



**Organisational Development  
Department**

Victoria Police Centre  
Level 6, Building C  
637 Flinders Street  
Melbourne 3005  
DX 210065

**Telephone** 9247 6204

**Facsimile** 9247 6712

**E-mail:**

paul.ditchburn@police.vic.gov.au

**Ms Kristen Murray, Executive Officer  
Rural and Regional Services Committee  
Level 8  
35 Spring St  
Melbourne Vic 3000**

**Dear Ms Murray**

**Subject: Parliamentary Inquiry Into Deaths And Injury On Victorian Farms**

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Thank you for the invitation for Victoria Police to make a submission to this Parliamentary Inquiry into Deaths and Injury on Victorian Farms which has been referred to me for attention.

I note the terms of reference listed for the Inquiry and I understand members of my staff have discussed with you the capacity of Victoria Police to provide information. Clearly there is little Victoria Police can produce to assist in responding to the Terms of Reference.

I suggest that the primary involvement of Victoria Police in the investigation of deaths on farms is the reporting of that information to the State Coroner as part of a coronial inquiry. As you will have direct access to the findings of the coroner which will include all the evidence provided during the course of the inquiry, it is not intended to reproduce any of the Victoria Police information in this submission.

However, by way of background, I would like to provide the following information to outline the response Victoria Police provides to coronial inquiries.

## **Victoria Police response to reportable deaths**

Members of Victoria Police who become aware of a 'reportable death' as defined in the *Coroners Act 1985* are obliged to make a report of that death to the Coroner. The definition of 'Reportable deaths' includes a death that has resulted, directly or indirectly, from accident or injury.

Police members investigating a fatal accident are advised by the State Coroner's Assistant's Unit to consider the following course of action. These notes are by no means exhaustive, but provide a framework for investigations.

### **On arrival at scene**

- Take notes
- Make a brief appreciation of the situation
- Take charge of the situation
- Ascertain if medical attention or other assistance is required
- Record, Isolate and Detain witnesses
- Establish communications
- Preserve scene and prevent contamination
- Devise a plan of action
- Delegate specific tasks (eg; log keeper, exhibit officer, traffic control etc.)
- Consider specialist organisations (eg; Office of the Chief Electrical Inspector, Inspector of Mines, WorkCover etc.)

### **Scene Inspection**

- Approach with caution
- Avoid contamination
- Stand in a safe position
- Use a common entry/exit point
- Establish a place for collection of exhibits
- Sketch the scene
- Ensure that the entire scene is photographed
- Ensure all measurements are taken accurately, and clearly record reference points from which other measurements are referenced
- Carefully note position of deceased in relation to any vehicle. Note seatbelts etc and whether they had to be cut during rescue attempts
- Note unusual or foreign objects
- Consider how many persons involved, the nature and extent of their involvement
- Consider whether specialist police services are required (eg; Video Operations, Crime Scene)
- Remember that the body of the deceased is an exhibit and should be handled accordingly. All clothing and safety equipment (eg; harnesses, helmet etc) should be left as is
- Arrangements should be made to have the appropriate experts present for removal of equipment prior to autopsy
- Consider whether circumstances warrant the attendance of a pathologist at the scene
- Consider whether circumstances suggest criminal negligence

## **The Victoria Police State Coroner's Assistant's Unit**

The Victoria Police State Coroner's Assistant' Unit (SCAU) has been formed to provide expert assistance to police members dealing with 'reportable deaths'. The Unit currently consists of 1 Senior Sergeant, 2 Sergeants, 6 Senior Constables and 1 Administrative Officer.

These members are responsible for:

- Liaison between the State Coroner and his deputies and members of the Victoria Police
- Completing or coordinating specialist investigations of deaths involving aviation, industrial accidents, medical matters and incidents of multiple deaths
- The oversight of all other 'reportable deaths' within Victoria (including some deaths which occurred outside Victoria) in accordance with the Coroner's Act
- Assisting in the conduct and advocacy of Coronial Inquests, and
- Liaising with country police members and investigating reportable deaths throughout the State of Victoria.

SCAU personnel are generally qualified at the Prosecutors' Training Course and selected from personnel with appropriate policing experience.

### **Immediate notification**

In order to ensure the appropriate response from the outset, Victoria Police members are required to **immediately** notify the Unit in the case of deaths, which fall into the following criteria:

- All aviation deaths
- All work place deaths
- Incidents where 3 or more deaths occur

In addition, the Coroner may request the Unit's direct assistance in circumstances that are outside these criteria but where direct supervision is advisable. This may include fires, explosions, series of deaths, deaths in prisons and deaths in hospital.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide this information, which I hope will be of some assistance. The contact officer for this matter is Senior Sergeant A. F. (Tony) O'Connor of Victoria Police Legal Policy ☎ 9247 6715.

Yours sincerely

Paul Ditchburn, APM  
**Acting Commander**

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