him because he'd played golf on Saturday and left her to care for the children.

By this stage the children were watching a favourite television show that commenced at 7.00pm and Mr Hunt was lying on the sofa in the same room. Ms Bourke and Ms Hunt sat at the dining table that was also in that room. Kim remained hostile to her husband and complained to Ms Bourke about him being lazy and doing nothing.

In her oral evidence Ms Bourke said that there was a lot of tension in the house that night and that *"you could cut the air with a knife."* It was submitted by Senior Counsel for the Geppert family that this was significantly different from the contents of her

⁹³ Lynette Hunt tab 71 para 27

written statement and should not be relied upon. Ms Bourke was challenged about the alleged inconsistency and was adamant her description was apposite. I found her to a conscientious witness who did her best to be truthful. I accept her oral evidence and find it is not inconsistent with her written statement.

Ms Bourke did a few more chores and then said goodbye to the children and Mr and Ms Hunt. As she was leaving Geoff said to her “*Goodbye Lainie, thanks, see you tomorrow.*” When she left Mr Hunt was wearing green work pants, a work shirt, socks and perhaps a polar fleece jacket. Fletcher and Phoebe were wearing pyjamas. Mia was just in underpants.

At about 7.30pm Geoff spoke to his brother Allen over the telephone. It was just a general catch up call instigated by Allen so that the two partners would know what the other was doing about the various properties the following day. Allen said it was a usual occurrence. He said that on this occasion Geoff did not seem inclined to extend the conversation beyond what was necessary - “*he sounded like he had to go and so he rushed through the conversation.*” Geoff told Allen that he was going to attend a grain marketing meeting in Lockhart and Allen told Geoff he was going into Wagga. According to Allen the phone conversion lasted about three minutes.

The deaths are discovered

At around 2.45pm on 9 September 2014, Lorraine Burke returned to Watch Hill to commence her shift. She was surprised to see Kim’s car in the driveway as Kim had agreed to collect Fletcher from cricket practice after school. The dog Ellie was barking loudly and running back and forth. As Ms Hunt made her way along the path to the back door which was used as the main entrance to the house, she saw Kim lying on the paved pathway with a blue jacket over her head.

She initially thought that Kim had fallen over because of her physical impairment. When she lifted the jacket, she saw what appeared to be a large amount of blood on the ground around Kim’s head. Ms Bourke ran inside and called Triple 0 from the land line. Records show this call was made at 2.51pm.

As she was talking to the 000 operator she walked back to Kim. She saw there were in fact two jackets covering her and she recognised them as Geoff’s work jackets that were usually hung in the laundry near the back door. This time when she lifted them she realised the seriousness of Kim’s injuries and noticed a spent shell casing on the ground near-by. She concluded Kim had been shot and was dead.

Still talking to the operator, she walked back into the house. While doing so, she noticed a hand written note on the dining table and read it aloud to the operator. She also saw Geoff’s utility parked a few hundred metres away next to a farm dam.

Ms Bourke ran out of the house and drove down to the farm gate to wait for the emergency services personnel.

NSW ambulance records shows that the first ambulance unit arrived at 3.04pm.

Ms Bourke followed the ambulance up to the house. The paramedics confirmed that Kim was dead. They briefly entered the house, which was in darkness with blinds

closed except in the kitchen. When one ambulance officer noted a spent cartridge on the hallway floor halfway along, the officers left the house and waited at the gate for police to attend. Ms Bourke went with them. She was worried that the children might get off the school bus and she wanted to be there to care for them.

Police records show that the first police radio dispatch was at 2.58pm, with the first acknowledgement by Wagga Wagga police at 3.04pm. Wagga Wagga and Lockhart Police attended as an initial police response and met with ambulance officers and Lorraine Bourke at the front gate of the driveway, where they set up a command post.

They gathered essential information from Ms Bourke and ambulance officers, including that Kim had been found with a suspected gun injury, that Geoff's white ute could be seen from the residence to be parked near the dam and that the children were supposed to be at school. Before entering the property, police contacted the school and established that the children had not in fact attended.

Three officers, Detectives Briggs and Galvin and Inspector Cloake, drove to the dam where Geoff's white Mitsubishi utility was located. They found the keys in the ignition and shot gun shells in the front seat. They did not locate anybody on the initial search of the dam.

Those officers then drove to the residence and searched the sheds and yard area before moving inside the residence. The search was recorded on video by Inspector Cloake, while Detectives Briggs and Galvin conducted the search.

Around 4.30pm, the officers found the three child victims in separate bedrooms in the house. Each child had obviously sustained a single gunshot wound to the head. A number of spent shotgun cartridges were located nearby the bodies.

The area was secured and a crime scene warrant was applied for and granted in the Wagga Wagga Court. The Police Forensic Science Group (FSG) was contacted and personnel from that unit attended. Homicide police were informed and attended the scene. The duty coroner was advised of the deaths. Entry to the residence was restricted and a search of the property and land, including around the dam area, continued until night time.

Police Aviation and Marine Area Command were notified, and arrangements were made for them to attend as soon as possible, which was the following day. Over night a crime scene guard was maintained at the property.

In the coming weeks and months the deaths were exhaustively investigated by a team of detectives led by Detective Sergeant Darren Gunn. I have no doubt that many of the task they undertook were distressing and demanding. I commend the officers and those assisting them for the high quality of the work.

Crime Scene Examination

At about 7.15pm on Tuesday 9 September, three officers from the Albury Crime Scene Section Forensic Services Group attended Watch Hill Station. They undertook a detailed examination of the house and surrounds and documented their findings.

Their expertise in forensic science; ballistics; and bloodstain pattern evidence enables the following crimes scene description and interpretation to be formulated.

Approximately three metres west of the rear and main entrance to the house under a covered walkway they found the body of Kim Hunt in a prone position. Her legs were on the footpath and her torso and head were on a garden bed. She was wearing a green jumper, white pyjama pants and slippers. She had a splint on her right hand. She had suffered massive head injuries consistent with a gunshot wound. The entry wound just above her right eye. It is estimated by ballistics experts that the shot had been fired at close range. It was apparent that she was shot as she stood where she fell. Nearby her on the ground was a spent Winchester Bushman 12 gauge shotgun shell.

Inside the house the blinds were drawn and the light in the living room was illuminated. On the dining room table was a note which read "*I am sorry. It's all my fault. Totally mine*". The opinion by a hand writing expert was in effect that it is very likely that the handwriting is that of Geoff Hunt and very unlikely that it was that of Kim Hunt. Discharged shotgun cartridges were found on a futon in the dining room, in the hallway leading to the main bedroom and near the doorway to that bedroom.

Inside that bedroom was a double bed. Other evidence establishes it was the bedroom of Kim and Geoff. Lying on the bed was the body of Phoebe Hunt. She was lying on her left side covered up to the neck with a blanket. Phoebe was wearing pyjamas. She had a massive gunshot injury to her face. It is estimated by ballistics experts that the shot had been fired at close range.

Fletcher Hunt's body was found in the bedroom usually occupied by him. He was lying on his right hand side. He was also wearing pyjamas. He had been shot in the back of the head. It is estimated by ballistics experts that the shot had been fired at close range. His bedside lamp was on. Other evidence indicated he slept with it on most nights.

In a bedroom which other witnesses indicated was usually occupied by Mia Hunt was found the body of that girl. She was sitting partially upright on a single bed leaning on her left hand side against the western wall of the room. Her buttocks were on a pillow which was against the bedhead. She was wearing pyjamas. She too had suffered a massive head and facial injury consistent with a gunshot wound to the middle of her forehead. The shot had been fired at close range. Blood splatter patterns suggest that when she was shot Mia was sitting upright in the centre of the bed with her back against the bedhead and she had slumped to her left after being shot.

There was no sign of forced entry of any disturbance to the rest of the premises.

On 10 September police divers searched a dam situated approximately 450 metres from the homestead beside which a four wheel drive utility owned and driven by Geoff Hunt was parked. The body of Mr Hunt was found approximately seven metres on the northern bank of the dam in approximately 1.6 metres of water. He was found to have shotgun injury to the roof of his mouth. He had three unused shotgun cartridges in his trouser pocket.

There were footprints in the mud surrounding the dam adjacent where to where the utility was parked leading into the water. They all appeared to have been made by one person. They were consistent with the work boots Geoff was found to be wearing.

In the dam, the divers also found a double barrel shotgun with cartridges in each barrel. The left hand barrel firing hammer was in the cocked position. The right hand barrel firing hammer was in the discharged position. The shotgun cartridge in the right hand barrel had a strike mark on it and when removed the cartridge was found to be empty. It had been discharged, whereas the cartridge in the left hand barrel was intact. The shotgun was a W Cashmore brand serial number 18022.

Two boxes of shotgun cartridges of the same brands as those found in the house were on the front seat of the car.

Testing and examination of the shotgun and fired cartridges found:-

- The gun was in good working order.
- It weighed 3.375kgs.
- The trigger of the right hand barrel required 2.44kgs of force to fire the gun.
- All fired cartridges had been fired from the right hand barrel, meaning the gun was loaded five times.
- The operation of the release lever required more force than the operation of the right barrel trigger and could only be conveniently operated with the right hand.

Autopsy results

Autopsies were undertaken on the bodies for the five deceased persons by experienced forensic pathologists at the Department of Forensic Medicine facility in Newcastle. The autopsies confirmed that the death of each person had been caused by a single gunshot wound to the head. No other wounds or injuries or anything relevant to understanding the manner or cause of death was discovered. Information gathered during the autopsies was collated with scene evidence to establish the identities of the deceased persons.

Psychological autopsy results

Dr Sarah Yule is the Senior Forensic Psychologist and Manager of the Behavioural Science Team, Forensic Services Group of the NSW Police Force. This team provides criminal psychology expertise for investigative consultations, police training and offender behaviour research.

Dr Yule has been practising forensic psychology for approximately 18 years. Much of her practice has been within the NSW Police Force and previously NSW Department

of Corrective Services where she specialised in the assessment and treatment of sexual and serious violent offenders.

Dr Yule's expertise is internationally recognised, including her private work teaching psychology and 'profiling' subjects for police agencies overseas.

An indirect personality assessment is a review of the available information relating to a particular individual for the purpose of determining characteristics that may be relevant for various investigative purposes. It can provide investigators with an understanding of an individual's behaviours, decision-making, pre-existing psychological diagnosis if applicable, and personality features. It is 'indirect' because no individual is being assessed in person. Dr Yule recognises in her report that the assessment is limited by the secondary nature of the information reviewed. Dr Yule acknowledges that further limitations exist where the primary person of interest is deceased. In cases of suicide, an indirect analysis is applied to examine whether, in hindsight, risk factors of suicidal ideation could be observed.

In conducting her assessment, Dr Yule assumed the hypothesis that Geoff Hunt was responsible for the deaths of Kim, Fletcher, Mia and Phoebe, and then himself. Dr Yule confirms that no information reviewed by her appeared to contradict this scenario. Dr Yule reviewed statements and other material pertaining to the Hunt's family history, and medical or psychological history.

Dr Yule believes that Geoff likely experienced depressive symptoms over some time that, coupled with his tendency to internalise cognitive and emotional distress, escalated into his decision to kill his family. Marital and family stressors, including Kim's permanent injuries, would likely have contributed to probable feelings of hopelessness for the future.

In contrast to other cases of family murders and suicide where the deaths are preceded by custody disputes and sometimes a history of family violence, in this case it appears Geoff could not contemplate separating from Kim or his children.

In Dr Yule's opinion, the children were likely killed because Geoff believed they could not cope without him. These distorted beliefs may have included that he was ending Kim's misery, particularly given that her recovery was believed to have reached its maximum expectation.

Therefore, Dr Yule concludes that Geoff's primary intent was suicide, and his decision to kill the remaining members of his family had a pseudo 'altruistic' motivation. His distorted thinking resulting in this action was likely associated with symptoms of depression and feelings of hopelessness for his and his family's situation.

Conclusions

The extended Hunt and Blake families have suffered terribly as a result of these deaths. To have a whole branch of the family snatched away in such a violent unforeseen incident is an horrendous loss for the parents, siblings, nieces and nephews of Geoff and Kim Hunt, the grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins of their children. If any more proof was needed, the heart breaking family statements made to the court at the end of the evidence confirmed that those who died had many relatives and friends who loved and admired them. They all have my sincere condolences. The community too has suffered. Lockhart and Tumberumba are close knit farming communities where everybody knows each other and looks out for their neighbours. Kim and Geoff were active in community affairs. Their children went to the Lockhart local catholic school. Undoubtedly, these deaths and the manner in which they occurred caused deep and lasting trauma throughout the local area.

It might be wondered whether raking over the evidence of these awfully wretched deaths will do more harm than good – nothing can bring back the dead or change what has occurred and it might only re-open wounds that are slowly beginning to heal. However, in my view, it is essential that the circumstances of the deaths of the young children in particular be fully explored and documented. In years to come young cousins will become adults and they will be entitled to know what became of their cherished playmates whom they will miss forever more. The whole family and the community is entitled to ask whether anything could have been done to avert the tragedies or whether there are lessons that can be learnt that will avoid similar incidents in other families. Massacres must not be swept under the carpet merely because they occur in the home of the deceased, at the hands of a family member. And so this report records the evidence of the witnesses who knew those who died, some who treated the adults, and the experts who examined the crime scene and other evidence in an endeavour to describe what happened and, if possible, explain it.

When did the deaths occur?

The deaths occurred after Geoff spoke to his brother Allen at 7.30pm on Monday 8 September and before 2.30pm the next day when Ms Bourke arrived. As the blinds in the house were drawn, and the living room light was on, the children and Kim Hunt were wearing pyjamas and the children were in bed, I conclude that the deaths occurred on the evening of 8 September or the early hours of 9 September.

Who caused the deaths?

There is no evidence indicating anyone outside of the immediate Hunt family was responsible for these deaths. No third party had any motive to kill any members of the family; there were no signs of a forced entry or any other suspicious disturbance of the scene. All those killed died from gunshot wounds caused by a gun kept in the Watch Hill farm-house.

When police came to the house 15 months before the shooting, Geoff Hunt assured them that the shotgun was kept in a locked gun safe that Kim could not access. There is no basis to suspect that changed after the gun was returned to him in August 2013.

There is no evidence that Kim had ever used a shotgun. Tests done only a week before the shootings showed the residual injuries to her right hand had left it very weak. When her body was found she was wearing a splint on that hand which would have made it impossible to load and operate the gun with her right hand which was her dominant hand. It is highly unlikely she would have had the strength to hold the heavy gun in the manner needed to so accurately shoot the children.

The cumulative effect of this evidence leads me to conclude Kim was not physically capable of accessing and operating the weapon. And just as conclusively, there is absolutely no evidence that she ever considered harming them. Accordingly, I reject any suggestion that she killed the children prompting Geoff Hunt to kill her and then himself.

I conclude that Geoffrey Hunt shot his wife on a pathway leading from the main entrance of the farm house to the carport and that he then shot each of his children as they lay in bed. When he shot them he intended to end their lives. If any small relief is to be found in the gut wrenching facts of this case it is that two of the children were asleep when they were shot. Geoff Hunt then drove to the dam, walked into the water, put the muzzle of the shot gun into his own mouth and intentionally took his own life. The note he left corroborates these conclusions.

Why did the deaths occur?

It is far more difficult to determine why the deaths occurred.

Generally, family and friends thought Kim and Geoff Hunt were both leading largely happy, stable and successful lives, overcoming or at least coping with the adversity dealt to them. The manner of their deaths demonstrates the truth was far different. This inquest has sought to describe that dissonance; search for signs of trouble in an attempt to explain how it could have ended so horribly for Kim, Geoff and their children; and to analyse whether there were opportunities for intervention that could have averted the carnage.

Because it is seeking to explain such a shockingly horrible event, it is unavoidable the focus of the inquest is on indicators of dysfunction, disharmony and mental illness. But that should not obscure the fact that both Kim and Geoff had done much in their lives to be proud of and had many very admirable qualities. They were both successful in their chosen careers, and, perhaps more importantly, they were both engaged and caring parents who undoubtedly loved their children dearly.

Geoffrey Hunt was the scion of a prominent local grazing family. He was well liked in the area, charismatic, an excellent sportsman and a tertiary educated and skilful farmer. He was sociable and hard working.

Kim Hunt's family was also from the land. She studied nursing at university and worked in metropolitan hospitals before moving to the Riverina to work at the Wagga Wagga Hospital as a highly credentialed intensive care nurse. She held herself and others to very high standards of efficiency and propriety. She was driven and determined but she was also compassionate and caring.

Over his working life, Geoff's father had significantly expanded the land holdings in the Lockhart district that he had inherited. He was the controller of an extensive and successful agribusiness. At different times all of his four sons worked in the business. By the time Kim and Geoff married in 2001, Mr Hunt senior had moved into Lockhart township and was moving to divest parcels of land to his sons. However, he maintained a firm grip over the finances via some loans, mortgages and a family trust. As a result, although Geoff was indirectly asset rich he had limited disposable income and Kim had no legal interest in the very modest house they lived in.

Further tension was generated when a financial dispute between the brothers led to Geoff feeling deeply betrayed and Kim feeling she and her husband had been defrauded. I stress there is no evidence before this court which could lead me to make any finding about those dealings but it is abundantly clear that Kim's belief that misappropriation had occurred became a source of considerable friction between her and Geoff.

Undoubtedly, the residual physical, neurological and cognitive impairment suffered by Kim Hunt as a result of the motor vehicle crash in July 2012 significantly tarnished all aspects of the Hunt family's life. However, an accurate appreciation of the effects of Kim's injuries requires acknowledgment of the pre-existing stressors on the relationship. In 2010, Kim had been treated for anxiety and depression with medication and psychotherapy. A psychiatrist who treated her after the crash speculated that Kim was probably suffering from bi-polar disorder before it. At that time, Kim was caring for three small children and working full time. It is also apparent that even before the crash she was highly critical of the level of support she received from Geoff in caring for the children despite him being very busy with farming. Geoff's response to the situation was problematic: he made comments consistent with suicidal ideation to members of his extended family in 2009 and 2010.

After the crash the family dynamics deteriorated severely. Because of her acquired brain injury Kim became disinhibited in her criticism of others, especially Geoff. She was prone to angry outbursts and suffered from a loss of empathy and insight into the effects of them on the subject. "*Viperish criticism*" was how one doctor described it.

Her cousin described Kim as becoming fixated on issues; "*These same issues consumed her and she could not find peace in her life. At times Kim would work herself up into a frenzy more often than not directed at Geoff. Kim was often out of control and depressed although with occasional pockets of joy.*"⁹⁴

In mid-2013, when referring Kim to a neuro-psychiatrist, her referring GP advised that "*Kim is struggling with irritability, disinhibition, fixation on particular thoughts, episodes of rage and decreased empathy/insight into other people's feelings.*" By September 2014, the psychiatrist considered that Kim no longer needed the regular reviews that had been occurring since that referral. The psychiatrist considered that Kim was functioning very well and her mood was stable.⁹⁵ Her notes indicate that

⁹⁴ Jane Blake tab 81 para 21

⁹⁵ Dr Jungfer report dated 8/09/14, tab 59; page 996.

Kim enjoyed going to work, her home life is great and they were socialising more as a family.⁹⁶ After seeing Kim four times in 2014, she was discharged from active follow-up but maintained on mood stabilising medication and anti-depressants and was to continue to see her psychologist.⁹⁷ This may well have pleased Kim, seeing it as further evidence of her recovery.

Conversely, Lorraine Bourke, the disability support worker who had been in much more regular and extensive contact with the family throughout that period and who saw them in their home for hours on end rather than in a consulting room or over Skype for an hour, knew that in September 2014 Kim was still prone to violent mood swings that could result in her becoming enraged about quite minor matters that precipitated fixated rants.

In my view, the totality of the evidence indicates that on “good days” Kim was able to interact nearly normally; that she *had* made progress over the two years following her injury but that at the time of her death she was still prone to mood swings and to articulating unreasonable and strident hostility towards Geoff. It must be stressed this was beyond her control. She was as much a victim of it as was Geoff. Indeed, Ms Bourke gave poignant evidence of Kim swearing at Fletcher and not even being aware of it when Ms Bourke told her that she had done so.

The indicators of depression that some family members had noticed in Geoff before Kim’s crash did not resolve after it. When he attended on a counsellor in September 2013 Geoff reported a lack of motivation, said he was avoiding people and was not enjoying being with his children although he rated them as the persons most important to him. Geoff told the counsellor that his worst fear was “*Being on my own.*”

In July 2014, Kim told her cousin that she had no love for Geoff, was not attracted to him, couldn’t stand him being around her and couldn’t stand him to touch her. In view of her lack of empathy and insight it is almost certain that Geoff was made aware of these views in forceful terms. It is not surprising that he appeared to be depressed.

That is also how he appeared to the disability support worker who was the last person to see him alive. She said in evidence that on that day he was showing no emotions, not responding to questions, and looking at the ground.

Nobody knows what happened between the time when the support worker left and the shootings took place. We know that Geoff had made plans for the following day and had made the children’s school lunches. Clearly the deaths were not premeditated. But we also know that Kim was in a very bad mood. Despite Geoff having fed the children their dinner, made their lunches for the next day and supervised their bathing she had been openly and constantly critical of Geoff throughout the evening. Further, she had heard that Fletcher had been abused at school for something Geoff was alleged to have done wrong the day before at the football.

⁹⁶ Dr Jungfer notes dated 3/09/14, tab 59; page 997.

⁹⁷ Dr Jungfer report dated 8/09/14, tab 59; page 996.

I accept the evidence of the forensic psychologist that Geoff's primary intention was to end his own life. It is well recognised that people at risk of suicide frequently act impulsively, with little planning or premeditation. For some reason, that night Geoff came to act on the view that he could not go on, that his life was not going to improve and that he was better off dead. Because of his emotional dependence on his wife and essential self-image of his position as the head of a family that he believed was dependent upon him, his distorted logic led him to conclude that the children and his wife would not cope without him. He then set about systemically and cold bloodedly killing each of them, before killing himself.

With the benefit of hindsight, it seems clear that Geoff and Kim could not live happily together in future. Before the crash there were deep seated tensions and differing aspirations that led them both, at different times, to question the viability of the marriage. After the crash, Kim was irrevocably changed in a way that made her on regular occasions, intolerant, indiscreet and abusive. Their pre-existing differences and the friction they generated were greatly magnified. It seems highly likely that Geoff was already prone to depression before the crash. After it, trapped by his emotional dependency on Kim and his self-image that prevented him from envisioning a life apart, things got far worse.

Understandably, after the crash, extensive and varied mental and physical health therapies were focussed on Kim, but little attention was paid to the likelihood of Geoff's mental health deteriorating and he made only desultory efforts to get help and largely ignored the urging of those close to him to do so. The extensive physical and mental health care provided to Kim gave no indication that she was at risk from Geoff because she was unaware of the risk.

This should not be interpreted as suggesting anyone – clinician, family member or friend – failed to see signs of impending doom they should have detected. Geoff kept it well hidden. It has only emerged as a result of the accounts of numerous people being collated into one body of evidence that was then analysed by experts, something that could never have happened when Geoff was alive. That would only amount to hindsight bias if that analysis were used to criticise those who did not reach the same conclusions in real time. That should not occur.

On the contrary, I am of the view the medical treatment; the mental health care; the occupational therapy; and the disability support care provided to Kim were all of a high standard.

What Geoffrey Hunt did was inexcusable; the absolute worst of crimes. It wasn't premeditated; it wasn't motivated by malice or to cover up other wrongs but it was completely unnecessary. It was the result of an ego centric delusion that his wife and children would be better off dying than living without him. The financial resources and family supports that were available to the Hunt family would have readily facilitated a marital separation whereby Geoff could have continued to work the farm, Kim could have continued to work part time and both would have had extensive contact with the children they so deeply cared for. It is unfathomable why Geoff Hunt would not have actively explored those options before taking the outrageous actions he did.

Findings required by s81(1)

As a result of considering all of the documentary evidence and the oral evidence given at the inquest, I am able to confirm that the deaths occurred and make the following findings in relation to them.

The identity of the deceased

The persons who died were Geoffrey Francis Hunt; Kim Jeannine Hunt Fletcher Austin Hunt; Mia Isobel Hunt; and Phoebe Amelia Hunt.

Date of death

All of those persons died on 8 or 9 September 2014.

Place of death

They died at Watch Hill farm near Lockhart, New South Wales.

Cause of death

Each of the deceased died from a single gunshot wound to the head.

Manner of death

Geoffrey Hunt deliberately shot his wife, Kim, and their three children Flechter, Mia and Phoebe with the intention of killing them. He then deliberately shot himself with the intention of ending his own life.

Recommendations

Pursuant to s 82 of the *Coroners Act 2009*, Coroners may make recommendations connected with a death designed to reduce the incidence of deaths occurring in similar circumstances or otherwise contributing to public health and safety.

Two issues are raised by the facts of this case for consideration from that perspective:

- The premature publication of information by the news media; and
- The competence of disability support workers to adequately assist suffers of acquired brain injury.

Media coverage

Media coverage of crimes and the police response to them is an essential part of our liberal democracy. It enables the public to be informed about what is happening in the community.

However, ill-considered media publication can do considerable harm. For example, the publishing of information about an event has the potential to degrade the memories of eye witnesses. Research consistently demonstrates that memories of traumatic events in particular are liable to be distorted if a witness hears other accounts of the incident. Accordingly, it is highly desirable that such accounts not be

published until investigators have obtained an independent account from all witnesses. If police are prevented from doing this by premature publication there is a risk prosecutions could be undermined. Conversely, news media accounts of an incident can lead to witnesses that the authorities may not have otherwise located coming forward.

The issue came into focus in this case because of concern that details of the incident were published before close relatives of the deceased had been notified of the deaths. Kim Hunt's parents were travelling in the Northern Territory. They had not been contacted by police when photographs of Watch Hill were broadcast along with commentary that a woman and three children had been found dead there. Similarly, the finding of Geoff Hunt's body the next day was broadcast by some electronic media before police were able to advise his family of this.

I readily acknowledge that most media outlets strive to ensure that their activities do not cause such problems to arise. Most abide by an informal arrangement whereby they check with the NSWPF media unit before going to air or print in contentious cases. Query whether this should not be more formally regulated. I have concluded that I do not have sufficient information to make a considered recommendation in this case. Any restriction on the right of the media to publish would have to be very carefully circumscribed. In any event it would be challenging to deal with so called citizen journalism which is proliferating. Accordingly, I will leave it to the NSWPF to take the matter forward if they consider it necessary.

Mental health training of disability support workers

Disability support workers providing assistance to persons with acquired brain injury are likely to have to deal with challenging behaviours by their clients. That raises for consideration whether they should have formal training in such matters. The principle carer in this case, Lorraine Bourke, had no such training but seems to have coped well because of her maturity and some personal experience in related matters. Other carers who attempted to work with the Hunt family fared far worse.

However, because the issue was not identified as one to be explored by the inquest neither the service provider in this case nor the authority which retained it was asked to put on evidence about the issue. Again, therefore, I am insufficiently informed to make meaningful recommendations about a complex matter. I can appreciate that particularly in regional areas recruiting suitable staff could be made difficult if entry barriers were raised. Unintended negative consequences could result. Accordingly, I will refrain from further comment but trust that the issue will receive consideration from the relevant authorities in any event.

I close this inquest.



M A Barnes
NSW State Coroner
Wagga Wagga