

23. I am required to make a finding as to the cause of death on balance of probabilities. The medical experts agree that exercise acquired hyponatraemia is a possible cause of Ms Killen's death. The indicators of exercise acquired hyponatraemia which have been identified by Dr Rothwell and which on the evidence before me were present in Ms Killen, included unsteadiness, agitation, confusion, delirium, vomiting, seizure and respiratory distress.
24. The risk factors for exercise acquired hyponatraemia described by Dr Rothwell and which I am satisfied were attributable to Ms Killen, include being of the female sex, event inexperience, greater than 4 hours exercise duration, unusually hot environmental conditions and possible excessive drinking behaviour. The forensic pathologist excluded any identifiable natural disease or any injury as causing or contributing to her death. Having regard to these factors, I am satisfied on balance that the cause of death was exercise acquired hyponatraemia and that the mechanism of death was cardiac arrhythmia in a setting of electrolyte derangement.
25. Having considered all of the available evidence, I find that Ms Samantha Killen died on 17 April 2009, at the Kokoda Track, Papua New Guinea and that the cause of her death was exercise acquired hyponatraemia and that the mechanism of death was cardiac arrhythmia in a setting of electrolyte derangement.

COMMENTS:

Pursuant to Section 67(3) of the **Coroners Act 2008**, I make the following comment(s) connected with the death:

1. There is sufficient evidence before me to warrant a recommendation that those authorities engaged in supervising, overseeing or promoting trekking at the Kokoda Track (and indeed any other high intensity and endurance event), provide information to participants as to the need to ensure appropriate hydration and acclimatisation.
2. The nature of trekking a location such as the Kokoda Track it involves extreme physical exertion and the inherent danger resulting from isolation and remoteness. The track is also subject to extreme turns of weather and low cloud cover, which may, as in this case result in emergency medical treatment or evacuation being unavailable.
3. Trekkers are subject to fitness level disclosure, health checks prior to commencing and the documentation provided by the tour operators appears to disclose the rigours and risks of the journey. However, it may be that the level or type of risk is misunderstood. Because many people, including high profile media personalities, have undertaken the journey in recent years, there is a risk of people not appreciating the reality of the physical task they will be undertaking. This combined with a lack of detailed information as to the necessity to balance fluid intake and to ensure appropriate hydration and acclimatisation may result in death or injury.