

## REASONS FOR FINDINGS

This is an Inquest into the death of Scott Russell Johnson.

The role of a Coroner is to establish, if possible, the identity of the deceased, the date of death, the place of death, and the manner and cause of death.

On 16 March 1989 an earlier Inquest was held into the death of Mr Johnson. That inquest found that Mr Johnson had died between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> December 1988 at North Head Manly, north of Blue Fish Point, from the effects of multiple injuries he sustained as a result of falling from a cliff. None of those findings are in dispute. At the Inquest in 1989 a finding was also made that Mr Johnson jumped from the cliff at North Head with the intention of taking his own life.

Since that inquest further information has come to light about a culture of violence against the gay community in Sydney in the late 1980's. In 2005 a police operation named "Taradale" uncovered that the deaths of three homosexual men in Bondi in 1989 were as a result of them being forced to their deaths from cliffs at a "gay beat".

Mr Johnson was homosexual. It is now known that the North Head of Manly near Blue Fish Point where Mr Johnson's body was found was a "gay beat".

As a result of the further information it was considered appropriate to re open the Coroner's file and further investigate Mr Johnson's death. That investigation has not taken the case any further. The information about the deaths at Bondi has however, sown a seed of doubt as to the positive finding of suicide. Suicide cannot be presumed and there must be "clear cogent and exact" evidence to support such a finding. [Briganshaw v Briganshaw (1938) 60 CLR 336]

In this case the possibilities that Mr Johnson was the victim of a "gay hate" crime similar to those that occurred in Bondi or that he fell are also available explanations to the circumstances that surrounded his death.

Accordingly, I find that the evidence adduced in Mr Johnson's death does not enable me to make a finding as to how he fell off the cliff and I make an open finding and refer his file to "Cold Cases" for further investigation in accordance with police procedures and protocols.

**FINDING**

Mr Scott Russell Johnson died between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> December 1988 at North Head Manly, north of Blue Fish Point, from the effects of multiple injuries he sustained as a result of falling from a cliff. The evidence does not enable me to make a finding as to how he fell.

**RECOMMENDATION****To the Commissioner for Police:**

I recommend that the death of Scott Russell Johnson be referred to "Cold Cases" for further investigation in accordance with the police procedures and protocols.

C Forbes  
Deputy State Coroner,  
27 June 2012