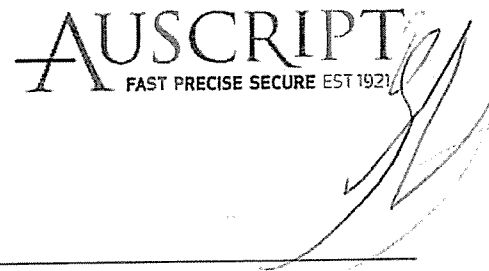


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## TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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### CORONERS COURT

CLEMENTS, Deputy State Coroner

COR-41/2008

IN THE MATTER OF AN INQUEST INTO THE  
CAUSE AND CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING  
THE DEATH OF KAREN LEE MAHLO

BRISBANE

9.28 AM, TUESDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 2014

Continued from 10.2.14

DAY 2

WARNING: The publication of information or details likely to lead to the identification of persons in some proceedings is a criminal offence. This is so particularly in relation to the identification of children who are involved in criminal proceedings or proceedings for their protection under the *Child Protection Act 1999*, and complainants in criminal sexual offences, but is not limited to those categories. You may wish to seek legal advice before giving others access to the details of any person named in these proceedings.

**RESUMED**

**[9.28 am]**

D/STATE CORONER: Good morning. Please be seated.

5

MR CHOWDHURY: Your Honour, the witness, Beverley Mahlo, is in the witness box.

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you. Good morning, Mrs Mahlo. How are you?

10

MS B. MAHLO: Morning.

**BEVERLEY MAHLO, AFFIRMED**

**[9.29 am]**

15

**EXAMINATION-IN-CHIEF BY MR CHOWDHURY**

20 D/STATE CORONER: Thank you.

MR CHOWDHURY: Thank you.

Is your full name Beverley Anne Mahlo?---Correct.

25

And you are the mother of the deceased, Karen Mahlo?---That's correct.

You provided an affidavit in respect of civil proceedings in the Supreme Court of Queensland?---Yes.

30

Thank you. And that is exhibit B5 and that should be in front of you there. Have you had an opportunity to read that again, before - - -?---I have.

35 Thank you. I just want to ask you some questions about your doctor - sorry - your daughter's depression and conversations she had with you. If you have a look at paragraph 13 of your affidavit?---Yes.

In particular, that you noticed - various conversations you had with Dr Mahlo that she was severely depressed?---That's correct.

40

And this appears to be in response to problems she had at work with Queensland Health?---That's correct.

And her being suspended from her work?---Yes.

45

What were the things that led you to conclude that she was severely depressed?---I could always tell. The tone of her voice, it just became lifeless. And she told me she

was depressed. And from past experience I knew how important Karen's position was to her and her work was to her. And this would have been a terrible blow.

5 D/STATE CORONER: Yes. Mrs Mahlo, perhaps if you'd just like to sit back a little bit?---Too loud, is it? I'm sorry.

Yes, yes, yes. No. Just be comfortable and I'm sure we will hear you?---Okay.

10 MR CHOWDHURY: You say that was over about a 12 month period. From when? From about the end of 2006?---Yes.

Thank you. Now, you also detail in that paragraph a conversation about a man called John?---Yes.

15 You had first met him in November 2006 at a party in North Manly?---Yes. A party that my brother arranged for me and all the family arrived - or most of the family and a lot of friends.

20 Okay. And at paragraph 14 you observed from this conversation you set out that you were deeply concerned that she was very depressed and not coping very well?---Yes.

25 Did you talk with your daughter about what she could do to help herself or did you discuss options with her?---Yes. I mean, Karen didn't have a - I always thought she needed an outside interest. You know, sport or - she was very interested in photography and I'd bought her a very good camera. And I suggested that she start into a camera club or do something outside her work, because I thought she was just too involved with work and not involved in anything else. Yes. We discussed that.

30 All right. One of the things she - can I just ask firstly, the conversation you set out in italics in paragraph 13?---Yes.

Was that from one conversation or was the same thing said in a number of conversations?---About her reputation being ruined?

35 Yes?---Yes. She - she was very adamant about that. You know, it - it was foremost in her mind. It - her reputation was everything to her and work was everything to her.

40 All right. Thank you. Now, I want to take you to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2008. This was when Dr Mahlo came to Orange?---Yes.

And it was the May long weekend?---Mmm.

45 Yes. At that stage, had you been aware that Dr Mahlo had been hospitalised following a suicide attempt?---Yes. I knew she had been hospitalised.

And you set out in your affidavit the details of a conversation you had with John Hehir about trying to find where Dr Mahlo is in hospital?---Yes, yes.

5 Did you have a conversation about that with your daughter when she came to Orange?---No, no.

You had been, obviously, very concerned that you weren't even being told where she was in hospital by John Hehir?---Exactly. Yes.

10 And you wanted to send flowers to her?---Yes.

But you didn't have any follow-up conversation with your daughter about that when she came?---No, no.

15 Thank you?---I thought - I just thought it was pointless. I mean, she was living with John Hehir and I'd only be interfering, really.

Thank you. I'm just going to paragraph 38 of your statement?---Mmm.

20 And this is where you met your daughter and granddaughter for lunch at a restaurant in Orange?---Yes.

25 Well, you said that your daughter's mood was a bit strange. Do you know what you mean by that? Can you describe what you mean?---Well, I just thought she was a little bit edgy. I noticed that when Karen was depressed before, she didn't do anything. She didn't buy any clothes. She was an inveterate person to buy things, and when she was depressed she just closed up. But this time she - you know, she had a pair of shoes on that she'd bought on the internet and she was looking at things. She was telling me about the things. So I just thought she was getting better.  
30 But I still thought - felt that there was a little bit of stress with her.

I should ask this: do you know how long your daughter had suffered from depression?---Well, I think the - I think she - I think Jenny Ruhno told me she had a panic attack when she left her husband. But I could understand that, because she was taking on the - she'd knew she'd have to look after the children. He wouldn't support them as well as, you know - but I think the only time I'd - I'd had any experience or she told me of depression was when she had problems in Orange when they cut off the finance and stopped - you know, the same thing more or less happened. She was planning this big hospital and planning the new hospital and then suddenly, like state governments do, they cut off finance and she couldn't employ the people she wanted. And she - she - she became depressed about the system.  
40

That was - - -?---But that was the first time.

45 Are you able to tell me approximately when that was?---Well, that was just before - that was in - about 6 or 8 months before she - 6 months, I suppose, before she went up to Brisbane.



All right. Thank you. Now, you attended a family – sorry, before I go on to that. Was there any conversation at the lunch at the restaurant about John Hehir?---No. None at all.

- 5 Was there any conversation you had with your daughter while she was in Orange in early May 2008 about her relationship with John Hehir?---She just said it had finished. That's all. I didn't pursue it because I thought, you know, it was just par for the course. I mean, Karen's relationships never lasted very long.

- 10 All right?---She - - -

Thank you. Now, I'll just take you to paragraph 39 where you talk about a barbecue at - - -?---Yes.

- 15 - - - your son, Brett's property. Is that correct?---That's correct. Yes.

And his wife – is it Ceiwen?---Yes.

- 20 Is that how you pronounce it? Thank you. And there you actually specifically detailed the conversation about your daughter saying that the relationship with John Hehir was over. Correct?---That's correct. Yes.

- 25 Do you know what her mood was like at the barbecue? That is, your daughter's?---I thought it was just normal. Yeah. She – you know, she was back with the family again. And I thought it was – it was quite normal. She seemed very - you know, quite happy.

- 30 At any time while you were with your daughter or speaking with her on the phone when she was down in Orange, did she ever express any thoughts about trying to commit suicide again?---No. She hadn't told me. It was only when she went back that I found out what had happened.

- 35 All right. Did you have – ask her about why she was in hospital, down in Orange?---In – in - - -

When she came down for that long weekend?---Yes.

Did you ask her about why she was in hospital?---No, no, no. I didn't.

- 40 All right. Was there a reason for that?---No, no. No particular reason. I'd – I suppose I was still quite angry with John Hehir and I just didn't want to pursue it. You know, that I hadn't been told where she was or why or, you know - - -

- 45 Thank you. Now, on the 7 May 2008 you had a conversation with your daughter, which is set out at paragraph 40 of your affidavit?---Yes.

It's mentioned there about Nadine. Who's Nadine?---Nadine's Ceiwen's sister.

Right?---And she was having a baby at the time. And her mother, Ceiwen's mother, is a big worrier, and she was worried that Nadine was depressed or was going to have post-natal depression. And I couldn't see that. I said just wait and see what happens. I mean, Nadine's going to be perfectly normal to me. I mean, so -- and then Karen  
5 said -- asked me then why I understood about Nadine's depression and I didn't understand about hers. But to me Nadine wasn't really depressed. It was a mother worrying more about her -- having her first baby, I thought.

10 Now, it was in this conversation that Dr Mahlo first told you that she had attempted to commit suicide?---That's correct.

All right. And you could hear her sobbing on the other end of the phone?---That's correct. She was very upset.

15 All right. And is the -- to the best of your recollection - the content of that telephone conversation contained in paragraph 40?---Yes.

Okay. Now, Dr Mahlo suggested that her father could come up for a week?---That's correct. Yeah.

20 All right. Was that unusual, that request?---I thought about it at the time. And they were very, very close and they -- neither of them kind of liked to discuss emotional things. They were both interested in the same kind of electronics and so on. And I thought he'd -- he'd probably be the best, because I might happen to do more than I  
25 should actually, you know, towards finding a -- suggesting things. I just had a feeling that she wasn't ready for my suggestions.

All right?---She didn't take kindly to, you know, people telling her what to do, quite honestly.

30 All right. Was there any time in that conversation that you had a discussion with her about getting treatment or seeing a psychiatrist?---Yes, yes.

35 Was that in that conversation?---I'm not sure about that. But I, you know -- I hoped -- no -- I'm sure I -- it's some time ago, but it would have been one of my suggestions to her.

Yes?---But, you know -- and I think she was -- I think she did tell me she was, I think -- Dr Fraser, isn't it, she'd been seeing.

40 All right. I come to the conversation on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2008. Just before that, at paragraph 44 you said you continued to ring Karen regularly. Every night or every second night?---Yes.

45 When did you start to do that? Was that from the time you first were advised of the attempted suicide?---Yes.

All right. And how many conversations did you think you had with your daughter up until her death?---Well, let me see. That would be about 20 days, wouldn't it? 20.

5 Yes?---I suppose I rang her 17 or 18 times. I mean there's very few times that I didn't ring her -- different times just to check on her. And when John was up there I rang him, I - no. I didn't speak to him on the phone. He's a bit deaf. I spoke to her and she told me what they were doing and things like that.

10 Just generally can you explain what her mood was in those conversations you had? Was it the same, did it change?---It changed.

15 How did it change?---Well, I believe she'd kind of decided -- she said she'd had -- there was two or three job offers that she could take up that would pay her exactly the same as she was doing. And she was looking into those. She also told me that when she'd woken up in the hospital the first thing she saw was Ben and she could never do that to him again. That was another thing she told me.

20 Ben is her son. Your grandson?---Ben is her son. Yeah. She started to open up. I mean, she started to talk about things, which indicated to me she wasn't -- she was getting over this depression and she was starting to look, you know -- that there was going to be a new opportunity and jobs in front of her. I just thought she was getting over it.

25 All right. Do you recall if she made any comment about setting up as a general practitioner to you?---I don't think she wanted to do that. I -- you know, I think she might have thought about it. At one stage she was talking about going -- giving some time to the overseas doctors, you know, without - - -

30 Doctors Without Borders?---That's right.

Yes?---But, I mean, she just -- she was just playing with these ideas to me. But she -- I thought she'd -- you know, she saw that there was plenty of opportunities for her. She wasn't really worried about getting a job in another position.

35 All right. Now, we're going to come to the last conversation you had with your daughter. And that was on the evening of the - - -?---Yes.

- - - 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2008 do you recall what time that was?---7 o'clock.

40 All right. And did you call her or did she call you?---Well, I -- I've got here she telephoned me, but I'm not -- you know, I was still pretty emotionally raw when I wrote this, but I'm not sure about that. I -- she could've rung me. I'm not sure.

45 All right. Is the content of the conversation set out in paragraph 46 the best of your recollection?---Yes. Yes.

All right. What was her mood during that conversation?---Perfectly relaxed. She'd been out with Anna all day. She'd sent me sunglasses for Mother's Day. Told me she could - I could return them if I wanted to. You know, I just - - -

- 5 D/STATE CORONER: Just half a moment. The people that have entered the court - are any of you giving evidence in this matter?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: [indistinct] Colton or Westland?

- 10 D/STATE CORONER: No. Next court.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No. Thank you, your Honour.

- 15 D/STATE CORONER: Next door. Thank you. Sorry to interrupt you, Mrs Mahlo?---That's all right. No. She was perfectly relaxed and [indistinct] quite happy, you know. And she'd been out with Anna all day shopping, and she told me she posted the glasses and - oh, we just chatted for - you know, about general things.

- 20 MR CHOWDHURY: All right. You said in your affidavit that you talked for about half an hour?---That's correct. Yes, because there was another incoming call. And she said I think that might be Ben. He's coming down for the weekend.

Right. Okay. Thank you. Yes. I have nothing further. Thank you, your Honour.

- 25 D/STATE CORONER: Thank you. If I could just ask a question before you commence, Mr Lewis.

- 30 Ms Mahlo, it seems from the information that is available to me in this inquest that your daughter, from time to time, drank alcohol quite heavily. Do you have any comment about that?---Not so much [indistinct] except when she was depressed [indistinct] but I never saw her drunk. To me, drinking heavily, I'm - I don't drink [indistinct] but I knew she was in Brisbane. I think - I don't know who told me, but I knew she was in Brisbane.

- 35 And in the course of any of your phone conversations with her did you ever feel in the way that she was speaking with you that she may have been affected by alcohol?---No.

- 40 No. Okay. Thank you. Mr Lewis.

**EXAMINATION BY MR LEWIS**

**[9.48 am]**

- 45 MR LEWIS: Thank you, your Honour.

Just on that point. When she died your daughter had a blood alcohol content of about .14, it would seem?---Yeah.

So when you were speaking to her earlier on that day or that - - -?---At night.

5 She didn't appear to you - - -?---Oh, no.

- - - like she'd been drinking?---No. No.

10 Okay?---Definitely not.

In your affidavit - I'm sorry. I'll start that again. When the difficulties occurred with the funding for the hospital in Orange?---Yes.

15 Prior to that Karen had been okay?---Yes. Yes. We'd - yes.

20 She became - obviously, the job that she had been employed to do there was no longer there; is that right?---No. That was - no. No. She was still employed. It was just - at one stage she was employing these specialists and building up this unit in Orange. And they'd suddenly cut off the money. She wanted to put in another specialist, which means they had a fly-in/fly-out specialist, which she considered costed too much money. And then there's also, I think, the hospital at the time. She'd been working on the plans for that and the plans came out. She considered it far too small and not adequate. So she was having arguments with the powers to be about that.

25 Right?---That's what, you know, the whole thing was about: the fact that they weren't, well, doing what she thought they should be doing, actually.

30 So that seemed to send her into, to use your perceptions, a state of depression about - - -?---Yes. You know - - -

35 - - - the system?---Yes. She - she had - she had the first four - four and a half years over there she [indistinct] employing specialists, she'd set up the hospital, she'd been going full steam. I mean, we were entertaining - she was looking after the specialists coming. We had looked after the - set them up. I mean, she was very good at that. And, suddenly, like, you know, money is cut off. And she'd also been planning the - what they needed in the new hospital and she wanted a cancer specialist there too. And suddenly it appeared that what was going to happen was going to be a lot smaller than what she thought was needed. And it seemed to her that, you know, all her work had gone down the drain, really.

So, obviously, she was at loggerheads with - - -?---Yes. With the - - -

45 The people making these decisions or - - -?---Yeah. The state government or whatever it is. The health department. She thought they were being - not looking into the future, you know.



And then she moved after a period of months up to the Sunshine Coast?---It was in January, I think. Yeah.

5 And then she started having -- after a while -- some difficulties with her work at Nambour Hospital?---I think it was difficulty with her immediate supervisor more than anything.

10 Yeah. Well, with people at the Nambour Hospital?---Yeah. I don't think he was at the Nambour Hospital. I think he was, for what I understood, was in charge of the more regional boss.

So - - -?---Because he employed her first and it was -- he was in -- I think he was in charge of the different regions, as far as I understood.

15 So she was -- and, again, I'm not trying to imply anything. She -- she went, really, from being -- having difficulties with New South Wales health - - -?---Yes.

20 - - - to being in a position where she was having difficulties with Queensland Health?---Not with Queensland Health, because they had -- they - - -

Or someone at Queensland Health?---Well, someone at Queensland Health. Yes.

25 Okay. And you've given evidence that she became very concerned about it, particularly after she was suspended because of her reputation?---Yes. That was very much -- very important to her.

And being irreparably damaged?---Yes.

30 And it was during that period of time that you became aware that her depression was becoming more severe?---Yes.

35 And that you asked or suggested to her that she see a psychiatrist?---Well, I think she -- I'm not sure if she was at the time. I suggested various things. I thought she should get -- she should broaden her horizons a bit and -- you know, that work wasn't -- I said to her work is not that important. Have a bit of life.

40 And you said that Karen wasn't someone who particularly liked being told things?---Not really. I mean, I was her mother. And children don't want to be told by their mother what to do, do they?

No?---To be quite honest.

Generally not?---It's a general principle.

45 And but did that flow into other aspects of her life?---What's that?

That she didn't like people telling her what to do or – for example, curtailing her plans, such as it happened in Orange?---I think she was quite adamant. There was one – yes. I'd say so, because she saw it as there was one way to do something. And it was – that, in the end, saved the health department money and this, that and the other. And – yes. She railed against that, to be quite honest.

Now, there's been a suggestion that Mr Hehir's constant insistence that she stop smoking and try and reduce drinking – is that the sort of thing that she would rail against if she – like, she wouldn't particularly like being told about that sort of thing? If you can't answer that's - - -?---I'm not sure about that.

Okay?---I think it was just part of his controlling – you know, and I don't think that would have mattered so much to her as work mattered to her, quite honestly.

Now, there was a party that Mr Hehir organised?---Yes.

And this was after the party that they had come down to that you had in Orange: a surprise party for you. Is that right?---That's correct. Yes.

Now, when Karen was down at that party you said that she appeared to be edgy?---Which party was this then?

For when she came down for your party in Orange?---I don't think she was edgy at all.

No?---I didn't say that.

Okay. What was her mood when she came down for your party?---She was full of beans. She was happy as Larry.

Okay. Sorry. I was looking at the - - -?---That was when she came down. Yeah.

For Andy Mathers?---Yes. Andrew [indistinct] was a great friend of hers and he'd committed suicide.

And John – that was the second time he met John?---Yes.

And that's when he mentioned the party to you?---That's right. Yes. Karen went outside to have a cigarette and he told me about it.

And, obviously, there was some differing views about the – whether or not the party should proceed?---No. It wasn't whether the party should proceed. It was whether – I didn't think John would go up because he's quite deaf, and as I told him, we wouldn't know very many people. And he also made it quite clear that we could fly out and fly back the next day. He didn't seem to want us to stay. So it just seemed to me, you know – and I'd just come back from overseas. I just – it was – Karen was 52 and it was going to be a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. It just seemed that he was planning exactly

the same as my birthday – my party in Sydney. And I don't know why I got my hackles about it somehow or rather. He was so pushy that, you know, we should come up and – it was over the next couple of weeks when he kept ringing the – I did.

- 5 All right. Now, you were obviously upset the time when Karen was in hospital. And you found out in around about way?---Yes.

And that time you have made reference to being angry with Mr Hehir about that?---Very angry.

- 10 Did you ever ask Karen about her being in the Buderim Hospital but not under her name?---No.

- 15 You never queried about how that came to pass?---No. I didn't. I thought I – no. I didn't query it. I just thought that she didn't want – I thought that – I thought she might have been drinking to excess and she didn't want the – the – the hospital to know that she'd been in hospital for alcoholism or something like that. I thought it was something like that, so I didn't see any – any reason to pursue it with her.

- 20 No. That's – I'm just simply asking whether or not you - - -?---No. I didn't.

- - - asked her. All right?---No. I didn't.

- 25 But that was your reason - - -?---I just - - -

- - - as to why it may have happened?---Yes. Yeah.

- 30 Okay. Because that may have provided further ammunition for those - - -?---Yes, exactly.

- - - working against her in the work environment?---Yeah. Yes. That's what, you know - - -

- 35 All right. Thank you, ma'am.

D/STATE CORONER: Anything further, Mr Chowdhury?

MR CHOWDHURY: No re-examination. Thank you.

- 40 D/STATE CORONER: Okay.

Thank you, Mrs Mahlo, for assisting us today. Is there anything further that you wanted to say - - -?---Not really. I think - - -

- 45 - - - or ask? Any other issue that you wanted raised? I know that you've had the opportunity of discussing things?---Yes. We have outside.

All right?---Yes. I think things are made fairly clear to me, so I don't think there's anything else.

5 Thank you, Mrs Mahlo?---Thank you.

**WITNESS EXCUSED**

**[9.59 am]**

10

MR CHOWDHURY: Yes. I call Semlin Mahlo. Sorry – yes. Brett.

D/STATE CORONER: Which one? Brett or Semlin?

15 MR CHOWDHURY: Brett.

D/STATE CORONER: Brett – right.

20

**BRETT JOHN MAHLO, SWORN**

**[10.01 am]**

**EXAMINATION-IN-CHIEF BY MR CHOWDHURY**

25

D/STATE CORONER: Mr Chowdhury.

MR CHOWDHURY: Thank you. Sir, is your full name Brett John Mahlo?---Yes. It is.

30

Mr Mahlo, you provided an affidavit in respect of civil proceedings in the Supreme Court of Queensland?---Yes. I did.

And your Honour, that affidavit is exhibit B6 - - -

35

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you.

MR CHOWDHURY: - - - and there should be a copy in front of you there.

40

I just want to take you to paragraph 5 of that affidavit. It's on the front page?---Yes.

It's the comment in the last sentence that during the last three to four months of her life, your sister was extremely depressed. What were the things that you noticed that led you to that conclusion?---Only from what my mother was saying, because I didn't have too much contact with Karen up until the last two or three months of her life. So it was only, you know, what my mother was saying, because she was in contact with Karen regularly.

45

Right. Okay. So that was – you were informed by your mother that – – –?---Family members, yes.

5 Right – that she was extremely depressed. You had had a falling out with her before she left Orange. Is that correct?---That's correct.

10 But was there some reconciliation some time after that?---There was, again, two or three months before her death, where she started – well, it was on the – the death of my brother-in-law. She made contact with us. Then we started, you know, conversing on – on the phone fairly regularly, you know, two or three months prior to her death.

All right. Was that Andy [indistinct]?---No, no. It was Eddie Baker.

15 Right. Thank you. In paragraph 6 you set out a telephone conversation you had with your sister, and you said it was during the last two to three weeks before her death. Are you able to pinpoint that any greater?---Not really. I mean basically what I said, you know – we didn't – we didn't talk too much – I didn't talk too much about John Hehir at all, or the relationship with John. I mean it was mainly on finances and the  
20 fact that she felt that she was locked into a, you know – a finance structure she couldn't get out of and, you know, we discussed that at length and, you know, her family life had not, you know – with her ex-partner John Hehir.

25 All right. Now, clearly, according to your affidavit, she told you that she and John Hehir were no longer in a relationship?---That's correct.

All right. You hadn't met John Hehir?---Not – not at – the first time we met John Hehir was at Karen's funeral.

30 All right. Had you heard about him?---Yes.

All right. From who had you heard, or from whom?---Again, my mother generally  
---

35 Right?--- - - - because she was in contact with Karen more than anybody else [indistinct].

40 All right. Thank you. Now, was that conversation that you detail at paragraph 6 before she – your sister Karen – came down to Orange for the May long weekend, 2008?---Sorry. Say – I was reading at the same time. Say that again.

That's all right. Was that conversation we've just discussed before your sister came down to Orange for the May long weekend, 2008?---Look, I can't pinpoint whether it was before or after, to tell you the truth, at this late stage.

45 All right. Thank you. When your sister came down with her daughter Anna, you noticed that your sister was quiet, withdrawn and distant. Have a look at paragraph



--?---Yeah. I – I yeah. She was. Yeah. I mean she wasn't her usual bubbly self. I mean obviously she was still suffering from depression and – and as I said, she was a little – little bit withdrawn. She was – you know, she'd engage in conversation, but she was withdrawn.

5

All right. At that time, had you been aware that Dr Mahlo spent some time at a hospital in Buderim [indistinct]?---No. I wasn't.

10 Were you aware that she had made an attempt to take her life?---Probably about that time I – I was made aware of it. I think that, you know, my mother spoke to me. But the timeframe I can't - - -

15 Sure?--- - - - distinguish now, but [indistinct] time I was made aware that she had, you know, made an attempt on her life and she had spent time in hospital.

Did you have any conversation with your sister about that?---No. I did not.

20 Did you have a conversation with your sister at all about why she was depressed?---Maybe, only because of the relationship that was ending or ended at that stage, and the financial burden she felt and the work pressures she was under.

Did she talk about what those work pressures were?---Not in a great extent, no.

25 All right. At that time, did you spent much time with your sister on that weekend?---Not a great deal. She came out to our property – we live out of town.

30 Yes?---She came out. We had a family get together [indistinct] several hours, but she stayed in town. So I guess over the weekend, you know, it'll be several hours, I suppose, at the most.

Did you talk to your niece Anna, Karen's daughter, at all much that weekend?---Not about Karen, no - - -

35 Right. Okay?--- - - - at all.

Thank you. She didn't express any concerns about her mother's state?---No. No. We didn't discuss it.

40 Thank you. You talk about a phone call the night of the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2008, when Karen rang you really upset. It's on page 2 of your affidavit?---Yep.

She was crying and sobbing on the telephone?---Mmm.

45 Okay. Was that unusual: that she'd call you?---Look, Karen and I were very close up until our falling out. I mean we were very, very close, much closer than she was to Wade. You know, obviously when she left Orange I think she was suffering

depression then, so we had a bit of a dispute. We didn't talk too much until she started calling me again. But then it was just like business as usual, so - - -

Okay?--- - - it wasn't something out of the blue.

5

I take it the falling out with your sister – was that over a minor issue?---It was – well, mum and dad were living with Karen at the time and she let me know something that I kind of slipped with – to my parents, and she, you know, thought I'd betrayed her trust. So that was – it was just [indistinct] family issue.

10

Thank you. Now, you said that you were concerned – well, in fact, you say you were alarmed about her mental state. Was that for two reasons: because she was crying and sobbing and because she said, "I need my daddy"?---Both. I mean it's not something you expect from your older sister.

15

All right. Thank you. How long did that conversation take?---Look, it's hard to say now, but it was – it was quite – I would say 20 minutes to half an hour.

20

Did it appear to you that your sister had been drinking alcohol?---That night, no. I mean it was difficult to tell that far away, but I didn't think she had been that night.

All right. Just on that point, were you aware that your sister drank alcohol?---Yes.

All right?---Yes.

25

Your - - -?---Because I don't, so [indistinct] drinks – I kind of pick up – so I knew she drank, you know, not a fair bit, but I knew she drank. And she, you know, got drunk occasionally which – I don't, so I pick up on it.

30

All right. I take it your family were teetotalers. Is that correct?---Not really. I mean I have a drink occasionally - - -

Yeah?--- - - and so does dad and mum, but I just don't drink as a matter of course.

35

Right. All right. Thank you. You said you were aware that Karen had got drunk on occasions. Was that back in Orange?---Yes. I mean some – some days, you know, she wouldn't get out of bed till 10 o'clock in the morning because she'd obviously had a big night the night before.

40

Right?---So I mean I don't think she was down the town, you know, rolling in the gutter drunk, but I think she, you know, didn't mind a drink either.

All right. Thank you. As a result of that conversation, you then contacted your mother?---Mmm.

45

And as a result, your father then travelled up to Sunshine Coast. Correct?---That's correct.

Just go to the next paragraph after that long paragraph, where you say, "The last time I spoke to Karen she was in fairly good spirits" – spoke about watches she had bought on eBay for her father and your son Lindsay?---Mmm.

5 Okay. Do you know when that conversation was?---Well, it was only, obviously, you know, a week or so before Karen's death, because we were speaking quite regular from the first contact up until she died. And you know, we were discussing, as I said, buying watches for my father on eBay and then – and you know, Lindsay going through school. So I can't recall exactly what date, but it was a few days  
10 before she died, because I was flying the night she was – died – that she died. So I was kind of busy two or three days prior.

Right. So you believe that conversation was two or three days before her death?---Look, I would say within a week, anyway.

15 Within a week?---Yeah.

What was her mood in that conversation?---Very good. She was, you know, on top of the world.

20 Thank you. Now, you set out towards the bottom of page 2 a conversation with John Hehir. Is that the first time you'd ever spoken to him?---Correct. No. It's not, sorry. It's not. He was organising a birthday party for Karen, and he rang up our house a couple of times to see if we were coming up. But that's not the first time I spoke to  
25 him.

All right. Okay. You never met him?---Never met him until the day of Karen's funeral.

30 Right?---That's the first time I spoke – I have seen him.

Okay. All right. And he called you – you've set out the conversation there. I'm sorry. You didn't actually speak to him. Your wife spoke to him?---No. My wife spoke to him first. She actually - - -

35 Yeah?--- - - - he rang my – my phone, and my wife answered it. And then she spoke to him.

And then the next day you received a call on your mobile from John Hehir?---Yes.  
40 That's correct.

And the discussion was about sorting out Karen's affairs?---That's correct.

45 All right. And you set out at page 3 of your affidavit that he said there were two wills and "I blame myself for Karen's death. We had a big argument on the phone"?---That's correct.

10 All right. Okay. Did you recall saying anything to him about that?---I mean at that stage we had – well, I mean I had no reason to blame or not blame anybody, so it was just a – look, you know – kind of a – a fairly subdued conversation about, you know, Karen's affairs and how we're going to have to sort it out from here on in. You  
5 know, he said there were two wills, which confirmed what he'd told my wife the day before and, you know, he – he was – it seemed to me like he was trying to tell me something without saying the words. That was only my impression of the – of the – the conversation. He was trying to tell me more than he actually told me but he, you know – he only told me about the two wills and then he blamed himself [indistinct]  
10 and whatnot.

All right. What was his mood during that conversation?---Like what you expect after a death of somebody close to you. It was, you know, fairly – he was upset.

15 All right?---I mean it wasn't calculating or cool or – it was, you know, fairly emotional.

All right. Thank you. Now, what you specifically put in your statement was – is that he said he wasn't going to contest the will?---That's correct.

20 Thank you. And then there's another conversation on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2008, where you said – he says, "I don't believe there's a second will"?---That's correct.

25 I presume more than that was said in that conversation?---That's correct, but again, the – the recollection's not that clear, you know, weeks afterwards, but, you know, that's how we knew there was going to be a fight on.

30 All right?---So it was a fairly brief conversation because I knew there was going to be a fight so it's not much use talking.

All right. Thank you. Yes, I have nothing further.

D/STATE CORONER: Mr Lewis.

35 **EXAMINATION BY MR LEWIS**

**[10.13 am]**

40 MR LEWIS: Thank you, your Honour. Just in relation to the falling out that you had with your sister?---Yes.

When was that in relation to when she moved to Queensland?---It was only a – six months or so, or three or four months before she moved out of Orange.

45 All right?---And that time frame I'm – I can't be specific now, but it was in - - -

That's - - -?---In a -- you know, a short amount of time -- three or four months before she moved.

All right. And that really led to a ceasing of contact for some time?---Pretty much.

5 Yeah. Okay. And then, as you've said, in the short time leading up to her death there had been something of a - - -?---Yeah. I mean - - -

- - - reconciliation?---- - - it was no surprise that she made me executor of the will because of our closeness in the -- you know, in the -- in the -- you know, before that -- that falling out, so I wasn't surprised at all and -- and you know, we used to talk a lot -- we're not -- I mean, we're not the sort of family we live in each other's pockets either.

15 No?---So, you know, we don't talk to -- I mean, I wouldn't even know what Karen's birthday was. That's just the way we are, but if -- if -- but we were quite close but we didn't talk every -- every day either.

20 No. No. I appreciate that, but there was certainly an estrangement?---Oh, there was. There's no doubt about that, and - - -

As a result of whatever the fallings out were?---- - - I think there was probably more -- more of the depression than -- than, you know -- Karen's depression than anything else - - -

25 Right?---- - - to tell you the truth.

Okay. Thanks.

30 MR CHOWDHURY: Yes. No re-examination, thank you.

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr Mahlo, for assisting us today. You are excused?---Okay. Thank you.

35 **WITNESS EXCUSED** [10.14 am]

MR CHOWDHURY: I call Ceiwen Mahlo.

40 **CEIWEN BARBARA MILFORD MAHLO, SWORN** [10.15 am]

45 **EXAMINATION-IN-CHIEF BY MR CHOWDHURY**



D/STATE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Chowdhury.

MR CHOWDHURY: Thank you. Is your full name Ceiwen Barbara Milford Mahlo?---Yes, it is.

5

Now, you provided firstly an affidavit in respect of civil proceeding in the Supreme Court of Queensland?---Yes, that's right.

Your Honour, that's exhibit B7.1

10

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you.

MR CHOWDHURY: And you also provided a short two-page statement to the police on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2010?---Yes.

15

And that was about a conversation you had had on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May from John Hehir?---That's right.

And you had made some notes after that conversation about- -?---Yes, I did.

20

- - - the phone call. Thank you. So I want to take you to your affidavit, paragraph 4 where you talk - you can have a look at you affidavit it's there?---Paragraph 4.

4?---Yes. Yes.

25

Where you say between August '07 and early May '08 you had numerous conversations with your sister-in-law over the telephone?---Yes, that's right.

All right. About how many conversations do you think you had?---In that period of time?

30

Yes?---Gosh, maybe half a dozen.

Did you have a good relationship with your sister-in-law?---Yes, I did.

35

How long had you known her?---Well, I guess I met her 1994 and - - -

Right?---Yeah.

40 So you've known her for some times?---Yes. Yep.

And was it through your relationship with your husband Greg?---Yes, that's right.

45 Thank you. Now, in particular you set out a conversation about her having attempted suicide?---Yes.

Was there one conversation about that or more than one?---No, just the one.

All right. And was that in early May 2008?---Yes, I believe so.

All right. And is the contents of that conversation accurately set out in paragraph 4?---Yes, it is.

5

Is there anything else that you discussed?---No, I don't believe so.

All right. Was there any conversation – did you have any conversations with Dr Mahlo in that period about a man called John Hehir?---No, I didn't.

10

Did you know of his existence?---Yes.

How did you know of that?---Just possibly through family conversations with Brett.

15

Right?---I think, yes.

Had you ever met him?---No, I haven't.

20

Thank you. What was – in this conversation set out at paragraph 4, when she tells you about the attempted suicide, what was her mood?---She was quite open and very – Karen was very straightforward, very straight to the point. Wasn't emotional, it was just very matter-of-fact conversation.

25

All right. In any of your conversations you had between August '07 and May 2008, did you have any concerns that she was depressed?---I did. The only – only concern I actually had with Karen was this conversation here, when we were discussing her suicide attempts. I think – I don't think we touched on it again. I think the conversations we had after that were more – when my brother passed away, you know, talking about that and then just general chitchat, you know, just talk about family and just general conversation.

30

All right. Now, you mentioned there that – did she tell you she had more than one suicide attempts?---I – she – I think she just said suicide attempts and - - -

35

Right?---Yeah. Yeah.

Okay. I take it you didn't go into any specifics about it?---No, not at all.

Did you ask her why she had attempted suicide?---No, I don't believe so.

40

All right. Did she tell you voluntarily why she had done so?---No. No.

Did you discuss any of the other problems she was having in her life?---Not – no, not really. Not in detail with Karen. She was – no. No.

45

All right. Okay. Were you aware of any problems she was having at work with the Nambour Hospital?---Yes, I believe so.

All right. How did – what knowledge did you have?---I think it was just more that, you know, Karen had a lot of vision and a lot of, you know, she wanted a lot of things to happen and a lot of progression with the hospital and was finding it – there were a lot hurdles that she was coming across to make these things happen. It was  
5 sort of nothing more specific than that.

So she never spoke to you about any particular problems she had at Queensland Health?---No.

10 Or that she felt that her job was threatened?---No, I don't believe so.

Or she was concerned she'd lose her livelihood?---No. No.

All right. Thank you. You say that – in paragraph 5 – that you thought she was  
15 getting better. What made you think that?---I think – it was, you know, there wasn't anymore talk about the – the suicide attempts. As I said, that was the only conversation I ever had with her about that. Other conversations that I had with her after that time were, you know, talking about the children and fashion and my family and holidays and, you know, it was very light-hearted. She was very happy. It was  
20 lovely – you know, lovely conversations that I had with her and it was just – just general conversation that you'd have with a family member or a friend.

Thank you. You make a comment that you thought – you were concerned that she might go through with it – that is, another suicide attempt – because she was such a  
25 determined person?---Yes.

Did you ever speak with her about that? Your concerns?---Well, in the initial conversation I did. I said to her you can't do that when she was, you know – I said you can't do that. You've got the children and her family – a family that love her  
30 and that – that was about all, I think.

Yep?---Yep.

All right. Now, you saw her in the long weekend of May 2008 when she and her  
35 daughter Anna came down to Orange - -?---That's right.

- - - to visit friends and family?---Yes.

How many times did you see her on that whole weekend?---I think we just saw her  
40 that – the one day. The – just that – I think it might have been a Saturday.

Okay. Was that when they came out for a barbecue, perhaps?---Yes, that's right.

All right. Did you have much to do with Karen during that visit?---Yes. Yep, we –  
45 yes, I did.

You stated in paragraph 7 that she appeared happy. She had seen – said – had a new haircut and shoes and so forth. She appeared fine to you?---She was fantastic, yep.

5 Okay. Previous paragraph – paragraph 6 – you had a conversation with her where you asked her why she came back?---Yes.

10 All right. And she said that she needed to get Anna away for a few days. You say you were suspicious about her motive and thought she may have come home to say goodbye to everyone?---That's right.

Was that your thinking at that time?---Yes, it was. Yep.

15 Did you ever raise those concerns with Dr Mahlo?---No, I didn't. No. I think I spoke to my husband about that.

Did your husband share those view or?---I don't think so. No, I don't think so.

20 After you'd seen how happy she was at the barbecue, did you continue to have that view?---No, I didn't. I was quite confident – she was absolutely – she was so happy. She looked fantastic. She loved being around family. She even said just as – not long before they were leaving, she said to my mother that she'd love to move back to Orange and be around her family again and I think after that I was quite – I think I just sort of relaxed. I was confident that – I felt a lot better that she was, sort of, getting through it all. She was just so happy.

25 Can you recall at that barbecue if Dr Mahlo was drinking alcohol?---I don't think so. We don't drink so I don't – from memory, I don't think we would have had anything other than soft drink or water.

30 Okay?---No, I'm pretty sure that she wasn't.

Okay. At any time through your association with Dr Mahlo, were you aware she drank heavily?---I wouldn't say heavily. I knew that, you know, she did drink, but I wouldn't say it was heavily. I didn't ever see her drinking heavily.

35 Okay. Any of the phone conversations that you had that we've discussed, did she appear to be affected by alcohol?---No, not at all.

40 Can you recall the last time you spoke to Dr Mahlo? Was it at that barbecue?---I think it was, yes.

Thank you. And then you learnt on the afternoon of 28 May 2008 that she had died?---Yes.

45 Thank you. And then about an hour later you say that your husband's phone rang – mobile phone and you answered it, and it was John Hehir?---That's right.

You say you knew him as Karen's ex-boyfriend. How did you know he was her ex-boyfriend at that time?---Look, I think it -- Brett might have just said that they weren't together anymore. It was -- yeah -- just something like that.

5 Were you aware that Karen had been in a relationship with a man called John Hehir?---Yes, I was. Yeah.

Was that through your husband or through Karen?---It was -- Karen had spoken about John Hehir. Yeah, so possibly through Karen or Brett. I'm not sure how -- I -- I  
10 don't really know, actually. Karen had spoken about John Hehir and Brett had as well.

What had Karen said about John Hehir, can you recall?---Just -- I think -- you know, we didn't really ever discuss him much. I do recall her telling me that he was  
15 helping her daughter Anna with employment through his office and that, you know, he -- she was receiving training and he was giving her some work there. I don't think we really ever discussed him in any more detail than that.

All right. Thank you. Now, you had never spoken to the man before?---Never.

20 Now, you set out in some detail the conversation in paragraph 9 of your affidavit?---Yes.

Were they taken from the notes of the conversation that you took afterwards?---Yes.

25 All right. Thank you. And when did you make those notes?---I think only an hour or two after I had the conversation with him.

Thank you. And one of the things that you say John Hehir told you was asking you,  
30 are you aware that he wasn't living with Karen?---Yes.

And that he had to get out because she was changing him and starting to bring him down?---Yes.

35 Thank you. What was his mood like during that conversation? What was his demeanour?---He was highly emotional. He was crying. His voice was going from a deep tone to a high pitch and back to a deep tone and he was very -- it was a very -- an emotional conversation.

40 Thank you. And one of the things he told you was that he thought that Karen had a second will in which your husband, Brett, was the executor - - -?---That's right.

- - - but that he hadn't seen it?---That's right. Yes.

45 Thank you. Yes, I have nothing further, thank you.

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Lewis.



MR LEWIS: Thank you, your Honour.

**EXAMINATION BY MR LEWIS**

**[10.29 am]**

5

MR LEWIS: Just in relation to the day that Karen and Anna came to the barbeque  
--?---Yes.

10 --- at your house. And that was when you said you were suspicious about her  
coming and that you thought she may have been coming home to say  
goodbye?---Yes.

15 And you noticed she had a new hairstyle and her hair previously had always been  
shoulder length or thereabouts, hadn't it --?---Yes.

--- and now it was short. Did you ask her about that?---I didn't -- I don't think I  
asked her about it. I commented on it.

20 Did you -- were you aware or did you become aware as to how her hair became  
short?---No, I don't believe so.

25 All right. So you didn't know at that stage that she had cut her hair herself with  
scissors which subsequently led to her having an admission to hospital?---No, I  
wasn't aware of that.

All right. And you say that she was wearing some new boots?---Yes, that's right.

30 So generally she was dressed nicely and you say her skin looked good?---Yeah, she  
did -- she looked beautiful.

Okay?---Yep.

35 Now you -- during the period of time of some months before Karen left Orange, there  
had been an estrangement between her and her brother, your husband?---Yes.

And that continued for some time up to shortly before her death?---Yes, I believe so.

40 So the contact you would have had with her, I think you've given evidence there  
might have been what -- half a dozen phone calls in a period of almost a year?---Yes.

You accept that?---Yes.

45 Right. So your contact with her was quite sporadic?---Yes, it was. Yep.

All right. Was there any indication to you that the level of her alcohol consumption  
had increased when she was in Brisbane?---No.

Or on the Sunshine Coast?---No.

Right. But again, she – did she – she didn't talk to you about her problems at Nambour Hospital?---No, she didn't. No.

5

And being suspended and all of those things. She didn't talk about those things with you?---She didn't talk to me about that. No.

Okay. Yes. Thank you.?---Thank you.

10

MR CHOWDHURY: There's no re-examination.

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you, Mrs Mahlo for assisting us today. You are excused.

15

WITNESS: Thank you.

**WITNESS EXCUSED**

**[10.32 am]**

20

MR CHOWDHURY: I call John Mahlo.

D/STATE CORONER: So this gentleman may be a little deaf?

25

MR CHOWDHURY: Yes.

D/STATE CORONER: Right.

30

**JOHN WALTER MAHLO, SWORN**

**[10.33 am]**

**EXAMINATION-IN-CHIEF BY MR CHOWDHURY**

35

D/STATE CORONER: I'll hand you over to Mr Chowdhury.

MR CHOWDHURY: Thank you.

40

Sir, is your full name John Walter Mahlo?---Correct.

Sir, you provided an affidavit in respect of civil proceedings in the Supreme Court of Queensland?---Yes.

45

Just have a look at that document there, sir. Do you recognise that as your affidavit?---That seems to be right. Yes.

Thank you. And you did a further affidavit sworn on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2009?---Which is that – the what?

There should be a second affidavit there?---The second one. I haven't seen that one.

5

It's just two pages?---Yeah, I recognise that. Yes.

Thank you. Sir, I want to ask about your knowledge of your daughter's depression. Are you aware that she suffered from depression, certainly in the months leading up to her death?---Correct.

10

All right. When was the first time you became aware that she was suffering from depression?---Only a day or two before I went up – my son organised me to go up and stay with her for a week. Only just a few days before.

15

All right. Was that – your son contacted you and said that your daughter wanted you to come up and stay with her. Is that correct?---Correct.

All right. Do you recall what your son explained to you about why?---No, other than she was – she was in a stressed situation and she needed family support. Not much other than that.

20

Did you have a good relationship with your daughter?---Sure. For sure.

25

Was she someone who confided in you?---I think so. Yes.

Did you – when she moved to Queensland to work, did you continue to have regular contact with your daughter?---Not regular, no.

30

All right. Would you occasionally speak on the telephone?---Say again?

Would you occasionally speak on the - - -?---Yeah. On the telephone, yes. Yes, as [indistinct]. Yes. Yes. No, she did come back to Orange once or twice in that period.

35

Yes?---Yes.

Would you get together for Christmas – that sort of thing?---Say again.

40

Would you get together – would the family get together for Christmas?---Only when she came up for a period – it mightn't have been Christmas but there was times she came up for a week or two and the family got together, for sure. Yes, correct.

Thank you. You had travelled on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2008 and left on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2008?---Say again?

45

Yes. You travelled to Queensland on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May - - -?---Yeah. Correct.

--- and you flew back – a friend had a plane at Archerfield?---That's right. Yep.  
On the Monday.

5 Yes, on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Now, in your affidavit – if you look at your first one and at  
paragraph 13 you set out a conversation on the Thursday morning, so some days after  
you arrive. That's paragraph 13?---Yeah, I follow that. Yes.

10 Okay. So some days after you had been there, she asked, do you know why you're  
up here and you said not really and then she said I attempted to take my own life a  
few weeks ago?---That's correct – exactly what I've written here.

Now that was the first time you had heard that?---I'd say so. Yes. Yes.

15 Okay. Because you then go on to say that you were stunned that she had told you  
that?---Say again?

Well, you go on to say that you were stunned by that revelation?---That's right. Yes.  
That's correct.

20 You hadn't been aware of that beforehand?---No. That's correct. I hadn't been, no.

Okay. All right. Thank you. At paragraph 12 there is a discussion about a BMU  
motorbike – BMW, I should say?---Correct.

25 Thank you. And she said that she had bought it with John?---Yes. Correct.

Had you met John Hehir at all before that?---Only once for a few moments when he  
came up to Orange with my daughter a year or so before.

30 Had you ever spoken to him?---No, other than acknowledging when I was introduced  
to him. That was all.

Right?---Not – not one other word. Just a pleased to meet you.

35 Thank you. During that week you were staying with your daughter, did you ever see  
this man John come to the house?---No, not at all.

All right?---Hadn't seen him at all.

40 Right?---No.

And he certainly wasn't living there?---No. No.

And, to your knowledge, did Karen have any contact with him?---Say again?

45 To your knowledge in that week you were staying with your daughter, did she have  
contact with John Hehir?---No, not to my knowledge. No. No.

All right. Did you have contact with your grandchildren during that week?---Yes.  
Yes.

Both Anna and Ben?---Both, yes.

5

All right. And did they come to the house?---Yes, one night we had a meal there and  
– but Anna regularly came along nearly every night.

Right. Okay. And Ben – you had one dinner with him. Is that correct?---Yes.  
10 That's correct. Yes.

All right. Thank you. What was your daughter's mood during that week? Are you  
able to tell us?---I think she wanted to feel old times again, you know. The way  
things were, you know, and I presume that's the reason I went up there, you know –  
15 to try and bring that situation – the way things used to be. That's about all I could  
say.

All right. Did she appear to be sad or down?---No. No. No. Very normal. Very  
normal, I thought.

20

All right. Can you recall if she was drinking alcohol during the week that you were  
there?---Say again? Drinking - - -

Was she drinking alcohol during that week when you were there?---I didn't see any –  
25 not at all. None.

Did you drink alcohol?---I don't – I don't drink normally. No.

Right. During that week, did you see if your daughter had a glass of wine or  
30 anything like that?---No, I didn't come across that at all. No. I don't recall any  
situation – not even that night at the meal. I don't – I don't recall anybody drinking  
alcohol but couldn't have been.

All right. Well, you never saw her drinking any alcohol?---Say again?

35

You never saw your daughter drinking any alcohol at all during that week?---No.  
Not to my memory. No. Absolutely right.

Did you ever see her affected by alcohol?---No. Not even, no. No.

40

Were you aware that your daughter had – did drink?---I think that I – she had the  
attitude that most people drink to some level.

Yes?---And why would she be different from anybody else.

45

I'm asking you did you know whether in fact she did drink alcohol through all the  
time - - -?---Well, I never – I can't say I ever saw her drink alcohol. I never seen her

drink alcohol but she could have done. But I never – I cannot recall actually ever seeing her drink alcohol.

And that includes when she was living in Orange?---Yep. Yep.

5

All right. Are you aware that your daughter went away to study medicine at the University of Queensland?---Correct.

10 All right. When – after she became 18, are you aware if she drank alcohol then?---I never observed it, no. And our family was a non-drinking family.

Right?---Lock, stock and barrel in [indistinct] for that matter.

15 All right. At any stage in your daughter's life had you seen her affected by alcohol?---Never.

20 All right. Thank you. When she told you that she had attempted to take her life, did you have any discussion with her about treatment she was getting?---The only thing that she – she had a psychiatrist who was helping her and she invited me to come down – and I did – with her to that psychiatrist's premises that morning and we had an hour, I suppose, discussion with the psychiatrist while she was there. I was with her in the room with the psychiatrist.

25 All right. Okay. So you were aware she was seeing a psychiatrist?---Correct.

All right. Can you recall if she was taking any medication during that week? Did you see here with medicine?---No, I have no recall of that. No.

30 Did she discuss any difficulties she was having at work with you?---Not greatly, except that she was strong-minded and I did talk to her about the fact that the – I can't recall just before – when it was – about hospitals have general managers - - -

35 Yeah?--- - - and doctors have responsibilities, and you've got to make sure that the two don't clash.

Right. Did she tell you she'd been suspended from work?---Yes, yes.

40 Did she tell you how that affected her?---Only that she'd been looking for a new position, and this psychiatrist had three positions in the public health that were available, and she should be able to pick one that suited her most.

Right?---That all was said, yes.

45 Were you present when the psychiatrist said that?---Say again?

Were you present when the psychiatrist said that?---Yeah, right there in front of me.

Said that there were jobs available - - -?---Yeah.

5       - - - that Dr Mahlo could do?---Yeah, she – and she should pick one that was sort of convenient or were her – desirable or the closest where she lived and that sort of thing.

All right?---And she sort of thought one of those three positions would be – would be – would be available to her, and she should pursue whichever one she wanted.

10      Right. Was he suggesting that there were types of jobs that she could do – he wasn't actually offering her a job, was he?---No, he was – he – he said that there was about three positions that he had notification of - - -

15      Right ?--- - - - that required doctors to take up these positions.

Right?---Now, he didn't tell me what they were or – just that there were three and that she should sort it – sort them out.

20      Okay. Now, apart from the conversation over the BMW motorbike, did she talk about John Hehir at all during the week you were there?---Only that they bought the motorbike between them, and I recall she was going to some way dispose of the motorbike altogether or back to him.

25      Right. And you made a comment to her that the bike was worth about \$30,000?---Correct.

Thank you. And she said that they had paid – she and John Hehir had paid half each?---That's correct.

30      All right. So you talk about registration of the motorbike - - -?---No.

- - - to your knowledge?---No.

35      Okay. Now, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May 2008, if you look at paragraph 14, you talk about a conversation where she says she was making a new will?---Yeah.

40      All right. Did that surprise you? That she was talking about a will with you?---No, I wasn't surprised. Well, I – the fact that she was going to make a new will was surprising, because it indicated she had one she wasn't happy with.

Right. Did she explain to you why she was making a new will?---Going back on memory, all she said was there were things in the will that I'm not – no longer happy with, and I'm going to write a new will.

45      All right. Now, it appears that you didn't want to talk to her about that?---That's – I was reserved [indistinct] for sure.

Did you take the position that it wasn't really your business?---No, I didn't say it wasn't my business. I – I wasn't there to talk about wills. I was there to comfort her.

5 All right. Thank you. You went up because your son Brett had told you that Karen was very stressed?---Yeah, correct.

Was she stressed? Did she appear stressed during the week you were there?---No, not at all.

10 Okay?---Very normal.

All right?---No, we went on tours and - - -

15 Okay. Did you notice her crying at all or appearing sad at any time?---Not at all. Not at all. Not at all.

20 When you left her – what was her state when you left her? Were you happy that she was fine?---Drove me out to the Aerodrome and I introduced her to the pilot, a friend of mine, and just normal goodbye, see you again. Nothing more.

Did she talk about what her plans for the future were at any time during the week?---No, negative.

25 Okay. Were you with your daughter for most of that week you were there?---Yes, correct.

She wasn't working. Was she - - -?---No.

30 She was at the house most of the time?---All the time, yes.

Okay. Was she pursuing other interests that you could see?---Say again?

Was she pursuing any other interests, like, was she going to the beach - - -?---Not that - - -

35 Is she - - -?---Not that she spoke to me about, no.

No, all right. Thank you. You did make a reference that she was a keen gardener?---Yep, correct.

40 So she was working in the garden during that week?---Yeah – yes.

Did you have any conversations with your grandchildren, Anna and Ben, about their mother?---No.

45 Neither of them - - -?---Not at all, no.



- - - expressed any concern to you about their mother?---No, not at all [indistinct].

To your knowledge, were they aware that Karen had tried to commit suicide?---Yes,  
only – not from them, but Karen said to me when – when she – when she came –  
5 came – became conscious – conscious - - -

Did you just need a bit of time, sir? You've got some water there, sir.

10 D/STATE CORONER: It's very difficult, Mr Mahlo. We appreciate that it's very  
difficult and it's hard for you to come into this situation with strangers and talk about  
very personal things. We appreciate that that's very difficult for you?---But what  
I'm – what I'm trying to say is that the only thing she mentioned at that time was  
when she came conscious in the hospital [indistinct] Ben was standing there looking  
at her.

15 MR CHOWDHURY: Okay.

D/STATE CORONER: Yes?---And that – and that terrible sensation for her.

20 MR CHOWDHURY: Okay?---Sorry, but I - - -

D/STATE CORONER: No, no.

25 MR CHOWDHURY: That's all right.

D/STATE CORONER: I appreciate the position and how hard it is for you to  
remember these things and have to go through them again?---I remember – I  
remember it so clearly.

30 Yes.

MR CHOWDHURY: All right. That's something your daughter said to  
you?---Sorry, again?

35 That's what your daughter said to you?---She said to me – that's what she said to me,  
yes. She said - - -

40 Yeah?--- - - - when I became – and I'm better now – when she – when she became  
conscious in the hospital and she saw her son standing there and he just looked at –  
looked at her.

Yeah?---You know, why. Why.

45 Now, my question to you was did you have any conversation with either Anna or  
Ben that week where they expressed concern about their mother that she was going  
downhill?---No conversation at all, no. Not one – not one word.

All right. Thank you. Did you have any contact with her by telephone after you left Queensland?---Did I have any contact with her after I left Brisbane?

Yes?---No, no contact at all. Not to me, no.

5

Thank you. Yes, I have nothing further, your Honour.

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you.

10 MR LEWIS: I have no questions.

D/STATE CORONER: All right. Thank you very much, Mr Mahlo, for coming and helping us with this inquest today. Thank you very much?---I knew it was my duty.

15

Thank you?---Thank you.

**WITNESS EXCUSED**

**[10.50 am]**

20

MR CHOWDHURY: I might just check to see if Dr Ruhno is here.

D/STATE CORONER: Yes, thank you.

25

MR CHOWDHURY: I'm just wondering whether we should take a break, anyway.

D/STATE CORONER: Yes, thank you. So how – when would you suggest you'd like to return?

30

MR CHOWDHURY: 11 o'clock.

D/STATE CORONER: 11 o'clock. Thank you.

35

**ADJOURNED**

**[10.51 am]**

40

**RESUMED**

**[11.31 am]**

D/STATE CORONER: Please be seated.

MR CHOWDHURY: Thank you. I understand Ms Went is in the witness box.

45

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you.

VERONICA MARGARET WENT, SWORN

[11.31 am]

EXAMINATION-IN-CHIEF BY MR CHOWDHURY

5

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you.

MR CHOWDHURY: Thank you.

10

Madam, is your full name Veronica Margaret Went?---Yes, that's true.

15

Ms Went, you gave a statement to police and there should be a copy there in front of you. Two statements. Just have a look to make sure that you recognise these as your statement?---Yeah.

20

I just want to ask you a few questions about your first statement. Did you have much to do with Karen Mahlo as a client of the business you worked at?---Yeah, I had a lot to do with her. Yes.

25

All right. From what time? When was the first time you met Dr Mahlo? Before – we take her death as the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2008. How long before that?---It probably would have been about, I guess, two years before – I mean, it's hard to say but, yeah, approximately two years.

30

All right. And was your contact with Dr Mahlo purely in respect of her being a client in the business?---No, I had, like – we sort of, like, sort of was a bit – like friends with her as well. Like I was sort of a bit of both. Yeah.

Okay. You say you were friends with her. What do you mean by that?---Like we went to a 50<sup>th</sup> and – you know, like, sort of hung out and went to different things like that sort of thing so – not on a big – you know what I mean. Here and there.

35

All right. Okay. Were you particularly close to her?---Probably not as a – it's hard to say. Not sort of fully like as a close friend or anything but just more of a – on a casual basis if you know what I mean.

40

All right. Okay. Did you, yourself, have any particular knowledge that Dr Mahlo was suffering from depression?---Only just what John had told me. I hadn't seen it firsthand at all. No.

45

All right. When did you become aware that John Hehir was in a relationship with Dr Mahlo?---He told me in the office one day that he was seeing her and that's the first time I [indistinct] he used to just disappear from the office and I wasn't sure what he was doing and then he sort of came and said that he was in a relationship with her.

Right. Can I just ask you to slow down a bit?---Sorry.

I know it is a bit nerve-wracking. When was it before Dr Mahlo's death that John Hehir told you that he was in a relationship with Dr Mahlo?---That would have been probably soon after they had started the relationship. Probably within a year and a half, I guess.

5

A year and a half before her death?---Yes.

Okay. Did you ever socialise with John Hehir and Karen Mahlo?---Only on, like, work occasions. We went -- you know, at Christmas parties and stuff like that.

10

Right?---And as I said, her 50<sup>th</sup> -- we went to her 50<sup>th</sup> as well. That's what happened.

All right. Did you, at any stage, become aware that Dr Mahlo and John Hehir had separated? They'd broken up?---Yes. Yes.

15

How did you become aware of that?---John Hehir told me that he split up with her and he was looking for a place to stay.

Can you recall when he said that?---It would have been -- just trying to think. Probably within the second year. Like, just not long after. Like, she -- you know, like when she died. It was probably -- I don't know -- two or three months before that, I think.

20

Right?---I'm -- yeah.

25

Well, we know she died on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2008 and we know we're going back some years but you think it was a couple of months before then?---Yeah, I'm sure it was. Yeah. It was a fair -- yeah, it was sort of a bit of a gap between then and there, you know.

30

All right?---Hard to put a figure on it.

You had to -- --?---Hard to sort of judge -- --

35 Yes. Put a figure on it?---It has been a while. Yeah.

And you say that Mr Hehir was looking for somewhere else to live?---Yes, that's true. Yes.

40 All right. Were you aware if he found somewhere else to live?---Yes. He found a flat or something in Cotton Tree.

All right. Thank you. Now, could I take your statement -- page 7 and the first paragraph on page 7?---Yep.

45

Your first sentence: "Not long after Karen and John split, I know that Karen was redoing her will"?---Yes.

How did you know that?---Because John was in the office and he was working out, like, what she had in financial – you know, home, property and that sort of stuff and he said that he was working that out for Karen so – and that she was redoing it.

5 So John Hehir told you that Karen Mahlo was redoing her will?---Yes.

All right. Did – were you aware that there was a will in which John Hehir was executor?---Yes.

10 And also beneficiary of the house?---Yes.

All right. How did you become aware of that?---Because John used to do, like, the client's wills and stuff in the office and that sort of thing and we were all – like, you know, he had a template which they did it on and I think I might have even witnessed her will – like, when she did her will.

15 All right. Okay. Can you recall if there was any discussion with John Hehir about the changes Dr Mahlo wanted to make to her will?---The – when she was redoing it?

20 Yes?---No, I didn't have anything to do with that. I just know that he was sort of working in his computer with the workings of what she had and the debt structure and that sort of thing.

All right. Thank you. You never saw a changed will?---No.

25 Thank you. Had you had any contact with Dr Mahlo in the weeks before she died?---I'm just trying to think. Yes, I would because I was still sort of – she was still a client with investment properties and stuff like that that we were doing and then the day before she died, John asked me to drop him around because he was picking up a motorbike or something that they jointly owned and Karen – I saw her.

30 Karen when she came home and I just said hello to her and that was the last I saw of her.

35 All right. Okay. Did you have much of a conversation with her about that?---No, I – she just pulled up and I said hi, how you going? And, you know – and she said good and then I just sort of left because I knew that, you know, they were sort of split up and I just didn't want to be - - -

40 All right. Do you know anything about the motorbike? Did John Hehir say anything to you about who owned the motorbike?---Well, it was in Karen's name but he said that they'd both bought it. That was prior to that and then that Karen was going to sign it over to him or something that day or – because he had the paperwork or something there so he – that's why he asked me to drop him around there to pick it up.

45 All right?---That's all I know on that one.

And that was the day before you learnt that Dr Mahlo died?---Yeah. Well, she died that morning or something. Like, the morning – yeah.

5 Did you hear any conversation between John Hehir and Dr Mahlo?---No. Because I left sort of basically after I said hello to Karen and I just got in the car and left. No.

Right. All right. And you didn't have any contact with John Hehir after that until you got a phone call that next morning, is that correct?---From the police. Yeah. Yes.

10 Right. Now, it was – the police had contacted your home phone, wanting you to go to the house?---Yes, that's right.

15 All right. Did you speak to the police about that?---Only on the phone when they just told me – and they said can you come to Karen's place because – and they just asked me to come there for John or something [indistinct]

All right. They wanted you to come for John Hehir?---Yes. Yes.

20 All right. Thank you. And then, at page 7 – the last two paragraphs of page 7, you then detail seeing John outside the house?---Yes, that's true.

All right. And then you talk about John wanting to go inside the house because he said he was cold?---Yes.

25 All right. And you went into the lounge room?---Yes. That's right.

I take it there were a lot of police there, were there?---At the – like, there was a lot of police around and stuff like that.

30 Yes?---And then he – well, they directed him to go in there and said to sit down and one of them said don't touch anything – just sit still and don't touch anything and, yeah, he just grabbed a glass and did that and [indistinct]

35 All right. And you got into trouble from the police officer?---Yes. Yeah, she was very angry because she specifically said not to touch anything and just sit there, you know, and then I think – then they put us outside on the – near the pool area or something after that.

40 Okay. You didn't see him touch anything else in the house?---I didn't notice it, no. That was just the one thing that I did, you know, like specifically notice. I suppose because we were told – you know, like it was – you just wouldn't touch anything, that's all.

45 Okay. And then, later, you drove John Hehir down to the police station?---Yes [indistinct]

And he was very upset?---Well, he acted like he was in a way which – you know, was just acting weird, really.

5 You said he was acting weird. What did you mean by “weird”?---Just that he’s a very controlled person and – I mean, not that you’d know, you know, how people react in these sort of cases but he just was acting strange and over the top if you – I don’t know. If you know – like, he’s a very controlled person and like a very stable – like, in these – and it was just – yeah. I just felt it was weird, put it that way. I just don’t know.

10 All right. I want to ask you about a conversation you had with him the following day – so that’s the 29<sup>th</sup> of May when you went to work and Mr Hehir was in his office. You said you went in and he kept saying, “I killed her. I killed her”?---Yes, which I ---

15 How many times did he say that?---Probably two or three times. Just – I can’t remember, like, how many he said but he just kept saying it.

20 And was there anyone else present when he said that?---No. Because I had just come to work and I was just sort of walking by and he was sort of crying and then he [indistinct] I killed her, I killed her, I killed her and I thought how can you do that? Because I – at the time, I didn’t realise how she had been killed. Like, you know, I didn’t know.

25 All right. Well, according to your statement, you say, “How could you have killed her? Don’t be stupid”?---Yes.

Right. And you said that you thought she had taken an overdose?---Yes.

30 You said you didn’t find out until a couple of days later when John Hehir told you that Karen had stabbed herself in the chest?---Yes. Yeah.

35 All right. Did he say anything about that in that later conversation?---I’m just trying to think. I just – I think what he said was that she’d stabbed herself and then, like, that he was the one that found her and stuff like that in the early hours of the morning which I thought was a bit strange that he was there because he wasn’t, you know, like, in a relationship with her and he said that he wasn’t ever going to answer any of her phone calls ever again and that sort of thing so it was just a bit – I don’t know. Just one of those - - -

40 Sorry, he had said something about he was never going to answer any of her phone calls?---Yeah, when she rang him, like, through the night or anything like that. He wasn’t going to answer any phone calls from her again and - - -

45 That was before her - - -?---Before – yes. Yes. So - - -

Right. Okay. Did he tell you anything else about the morning? About how he found her? Did he say why he'd gone over?---I just can't remember, sorry. Yeah.

5 All right. Okay. Did he talk about a computer or anything like that to your knowledge?---Yeah, well he -- he said that he went back to the house and snuck in there and got something to do with a computer and I thought that was strange so that's all I know of that one. Like, he actually got in there and got something.

10 Right. Well, I'll ask you about that. This in your fourth paragraph on page 9 of your statement -- you say that, "Sometime later, John told me he'd gone back to Karen's house, broken in and had to get something from the downstairs section of the house"?---Yes.

15 Firstly, can you recall when that conversation was?---Sorry, I'll just try and think.

Well, if you take the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2008 as the day you went to Dr Mahlo's house to comfort John - - -?---

20 - - - and you learned that she was dead, how long after that?---Maybe a couple of days or so after. I'm -- I just -- yeah. It's hard to remember sort of like that dates and stuff but it wouldn't have been too long after, I wouldn't think.

25 All right. Where were you when you had this conversation?---It would be in the office, yes.

Was anyone else present?---Not that I recall. I don't -- couldn't tell you that. No.

30 Did you ask him what it was that he had broken in to take?---I might have done it. I just can't vaguely remember exactly what I said. I would've probably asked him.

35 Well, you say in your statement that, "I'm pretty sure it had something to do with a computer"?---Because he did say that he was sort of -- there was something -- there was a computer that he left there and that was his and I just generally thought that it might have been, you know, like, something that he'd had with her. You know, like a computer or something like that he's left there or I don't really know. I didn't really sort of think at the time.

40 Well, doing the best you can, what were the exact words he said about what he took?---He said it was something that he'd left near the -- on the computer or in the computer that he had to pick up. I -- you know, that's -- I just -- yeah. Sorry, that's the best I can do.

You'll just have to keep your voice up, I'm sorry?---Sorry.

45 All right. Well, did you say anything to him about that?---I just said -- I probably would have just said, well, why would you have to break in if it was yours? You can just go and ask for it back. I mean, that's what I would have said to him. You know,



like, if it's his then he should – you know, he would have just had to go and ask for it and get it back, I guess, you know.

Well, I'm not interested in what you would have said?---Mmm.

5

Can you recall what you actually did say to him?---No, I can't.

Right. Did he say how he broke in?---No, I didn't ask. No.

10 All right. Did that surprise you that he'd broken in?---Yes.

Did you report this to anyone?---I can't remember if I had spoken to anyone – well, I didn't really – because it was all going through and I didn't even know anything – like that any of the background was happening, if you know what I mean. I just –  
15 yeah. Not until I actually gave the evidence with Jodie that I – that I knew all this was happening in the background.

Well, you gave your statement to Detective Allan on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2010?---Yes. That's right.

20

So two years later?---Mmm.

Had you reported that to the police that John Hehir had broken into a house and taken something?---No.

25

All right. Is there any reason why you didn't do that?---I didn't really think at the time, you know, that it would – I just thought it was just sort of like a thing between everyone at the time – you know, the kids and that sort of thing. I didn't really –  
30 yeah, I don't know. I didn't sort of think about it if – I don't know.

30

All right. Was there any other conversation you had with him about that?---No. Not that I can recall.

All right. Did John Hehir ever talk to you about Karen's will after her death?---The one that she – the – the one that she was doing or the one that she was - - -

35

The one she was doing?---The one that she doing? Only just that part back there – what he was doing on the computer is the only part that I – that he said anything about it.

40

That's before Karen's death?---Yep. Yes.

All right. Did you become aware that there was litigation? There was a court action between the children and John Hehir over the will?---Yes. When it sort of become –  
45 like, later on, after Karen had died, they – with regards to the wake and all that and that stuff like that, he was very domineering over that and wanted to take control of it and then – because the kids were doing things – you know, like, the wake for their

5 mum and that sort of thing and he was very angry about that because he liked to control everything and then he just said, well, I'm the executor. I can just spend their money and it won't – you know, I don't really care. That sort of thing and then I knew it was getting really, you know, serious and I said to him, like, you know, really it – just, you know, it's the kids' property and stuff. You really should just let them have it.

10 All right. Did he make any comments about that?---He just said, well, I'm not going to. I'm going to fight it and just use the money that's in there so that sort of thing.

15 All right. If you look at the top of page 10 of your statement, you seem to suggest that his decision to fight the will was arising from issues of the funeral?---Yeah, he got very angry about that because the kids didn't want him to be there and then they didn't want him to speak and then he just pushed his way in and decided that he was going to speak anyway and when he spoke, the kids walked out which I thought very sad.

20 All right. Were you with John Hehir after the funeral? Were you together?---Yes. I went down – him and – I've got a mental blank.

Just try - - -?---One of Karen's friends. We went down – like, he came – like, came to the office with John and took us out to a café and yeah. That's [indistinct]

25 Right. Okay?---Grant Stone. Sorry, that's his name.

What was it? Grant - - -?---Grant Stone.

Grant Stone?---Mmm.

30 A man?---Yes.

Okay. All right. Okay. To your knowledge, in the days after the funeral, did you ever see John Hehir in company with a blonde woman?---Not at the – not straight after, no.

35 All right. You were aware, some time later, that he had a new girlfriend? Jill?---Yes. It was, like, two months after Karen had died, which was very upsetting. Yep.

40 Right. What – upsetting to you?---Oh just – yes. Because of all the – you know, the – after Karen had died, when he was – you know, crying and carrying on and was so upset about it and then, two months later, he had somebody else sort of thing. Not that it – you know, I just – yeah.

45 That was just your personal view of it?---Yeah, it's just my – yeah. Personal view.

All right. Thank you. Yes, I have nothing further.

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Lewis.

**EXAMINATION BY MR LEWIS**

**[11.51 am]**

5

MR LEWIS: Thank you, your Honour.

The day you went for coffee with Mr Stone - - -?---Yes.

10

- - - was, in fact, the day after Dr Mahlo died, wasn't it?---Yes. Yes.

So it wasn't after the funeral; it was after the death?---Oh sorry, yeah. I meant --  
yeah. Sorry.

15

And do you remember on that day that Mr Hehir had had a fall on the steps outside at  
the office and had hurt his knee?---I can't remember that, no, sorry.

20

And was limping around?---Yeah, I don't remember it but he could have done it at  
the time. Yeah.

25

Okay. And, indeed, when Mr Hehir was speaking to you about the -- Karen redoing  
her will, he was doing up new financials?---Yeah, what he was doing was just doing  
a spreadsheet on what she got and what she had and, you know, what the value of it  
is and I -- he just said he was doing it for Karen because she wanted to change her  
will.

Because she wanted to change her will?---Yes. Yes.

30

And he didn't say this in any sort of angry way?---No.

35

Just as a matter of fact and that was obviously after their relationship had  
ended?---Yeah, and I thought, well, that's fair enough. Yeah. Because he was her  
financial advisor anyway and I thought, well, he would know more about, you know,  
what she's got and stuff like that because she didn't really care.

Now, the day before Dr Mahlo died is the day you dropped Mr Hehir over to get the  
motorbike?---Yes. That's right.

40

And you say he let himself in through the garage using a key?---Yes.

Was it a -- what sort of garage door was it? Was it a big garage roller door or was  
there a side door to the garage or - - -?---I cannot even tell you that, no. I've only  
ever sort of seen it once and I didn't really take much notice.

45

Well, was it a key or was it a pass card?---Well, I didn't -- I don't know. He just had  
-- he just opened it up when I was at the car so I don't - - -

Could you even tell if it was locked?---No, I couldn't tell you that. No.

So it may not have even been locked?---It might. I don't know. Yeah, I can't really tell you.

5

But in -- to your mind, though, he had a key to access the premises?---Yes.

Now, your daughter used to work for Mr Hehir as well?---Yes, that's true.

10 And how long after these incidents occurred did you leave the employ of FAA Services?---After Karen died? About two years after, I think. Yeah.

So some time in 2010?---Mmm.

15 By that stage, your daughter had left the employment of Mr Hehir?---Yes, that's right.

And had set up her own business?---Yes, that's true.

20 Essentially in competition with Mr Hehir's business?---No, not really. No.

Well, isn't it a financial services business your daughter set up?---Yeah, but John did more salary -- like financial salary packaging and sort of property stuff and that sort of stuff. Yeah.

25

But your daughter was working under John's direction as the mortgage broker for FAA?---At the time when she was working there, yeah.

30 And then she went up on her own to do the same work for herself?---Yes. Yes, that's true.

35 And didn't you come to leave because you were confronted about some referrals to her that took away commission from FAA?---That was because, at the time when we were doing it, the guy that -- the finance guy at the -- that was there, he didn't get the finance for it and that's the only reason for that, which I told John about that -- yeah.

No, but isn't that -- the reason you left is that work had gone to your daughter that should have gone to FAA?---That's not why I left. No. Not the reason for it.

40 Right. It was -- well, did not that accusation get put to you about the time you left?---Yes. It was around the same time. Yes.

Right. But you say it wasn't the catalyst for you leaving?---No.

45 Okay. And then this statement that you say that Mr Hehir made about going back later and breaking into the house -- you didn't think to tell anybody about that until

you gave your statement?---Well, I didn't know that all the investigations were going on so I didn't, like, even think about it, really.

5 Okay?---It wasn't until Jodie rang me and said that they were investigating that I knew anything about – anything about it.

10 All right. And you can't remember what it was but you say you're pretty sure it had something to do with the computer?---Yes, because he said something about a computer but I didn't know what it was or anything like that.

So, in fact, any mention of the computer might have been incidental to what it is he went back to get?---Yeah, exactly. I mean, I can't sort of verify what it was or anything like that. Yes.

15 So what he went back to get – even on what you say he said – may not have had anything to do with a computer?---Yeah, I mean, it could possibly be that.

Now, did he definitely use the words “broken in”?---Yes.

20 Because – didn't you think he had a key still?---Well, I thought he might have given it back to Karen when he saw her on the Tuesday night, when they were finalising all their stuff together so - - -

25 I see. And if I was to say – suggest to you that, in fact, Mr Hehir didn't meet Jill Hays until around the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August of that year, would that be right?---Well, it would be July, August. That's two months after – yeah. Around July, August.

30 So it could be as late as late August?---No, well, it was pretty soon after so it would have been around the two months that I remember.

But you certainly didn't see him in company shortly after with any blonde women?---Well, he didn't bring anybody to the office and – yeah.

35 No?---And she lived in Brisbane anyway so - - -

Yes. Thank you.

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you.

40 MR CHOWDHURY: There's no re-examination, thank you.

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you for attending today and providing your assistance. You are excused?---Thank you.

45 **WITNESS EXCUSED**

**[11.58 am]**

MR CHOWDHURY: Your Honour, we have [indistinct] Dr Ruhno to call at 12.15 from New South Wales. I just think we just have to have a break until then.

5 D/STATE CORONER: Yes. Yes. Certainly. And that's -- that's setting up -- is it video or phone?

MR CHOWDHURY: Telephone.

10 D/STATE CORONER: Telephone. Yep.

MR CHOWDHURY: And that'll be the last witness so we'll probably be finished by lunch.

15 D/STATE CORONER: Thank you.

MR CHOWDHURY: Thank you.

20 **ADJOURNED** [11.58 am]

**RESUMED** [12.14 pm]

25 D/STATE CORONER: Please be seated. Dr Ruhno, can you hear me?

DR RUHNO: Yes, I can, your Honour.

30 **CONDUCTED VIA TELEPHONE CONFERENCE**

**JENNIFER CHRISTINE RUHNO, AFFIRMED** [12.14 pm]

35 **EXAMINATION-IN-CHIEF BY MR CHOWDHURY**

40 D/STATE CORONER: Thank you. I'll hand you over to Mr Chowdhury and then anyone else that speaks will introduce themselves afterwards. Thank you?---Thank you.

MR CHOWDHURY: Dr Ruhno, my name is Craig Chowdhury, counsel assisting. Can you hear me?---Yes, I can. Thank you.

45 All right. Your full name is Jennifer Christine Ruhno?---That's correct.

And you're a medical practitioner registered to practice in the state of New South Wales?---That's right.

5 All right. Thank you. I just want to ask you some questions about your friendship with Dr Mahlo and in particular about your knowledge of her mental health, okay?---Yes.

10 In the -- first of all, I should say you did an affidavit for lawyers representing the family of Dr Mahlo in respect of civil proceedings in the Supreme Court of Queensland?---That's correct.

Do you have a copy of your affidavit with you?---I do.

15 Your Honour, for the record, that's exhibit B11.

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you.

20 MR CHOWDHURY: You talk about in 1991 you had a conversation with Dr Mahlo where she felt like she was having a heart attack?---Yes.

And you recognised that as similar to a panic attack and helped her in how to deal with those symptoms, correct?---Yes, that's right.

25 All right. Now, you said yourself that you had experience with depression and anxiety so you were -- been able to help Dr Mahlo because of your own experience?---Yes, that's right. Yes.

30 Thank you. And did you work with her -- I just want to clarify -- did you live in Orange as well at the same time Dr Mahlo was or were you in Sydney?---I lived in Sydney when Karen first moved to Orange and then I moved to Orange after that. I lived at Orange in two thousand -- started work in Orange 2008.

35 Right. And do you still work in Orange?---Sorry, not 2008, 1998. Yes, I still work in Orange.

All right. And I should just ask are you in general practice?---No, I'm an addiction medicine physician.

40 Thank you. And so do you work for the regional health - - ?---I work for the area health service, yes.

Yes, thank you. You remained good friends with Dr Mahlo after she moved to Orange?---Yes.

45 All right. In fact, you had known each other from University of Queensland, is that correct?---Yes, that's right.



Thank you. Now, you were aware that she had taken up a job in Queensland at the Nambour Hospital?---Yes.

5 It appears that Dr Mahlo's career was in – being Medical Superintendent of various hospitals?---Yes.

Okay. Now, I just want to ask you about paragraph 6 of your affidavit. How often did you speak with Dr Mahlo after she moved to Queensland?---It wouldn't be weekly. It may be monthly or maybe on some occasions maybe not evenly monthly.  
10 We – that was just the general pattern of how we would communicate and when we did communicate we'd usually talk for a long time and cover, you know, what had happened in the period of time, you know, intervening last time – you know, between the last time we spoke.

15 All right. Now, you particularly detail a conversation in paragraph 6 which occurred, to your memory, in the first half of 2006 where she first mentioned a man by the name of John Hehir?---Yes.

20 All right. At that stage she only mentioned that he was her financial advisor?---Yes, that's right.

All right. When did you learn that she entered into a intimate relationship with Mr Hehir?---I think it was around the time that I spoke with Karen after my brother died, which was – I spoke with her – it would be about January 2007.

25 Right. Thank you. You describe in paragraph 7 about that first conversation where she mentioned John Hehir that she was emotionally up and she was excited?---Yes.

30 All right. And that's because she was talking about investments and planning for the future?---And the thought that she could retire, I think.

Yes. All right. At that time had she mentioned having any problems with Queensland Health?---Not to my recollection, no. But she certainly – I mean, the job was stressful, to my understanding, but no, that was the nature of the work.

35 Okay. I'll just take you to paragraph 8 where you say that you didn't know that Karen had been having problems at work at management of the hospital and it was some months later, or many months later – and it was only after your brother died in December 2006, when Dr Mahlo didn't actually ring you straight away, you thought  
40 that was odd. Do I read that correctly?---Yes, I did think that was odd because he had been a doctor in Queensland and the medical grape vine is active so I knew she would have heard of it from somebody. And after I hadn't heard from her for a couple of weeks I thought, yeah, definitely was – probably something going on.

45 All right. Can I just ask what your brother's name was?---John William Ruhno.



5      Okay. Thank you. You make a specific comment you thought that Karen was depressed. Was that because she hadn't rung you about your brother's death?---Yes. Yes, definitely, that was -- and that had been the history in the past of when I didn't hear from Karen for a long time and I often would ring and leave a message and then didn't hear from her -- it was usually because she wasn't feeling well.

10     All right. Had you had discussions with Dr Mahlo about depression and whether she was receiving treatment for it?---I have had but I don't know when I -- you know, I couldn't tell you exactly when I had those conversations. I knew she was on medication and I knew she was seeing a psychiatrist but I couldn't tell you when I specifically had conversations about it.

15     All right. In paragraph 9 you set out a conversation some time after your brother's death where she first raised issues and problems at her work place, correct?---Yes, and that was the first time I'd heard from Karen after John died. That came up in that conversation then when she apologised -- said, you know, that's why she hadn't contacted me, because she'd just hadn't felt like talking.

20     All right. And she told you that she had seen a psychiatrist who advised her that it was a management problem she had not a health problem?---Yes, that's correct.

      All right. And you advised her she should join the -- you know, the Medical Association?---Yes, some professional body to help her with representation.

25     All right. Was there any discussion there about her feeling depressed or feeling down?---I can't specifically recall but I presume -- you know, I think she was depressed at that time because she'd been off work and, you know, it had obviously been a terribly stressful time. And my impression she was depressed but I don't specifically remember having a conversation about it.

30     All right. Then there was a later -- you had numerous conversations but you had one particular conversation where she advised you she'd appointed John Hehir as her -- granted him power of attorney, correct?---Yes.

35     All right. And you had some concerns about that?---Yes.

40     All right. The concerns you expressed was that he shouldn't have her power of attorney when at the same time he was giving financial advise?---Yes, and I suppose I didn't know who he was and I didn't know whether -- you know, I was worried about Karen's -- you know, her being depressed and whether she was making good decisions and so I just was generally concerned about her putting, you know, her affairs in somebody else's hands.

45     All right. Did you express those concerns to her?---Yes.

      What was Dr Mahlo's reaction?---Well, I think she thought that John was very capable of dealing with those sort of situations and that he'd had a previous history

of managing some harassment claim and that he'd been – gone to the Supreme Court and he'd been successful so she thought he was going to be a good representative for her.

5 All right. Now, did you ever go to Queensland and visit Dr Mahlo?---No.

All right. You talk about in June 2007 Dr Mahlo coming down to Orange to attend a funeral of a mutual friend, Andy Mather?---Yes, that's right.

10 All right. When had been the last time you had actually physically seen Dr Mahlo before that?---It would have been the day that she left Orange - - -

Right?---- - - to go to Queensland.

15 Okay. So some years?---Yes.

Okay. You noticed, in particular, that Karen was depressed and highly anxious. Now, having attending a funeral of a friend that wouldn't be unusual I take it?---No, and also she was – still had ongoing work – you know, she wasn't working, ongoing situation. Yes, it was – there weren't many good things going on at that time.

Sure?---He was a close friend of hers.

Yes. You noticed she was drinking heavily and taking diazepam?---Yes.

25 Can I ask you about your knowledge of Dr Mahlo's drinking habits? From the time you met her at university did she consume alcohol?---Yes.

30 Was she a heavy drinker or just a moderate drinker, from your knowledge?---At university probably within the same pattern as her group of friends – Friday, Saturday night binging habit. Not a regular drinker at that time.

I have some knowledge of medical students from being at University of Queensland myself. I'm not going to make a - - -

35 D/STATE CORONER: As well as legal students – law students - - -

MR CHOWDHURY: Yes.

40 D/STATE CORONER: - - - let's not - - -

MR CHOWDHURY: No, I did go to a medicine ball and others things so - - -?---At Cloudlands, I remember them.

45 Yes. But she wasn't drinking anything more than what was the usual for uni students at that time?---No, not at that time. No.

Okay. All right. What about the taking of diazepam? What was your knowledge of that? How did you know that?---That she was taking them?

5 Yes?---Because when she was staying at my place she had them in her handbag. So, you know, she would take, like, half a tablet when – or a tablet – when she was, you know – a few times a day.

10 Okay. Was that unusual?---The only time I've ever seen Karen taking diazepam was when she was highly anxious as part of, you know, a flare up of depression, anxiety and usually due to work dramas.

15 Okay. Now, can you recall if she was taking diazepam together while she was drinking alcohol?---When she was staying with me, when Andy – for Andy's funeral, yes.

All right. Now, as a medical doctor it's not a good combination, is it - - ?---No.

20 - - - diazepam and alcohol?---No, and it was obvious that she was fairly tolerant to them.

Okay. Is that because she didn't have – show – or exhibit any real effects of taking them in combination?---I think that, you know, she'd obviously been taking them for a while.

25 Okay. All right?---I don't think she was taking – to my – as much as I could see, I don't think she was taking big doses of them at that time, just - - -

30 All right. When you made the observation at that time she was drinking heavily, how much was she drinking? Can you just give me an example?---I would think, you know, more than a bottle of wine a day.

All right. Now, she stayed at your house?---She did stay at my house for a few nights before the funeral, yes.

35 All right?---Maybe two nights, I think.

And did she stay after the funeral?---She stayed in Orange. She stayed at her brother's house. When John arrived on the day of the funeral she and – he and Karen stayed at her brother's place.

40 All right?---Really, at my request.

45 Okay. Well, I'll come to that. Paragraph 13 of your statement you made an observation that John Hehir was constantly phoning Dr Mahlo on her mobile phone and also on your landline?---Yes.

And you noted that that was unusual?---Yes. Yes, it was very unusual.

How often was he calling?---Well, I can – I was trying to get ready for work and the phone would literally ring out and start ringing again. And that just keep going constantly.

- 5     Okay. And eventually you say Dr Mahlo said to you, on occasion, “It’s just John, don’t answer it”?---Yes.

Okay. And eventually you said to Dr Mahlo, “I just can’t stand this. It’s driving me crazy” and you took the phone off the hook?---Yes.

- 10    Okay. And you could identify it was John Hehir ringing because your phone had a display which showed the incoming phone number?---Well, it showed it was a Queensland number, so yes.

- 15    Okay. All right. Thank you. And then after the funeral you had a conversation with Dr Mahlo where she told you that John Hehir was trying to get on a flight to come down to Orange?---Yes.

- 20    Okay. And you made a comment that you didn’t think you could cope with him staying at your house?---Exactly.

- 25    All right. And that was because of his strange constant telephone call?---I – well, I think, by that stage, I was very anxious after the funeral and the telephone calls and the whole – and it was just the thought of – I’ve got a small house and the thought of John there was just – if there was a better arrangement it might have been more amicable for John.

- 30    All right. Thank you. You actually met him that night at the wake at the local hotel, is that correct?---I did, after that discussion, yes.

- 35    All right. And you made some comments about his odd behaviour there, correct?---I don’t know whether I thought it was odd at the time, I just thought that he was really – he was intrusive and trying to make a good impression.

- 40    I suggest that you used the phrase that his arrival at the wake was unusual and intrusive?---Sorry, sorry, yes, I did think that it was unusual for him to attend the wake. I thought – I would have thought if he was going to look after Karen, give her support, that he would have come to Orange with her rather than arriving after the funeral.

- 45    Okay?---I – yes, that was my impression anyway.

- 45    All right. Did you have contact with Karen after that night, before she went back to Queensland?---Yes. Yes, she came over and – she and John came over before they left to drive back to Queensland.

Okay. All right. Now, in paragraph 16 of your affidavit you talk about the last week of April 2008, having a conversation with Dr Mahlo about John Hehir?---Yes.

5 All right. And she told you that John Hehir had moved out of the house?---That's right.

And there had seemed to have been an issue over her smoking and that her children hated him?---I can remember her saying that she -- that John had said to her that if she loved him she would be able to give up smoking or a similar phrase.

10 All right. And you made some comment about him trying to control her, is that correct?---Yes.

15 I don't need to go into it, it's set out in paragraph 16. And then the next contact you had from her was when she telephoned to say she was on her way to Orange for the May long weekend, correct?---Yes, that's right.

All right. Now, on that May long weekend you had lunch at a local restaurants, correct?---Yes.

20 I take it you had to travel to -- you were working in Orange then, yourself?---Yes.

Right. And you said that she was in the best mental health you had seen for some time?---Yes, definitely.

25 What was it about her that made you make that comment?---She didn't seem anxious and she was -- and she certainly didn't seem to have a flat mood where she wouldn't want to have lunch or to go anywhere. And in the last few years, even before she'd left Orange, if she was able to go out and about she would appear anxious and for the first time, as I said, for years she didn't appear like that.

30 Okay. Did she tell you that she'd been under the treatment of a psychiatrist at that time?---Yes.

35 Okay. Did she mention his name?---I -- it was Ty Fraser, who I actually went through medicine with.

40 All right. Were you and Karen friends with him at medical school?---I don't know if Karen knew him at medical school because she was a few years ahead of me but I knew him and had -- and was friendly with him, yes.

All right. Thank you. Had you had any contact with Dr Fraser about his treatment of Karen before her death?---No.

45 All right. Thank you. Now, one of the things that you set out in paragraph 19 is a conversation about her will; is that correct?---Yes.

All right. And that she was going to appoint one of her brothers as executor and leave everything to her children and some money to her parents; is that correct?---Yes.

5 Thank you?---Yes.

All right. Did she specifically talk about her relationship with John Hehir?---I remember her saying she still cared about John. I – that she didn't live him, but she still cared about him.

10 All right. Thank you. Then there was a discussion, an evening at a dinner where she talked specifically about an attempted suicide; is that correct?---Yes.

15 All right. The conversation you've set out at paragraph 21. I just want to clarify something. Presumably, more was said than just that?---Yes, yes, yes. The – this whole affidavit looks very weird when I read it back, but, yes. I just – that the – I remember Karen specifically saying about the look in Ben's eyes. That's - - -

20 Yes. And does the statement say, "But you know if you ever kill yourself I will understand." Was she - - -?---Well, I remember Karen saying that. Yes.

Directing that to you?---Yes.

25 Is that right. Okay. What was her mood at that time, that night, when she was talking about the attempted suicide?---Reflective really just the same as it had been all day. We'd talked about things and family and the kids and things that we really hadn't talked about like that for years.

30 Yes. Okay. Well, did you have any concern that she was feeling suicidal or talking possibly about that?---Quite the opposite. I thought that she was – her mental health was better than it had been for many years. The – and for years before she left Orange she'd been, you know, under work stress here in her – as a clinical superintendent's job, and I hadn't seen her as well for I don't remember how many years, but certainly before she left Orange.

35 All right. Thank you. Now, the next time you heard from her was when she left a message on your mobile phone on the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> of May at about 7.30 pm?---Yes. That's correct.

40 Was that a voice message or a text message?---A voice message.

All right. And you've set out in paragraph 22 the best you could of your recollection?---Yes.

45 And, "I'm sorry I've not returned your calls or emails, but I've been feeling down." Had that concerned you that she had not been returning your calls or emails?---I – well, it – it certainly goes to the pattern of our relationship in the past. Karen would



ring me when she wanted to talk and tell me what had been going on. So just because I felt like ringing her and asking her what was happening, it didn't mean that she necessarily wanted to tell me at that time.

- 5 Correct. Okay. Thank you. You didn't decide to return the call that night. You were planning to do it the next day?---Yes. I can remember thinking that she sounded -- just the tone of her voice sounded great. Yes, that was my -- that was my opinion at the time.
- 10 Just listening to the message, did it appear she was affected in any way by liquor or a drug?---No. No, no. She sounded very -- you know, very -- just Karen when she was well and definitely not intoxicated.

All right. Thank you. Yes. I have nothing further.

- 15 D/STATE CORONER: Thank you.

**EXAMINATION BY MR LEWIS**

**[12.39 pm]**

20

MR LEWIS: Thank you, your Honour. Doctor, Simon Lewis is my name. I'm the counsel representing Mr Hehir. Can you hear me?---Yes, I can.

- 25 Okay. Just a couple of questions for you. You work as a -- I can't remember the exact phrase used, but in addictive medicine. So you deal with people, obviously, who have addictions?---I do. Yes.

- 30 And people who have addictions, in your experience, can go to some lengths to hide those addictions from people if they don't want them to know?---Yes. That's correct.

- 35 And, for example, somebody who regularly drinks to excess is able to hide that to a certain extent, aren't they?---They can. Yes.

- Because you can a tolerance to alcohol?---Yes.

- 40 And there's also an expression that's used about functioning alcoholics?---Yes. I can't say it's an expression I ever hear addiction medicine physicians used, but I see it in the newspaper.

- 45 Yeah. I'm not saying that it's, perhaps, an accepted term within the medical fraternity, but, practically, it refers to people who may be considered to be alcoholics but are able to function at a reasonably high level, as I understand it?---I think there are a lot of the general population who drink above the recommended amounts of alcohol a day and hold, you know, complex positions in the workforce and have a lot of responsibilities and function -- and they function perfectly well for some time.

So is it possible that people who did not have regular face-to-face contact with Karen may not realise the extent to which she was drinking?---I – I don't know.

5 Okay. Certainly, when she was visiting you in Orange for the funeral she was drinking heavily?---That was on – at that occasion on that, you know, for a couple of days, yes.

10 Yeah. Okay. You described her mood around that time of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May of 2008 as being reflective; is that right?---Yes.

15 Okay. And then she left and went back to Queensland and then there's that message that she left for you on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May which, as you say, seems to have fitted into the pattern of your relationship?---Yes. Well, I – at the message I thought that she sounded very well, the tone of her voice and the content of what she said meant to me that I thought that she was doing well.

20 Sure. And at least at that stage of evening, as far as you could tell, she was not affected by alcohol?---Not at that – no. It was about 7.30, I think, and I – certainly, she seemed completely sober as far as I could tell.

25 All right. But that was going from the short voice message that had been left?---Yes.

30 All right. Just briefly, the conversation you had and it was Karen that told you that John had moved out of the house because she couldn't give up smoking?---Yes.  
35 That's right.

40 Some people, is it fair to say, when they're dealing with people who have addictions such as smoking, drinking, or the like who aren't therapeutically experienced in intervening in such situations can attempt a controlling rather than supportive role, thinking that that can blackmail someone into giving up an addiction?---I suppose that's possible. Yes.

45 All right. It's not necessarily inconsistent, is it, with somebody trying to get somebody to give up an addictive behaviour, but perhaps it's not the best way to go about it?---I wouldn't have thought it was an intelligent way of going about it, no.

50 Right. And, indeed, as you pointed out to Karen, that expressing reasons for his concerns would be more constructive than attempting to control the behaviour?---That would be in my opinion, yes.

55 Yes. And that's as somebody who practises in that area?---Well, I think, hopefully, anyone with any common sense of my age would think that as well. Yes, bullying doesn't usually work.

60 Yes. Thank you, your Honour. Thank you, Doctor.

MR CHOWDHURY: Yes. No re-examination. Thank you.



D/STATE CORONER: Thank you very much, Dr Ruhno, for helping us today in the inquest. I'll say good afternoon?---Thank you very much, your Honour.

Thank you.

5

**WITNESS EXCUSED**

**[12.44 pm]**

10 MR CHOWDHURY: Your Honour, we've managed to move quite quickly through the witnesses and we've arranged for Dr Isles to give evidence tomorrow afternoon, if we can, via video link. So, hopefully, we can conclude the evidence tomorrow. Otherwise, I'm afraid that's all I have for the court today.

15 D/STATE CORONER: All right. No, that's fine. So we've got Dr Fraser.

MR CHOWDHURY: The children, Anna and Ben.

D/STATE CORONER: That's right.

20

MR CHOWDHURY: And then Mr Hehir and Jill Hehir.

D/STATE CORONER: Right. All right.

25 MR CHOWDHURY: And then Dr Isles.

D/STATE CORONER: Okay. So we're still resuming at 9 in the morning? Is that correct?

30 MR LEWIS: Yes. Is that convenient?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

D/STATE CORONER: That's convenient.

35

MR CHOWDHURY: Yes.

D/STATE CORONER: All right.

40 MR CHOWDHURY: Thank you.

D/STATE CORONER: Thank you. Good afternoon.

45 **MATTER ADJOURNED at 12.45 pm UNTIL  
WEDNESDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2014**

