



## VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICE

**MEDIA RELEASE: Friday 18 October 2019**

### **Police pursuit policy must be limited to avoid more deaths**

Two years after the tragic death of Raymond Noel Lindsay Thomas during a police pursuit on 25 June 2017, a Direction Hearing yesterday before Coroner John Olle raised questions about inconsistencies in the evidence, including when police officers commenced the pursuit, and the speed their vehicle was travelling at.

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) is representing the family of Raymond Noel, a 29-year-old Gunnai, Gunditjmara, and Wiradjuri man, who tragically passed away after sustaining injuries during the pursuit. At the time, Raymond Noel was driving home from Woolworths in Preston South to his home in Thornbury.

The Officers involved indicate that the pursuit was initiated after Raymond Noel was involved in a collision with another vehicle, which raised public safety concerns. However, GPS evidence suggests that the pursuit may have commenced earlier, possibly after police determined that Raymond Noel was driving an unregistered vehicle.

Counsel assisting the Coroner expressed concerns about discrepancies in the evidence, including in relation to the speed of the police vehicle, and continuation of the pursuit prior to the fatal accident. The Coroner has requested that further evidence be provided to determine when the pursuit commenced and how fast both vehicles were travelling.

Coroner Olle also expressed frustration that earlier Coronial recommendations for all police vehicles to be equipped with in-car video had not been implemented to aid the Coroner's understanding in pursuit situations.

The Inquest is due to take place in April 2020, after a second directions hearing to define the scope of the inquest.

#### **Statement from the family**

Our Raymond was a big man with a big heart. A proud Gunnai, Gunditjmara, and Wiradjuri warrior. As big and strong as he was, Raymond had a caring nature and a beautiful soul. He was affectionately called the gentle giant by his family, friends and community.

Big Raymond loved his family. Most precious to him was his niece Leahtia who he adored. Now our family show photos of Uncle Raymond to his nieces and talk to them about him, to keep him alive in their hearts and ours.



Raymond was a staunch West Coast Eagles supporter. Sadly, he missed seeing his Eagles win the premiership last year, but his family celebrated the victory for him at home. A happy moment marked with sadness.

We as a family and a community now carry that same grief and pain that many Indigenous families and communities around the country have had to endure.

*The loss of a Child, a Brother, a Nephew, a Cousin, and a Friend.*

We want justice for our son. Hopefully accountability will result through this process, and changes can be made to prevent any other family having to experience what we have since his passing.

#### **Quotes attributable to Nerita Waight, CEO at VALS**

“After two long years, VALS and Raymond Noel’s family are relieved that there is finally progress in examining the circumstances that led to the death of Raymond Noel.”

“The hearing yesterday demonstrates that there are serious questions to be asked about how, when and why Victoria Police officers initiated a pursuit of Raymond Noel. The discrepancies and inconsistencies in the evidence are extremely concerning and indicate that the police investigation into Raymond Noel’s death may have been inadequate. This is yet another example demonstrating that police should not be investigating police.”

“VALS and Raymond Noel’s family will be asking the Coroner to examine the adequacy of the existing Victoria Police pursuit policy and to make recommendations to prohibit police pursuits for low-level offences.”

#### **Note for media**

*For cultural reasons, the family of Raymond Noel does not wish to make any further comment to the media about this case at this time.*

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