



FINDING OF INQUEST

An Inquest taken on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at Adelaide in the State of South Australia, on the 6th, 7th and 15th days of May 2009, the 3rd and 4th days of March 2010 and the 18th day of October 2010, by the Coroner's Court of the said State, constituted of Mark Frederick Johns, State Coroner, into the death of Katherine Michelle Natt.

The said Court finds that Katherine Michelle Natt aged 24 years, late of 12 Abraxas Court, Aberfoyle Gardens, South Australia died at Flinders Medical Centre, Flinders Drive, Bedford Park, South Australia on the 5th day of August 2006 as a result of hepatic encephalopathy due to hepatic necrosis due to paracetamol toxicity. The said Court finds that the circumstances of her death were as follows:

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Sometime late on Monday, 31 July 2006 or in the early hours of the following morning, Katherine Natt consumed a large amount of paracetamol. At or about the same time she wrote a note in her journal¹ which might be described as a suicide note. It says in part:

'I ruined my marriage with my pokie addiction and then it affected my Dad finacilly² when he had to bail me out off my me\$\$ that I had gotten myself into. but it was too late my pokie addiction was too big I couldn't stop. I CAN'T STOP! but what finally did it was when it took away something I wasn't sure I would ever get back. Because I was so so so far in debt I couldn't quit my job to try and find a job with 9-5 hrs because I couldn't afford to take a pay cut so if I fight for Taneeshka I'm scared I'll loose. But if I say yes what happens in 5-6 years will he let me have her back, will she want to come back.'

¹ Exhibit C13b

² Literal reproduction of journal including spelling errors

Katherine did not disclose her consumption of paracetamol to her partner, Mr Kane Nitschke. She was admitted to Flinders Medical Centre two days later and died on 5 August 2006. A post-mortem examination showed that death was the result of hepatic encephalopathy due to hepatic necrosis due to paracetamol toxicity³, and I so find.

- 1.2. In summary, Katherine's suicide note and the evidence taken at this Inquest show that she was addicted to gambling on poker machines as a result of which she suffered heavy financial losses and became concerned that she would lose the custody of one or both of her children. In consequence of these matters she took an overdose of paracetamol in what was clearly an act of suicide.

2. Background

- 2.1. Katherine was 24 years of age at the date of her death. She was the mother of two children, a daughter, Taneeshka, aged 6 years and a son Riley, aged 2½. Taneeshka's father was a Mr Larwood with whom Katherine, whose maiden name was Strudwick, was then in a relationship. Subsequently Katherine entered into a further relationship with Ben Natt, with whom she had a son, Riley. She married Mr Natt on 11 December 2004⁴. The relationship ended in the middle of 2005⁵ and Katherine then became known as Katherine Natt. She met Mr Nitschke sometime around Christmas 2005 and entered into a relationship with him which continued until the time of her death.
- 2.2. It is clear that for several years prior to her death Katherine was in a worsening financial position and was betting heavily on poker machines.
- 2.3. With the suicide note in her journal Katherine left bank statements in her name covering the period from 24 June 2006 to 23 July 2006. The statement⁶ records withdrawals from an ATM at the Aberfoyle Hotel⁷. The Aberfoyle Hub Tavern has an automated teller machine near the front door and alongside the gaming room. In the evening of 27 June 2006 Katherine withdrew a sum of \$200 from the ATM at 1949 hours. She withdrew a further sum of \$200 at 2020 hours, a further sum of \$200 at 2035 hours and a further sum of \$160 at 2035 hours, a total of \$760. The account records that the same evening at 2012 hours Katherine transferred the sum of \$760 into the account from her credit card.

³ Exhibit C1a, Post-mortem report of Dr J Gilbert

⁴ Exhibit C14c

⁵ Exhibit C17a

⁶ Exhibit C13c

⁷ This is a reference to Aberfoyle Hub Tavern, see Exhibit C11a

- 2.4. On 29 June 2006 Katherine withdrew sums of \$200 from an ATM at the Lonsdale Hotel at 0406, 0412, 0413, 0427, 0427 (2nd), 0438 and 0439 hours, amounting to a total of \$1,400.
- 2.5. Also on 29 June 2006 Katherine withdrew sums of \$200 from the Aberfoyle Hub Tavern at 0945 hours and 0946 hours respectively. A total of \$400, making a grand total for 29 June 2006 of \$1,800.
- 2.6. On 4 July 2006 Katherine withdrew the sums of \$200 from the Aberfoyle Hub Tavern ATM at each of 2225, 2231, 2238, 2300 hours and a further withdrawal of \$100 at 2300 hours, making a total of \$900. On the same night at 2257 hours she transferred the sum of \$900 from her credit card into her savings account.
- 2.7. There is no direct evidence that Katherine spent the money withdrawn on those occasions from the ATM on poker machines. However, having regard to the suicide note she left, the fact that the bank statement was left together with the suicide note, and the particular references in the evidence to Katherine's concerns at her growing indebtedness, I consider that it is reasonable to infer that the entirety of those monies was gambled on poker machines. There is no evidence as to whether Katherine had any winnings on the poker machines in return for those sums gambled.
- 2.8. Exhibit C14c contains a number of other bank statements which show other withdrawals from the ATM at the Aberfoyle Hub Tavern and also at the Strathmore Hotel on North Terrace, Adelaide. Evidence taken at the Inquest indicated that Katherine was known to gamble on poker machines at the Strathmore Hotel⁸. Katherine was a full-time employee of the Skycity Adelaide Casino. She worked as a dealer on the table games. Under the terms of her employment with the Casino Katherine was not permitted to gamble in any way at the Casino, including by use of the poker machines.
- 2.9. The evidence showed that Katherine was a shift-worker and much of her work at the Casino was carried out during the night. She would often complete her shift in the early hours of the morning and, with other staff, would visit the Strathmore Hotel on the other side of North Terrace, Adelaide to wind down after a shift. Almost invariably Katherine would play the poker machines at the Strathmore Hotel⁹.

⁸ Exhibit C6a

⁹ Exhibit C6a

- 2.10. Katherine was, as her suicide note suggests, assisted financially by her father. Indeed, Katherine's father, Mr Edward Strudwick, lent her \$40,000 during her marriage to Ben Natt¹⁰. Mr Strudwick said that after Katherine and Ben's relationship came to an end, Katherine owed \$16,000 on her credit card, \$40,000 to him and between she and Ben, a total indebtedness of over \$100,000. He though her share of the debt was about \$60,000. He assumed responsibility for paying off the credit card amount of \$16,000 and effectively assumed control of Katherine's income at that point. He agreed with Katherine that she would cancel her various credit cards, that he would assume responsibility for paying her utility and other expenses and that she would be given an amount of cash each week for petrol and other sundry expenses. Mr Strudwick believed that Katherine had continued to draw money on the credit card while he was supporting her and that she was using those funds to continue with her habit of gambling on the poker machines¹¹.
- 2.11. A table of ATM withdrawals and account credits between September 2005 and July 2006 for Katherine's Bank SA account shows that in this period she withdrew a total sum of \$12,710 at hotels in the Southern suburbs¹². A table indicating ATM withdrawals and account credits between 2 March 2006 and 31 July 2006 for Katherine's CPS Credit Union account shows that in this period she withdrew \$5,650 at various hotels¹³.

3. Conclusions as to Katherine's motivation for suicide

- 3.1. Having regard to all of the evidence received at the Inquest, I have concluded that Katherine's suicide was a direct result of her inability to cope with a poker machine addiction and the resulting financial consequences of that addiction including, particularly, her fear that the addiction may lead to her losing custody of her children. It is true that there was another stressor in her life at this time. For the last 3 months prior to her death, a wrist injury had kept her away from work and she was not earning any income. This only served to heighten an already seriously adverse financial situation.

¹⁰ Exhibit C17a

¹¹ Exhibit C17a

¹² Exhibit C14b

¹³ Exhibit C14c

4. Katherine's employment at the Casino and her poker machine addiction

- 4.1. Counsel for Katherine's mother urged me to draw a link between Katherine's exposure to gambling as an employee of the Casino and her addiction to poker machines. While it is clear from material tendered by counsel for Katherine's mother that statistically persons employed in the gambling industry are more likely to have gambling problems than other members of the community, there is no other basis on which to conclude that there was a particular link between Katherine's employment at the Casino and her undoubted gambling addiction using poker machines. In particular, investigations were carried out with the Casino to determine whether Katherine had ever made use of the Employee Assistance Program counselling service provided by the Casino with a view to seeking assistance for her gambling addiction. She did not. While some of her co-workers at the Casino were undoubtedly aware of her gambling problem, there is nothing to suggest that senior managers at the Casino were ever made aware of this, nor that Katherine ever raised the issue at a management level herself. Indeed, all the evidence suggests that Katherine was very secretive about her addiction and her problem.
- 4.2. For these reasons, I decline to make any comment upon the relevance, if any, of Katherine's employment at the Casino to her gambling addiction.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1. In view of the recent indications that the Commonwealth Government may be considering measures to deal with problem gamblers and poker machines following negotiations with the Independent Member for Denison (Mr Wilkie, MP), I have decided simply to recommend that a copy of this Finding be provided to the Prime Minister's Office, and to the Office of the Member for Denison, together with a copy of such other material tendered at the Inquest as either of those Offices may request.

Key Words: Gambling; Paracetamol

In witness whereof the said Coroner has hereunto set and subscribed his hand and

Seal the 18th day of October, 2010.

State Coroner