



CORONERS COURT OF QUEENSLAND

FINDINGS OF INQUEST

CITATION: **Inquest into the deaths of Lizzie Reuben and Isei Navutovuto**

TITLE OF COURT: Coroners Court

JURISDICTION: BRISBANE

FILE NO: 2022/3906 Reuben
2022/4332 Navutovuto

DELIVERED ON: 12 November 2025

DELIVERED AT: BRISBANE

HEARING DATES: 8 – 10 July 2025

FINDINGS OF: Deputy State Coroner Gallagher

CATCHWORDS: Coroners: Inquest, welfare check by Queensland Police Service, domestic relationship, Queensland Police Service assessment of domestic family violence, fire.

REPRESENTATION:

Counsel Assisting: S Lane and C McKeon

Constables Monica Stafford and Ethan Shields: A Waite, Gnech & Associates

Commissioner of Police: T Boettcher, QPS Legal

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Introduction

- [1] Lizzie Reuben and Isei Navutovuto lived together at 34 Home Hill Road, Ayr (the house). They had been involved in a domestic relationship since 2018 and had a history of domestic violence (**DV**)-related attendances upon them by the Queensland Police Service (**QPS**) over the course of their relationship.
- [2] On the night of the fire that led to their deaths, Ms Reuben called police to the house because, on her account, Mr Navutovuto was threatening to kill himself. Two police officers from the Ayr Police Station, Constable Monica Stafford and Constable Ethan Shields, attended. Given the short distance between the station and the house took them minutes to traverse, the officers had little time, if any, to investigate any QPS records relevant to the couple's DV history before they arrived at the house to conduct a welfare check on Mr Navutovuto.
- [3] After some discussion with Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto, the officers called the Queensland Ambulance Service (**QAS**) to assess Mr Navutovuto's mental health. QAS Officers attended the house and assessed Mr Navutovuto. It was determined that he did not fit the criteria for an Emergency Examination Authority (**EEA**) under the *Public Health Act 2005*.
- [4] The QPS and QAS attendance is captured on QPS body worn camera (**BWC**) and lasted just over 1 hour and 40 minutes. During this time, neither Mr Navutovuto or Ms Reuben made any mention of Mr Navutovuto's alleged past threats to burn down the house, no petrol cans were observed in the house or the shed, and Mr Navutovuto gave no indication that he had any immediate plans to harm Ms Reuben.
- [5] About 45 minutes after QPS and QAS officers left, a neighbour heard noises, and a male voice, he thought was Mr Navutovuto's, yelling and swearing. The neighbour then heard Ms Reuben screaming and saw that the house was on fire. He kicked the front door in to get inside and saw Mr Navutovuto running down the hallway, looking like he was pouring accelerant which was already on fire. He described that the fire was following him as he ran. The neighbour went out into the backyard to assist Mr Navutovuto.
- [6] Ms Reuben came out of the front of the house and was also helped by neighbours. Three of the neighbours who attended to Ms Reuben later reported she was saying words to the effect of "hide me, get me away, he's trying to kill me, he's got a knife". One of the neighbours who helped Mr Navutovuto later reported he could smell petrol on Mr Navutovuto.
- [7] Both Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto were taken to Ayr Hospital by QAS and then transferred to Townsville University Hospital (**TUH**) by air.

- [8] On arrival, Ms Reuben was assessed as having burns to over 90% of her body, and her burns were not considered survivable. She was transferred to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) for palliation. She passed¹ at 3:10pm that afternoon.
- [9] Mr Navutovuto was assessed on arrival at the TUH ED as having burns to 50% of his body, with the most significant burns to his neck, right shoulder, hands and feet. Mr Navutovuto was transferred to ICU and then to the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital (RBWH) Burns Unit later that day.
- [10] After 20 days of support in intensive care, Mr Navutovuto died on 29 August 2022 at 6:34pm.
- [11] During the investigation into the deaths, it was ascertained that a domestic violence protection order had been issued around 8 months into their relationship, which required Mr Navutovuto not to commit acts of domestic violence and to be of good behaviour to Ms Reuben. The order was for a period of 5 years and was in place at the time of the fire. Mr Navutovuto had plead guilty to contravening the order on two occasions in 2021, but no changes had been made to the original conditions in the order at any time.
- [12] Mr Navutovuto was known by family members to be aggressive and argumentative, particularly when he drank alcohol. He would verbally abuse Ms Reuben, and this verbal abuse would sometimes escalate to physical violence.
- [13] Ms Reuben was known by family members to drink alcohol for extended periods, once she started drinking. She was also known to gamble, and this caused friction between the couple. Ms Reuben would also become argumentative and aggressive when she had been drinking. Despite the fact that arguments between them, and violence by Mr Navutovuto were witnessed by family members and reported to QPS, Ms Reuben was always reluctant to admit that there had been any altercation and repeatedly advised QPS that she was not fearful of Mr Navutovuto. Mr Navutovuto had a similar tendency to downplay events and provide what appeared to be alternative explanations for various reported domestic violence incidents.
- [14] Although Mr Navutovuto's violence escalated over the course of the relationship, apparently, he had never caused visible injuries to Ms Reuben, and the reported DV incidents between them had been described as relatively minor and short lived.
- [15] Ms Reuben told various family members in late July 2022 that Mr Navutovuto "was losing it" and was walking around the house with a jerry can of fuel threatening to burn the house down. She said to one family member "I don't know why he wants to burn the house down I told him just pour fuel on me and burn me down". Although family members told Ms Reuben that this was

¹ Ms Reuben was a proud Torres Strait Islander born on Thursday Island. Accordingly, where possible, I will use the term "passing" or "passed", consistent with cultural protocol.

serious and she should report the threat to QPS, neither Ms Reuben nor her family members did so.

- [16] During the investigation into the deaths, the QPS conducted a review of the couple's DV history and the QPS responses to DV callouts relating to the couple, to determine whether there had been any shortcomings in the QPS responses and/or missed opportunities to intervene or assist.
- [17] During 2022, the *Independent Commission of Inquiry into QPS Responses to Domestic and Family Violence* was conducting hearings and QPS had recognised a service-wide need for training in respect of DV and QPS DV responses. The new training was in development at the time of the deaths, and a suite of training modules was implemented by the QPS from 2022 to 2024.

Inquest

- [18] Given the involvement of QPS with Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto immediately before the fire and their consequential deaths, their deaths were determined to have been deaths in the course of a QPS operation. As such their deaths were reportable deaths pursuant to s8(3)(h) of the *Coroners Act 2003 (the Act)*.
- [19] Section 27(1)(a)(iii) of the Act provides that an inquest is mandatory in respect of a death which occurred in the course of a QPS operation, unless the Coroner is satisfied the circumstances of the death do not require the holding of an inquest.
- [20] In this case, I determined it was appropriate for an inquest to be held given Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's DV history, the temporal proximity of the last call-out to QPS to the event which caused the deaths, and the recent National and State Government emphasis on the prevention of DV.
- [21] In addition to the findings the Coroner is required to make in accordance with s45(2) of the Act, it was determined that the following issues would be investigated at the inquest:

Issue 1: Whether, overall, the QPS response to the DV complaints (and other call-outs) relating to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto was in accordance with QPS policy and procedure in place at the time;

Issue 2: Whether there is any appropriate action which could have been taken by QPS officers on 9 August 2022 which could have prevented the incident which led to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's deaths; and

Issue 3: Whether the QPS has made appropriate changes to training, policy and procedure to address any shortcomings identified in respect of DV responses relating to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto.

Evidence

[22] The brief of evidence compiled during the coronial investigation was tendered at inquest, and four witnesses gave oral evidence:

- i. Detective Senior Sergeant Nathan McCormack;
- ii. Senior Constable Monica Stafford;
- iii. Constable Ethan Shields; and
- iv. Inspector Melissa Dwyer.

Autopsy results and cause of death

Ms Reuben

[23] On 12 August 2022, forensic pathologist Dr Rebecca Williams conducted an autopsy consisting of an external examination and full internal examination of the body, along with CT scans and toxicology testing.

[24] Toxicology results showed that alcohol was present in the admission bloods at a concentration equivalent to 0.011%.

[25] Dr Williams noted that:

There were burns to approximately 97% of her total body surface area, with sparing of the genitals and central buttocks. The appearance of these burns was similar across all of the affected areas. The extent of these burns is incompatible with life.

No other type of injury, such as blunt force or sharp force injury, was identified.²

[26] Dr Williams concluded that the cause of Ms Reuben's passing was:

- 1(a). Burns³

Mr Navutovuto

[27] On 22 August 2022, forensic pathologist Dr Christopher Day conducted an autopsy consisting of an external examination and partial internal examination of the body, along with CT scans and toxicology testing.

[28] Toxicology results showed that alcohol was present in the admission bloods at a concentration equivalent to 0.06%.

[29] Dr Day noted:

² Autopsy Report, Reuben, p 7.

³ Autopsy Report, Reuben, p 11.

Burns with associated surgical debridement to approximately 45% total body surface area, including to:

- a. Front and right side of face including around the mouth, lips, tip of the tongue, and nose. More discrete areas of thermal injury were noted to the upper eyelids and eyebrows and there was singeing of the temporal regions of the scalp hair.*
- b. Chest and abdomen in a patchy distribution, most prominently involving the left side of the flank and back.*
- c. Full circumference of the right arm, forearm, and hand and left thumb and hand.*
- d. Patchy distribution of the left thigh and shin. Circumferential involvement of the right thigh, knee, and proximal shin and of the foot.*

Other than the thermal injury as stated above, there was no evidence of other injury (blunt or sharp force) to the external surfaces of or internal structures of the body within limits imposed by the degree of thermal injury/surgical intervention.⁴

[30] Dr Day concluded that the cause of death was:

- 1(a). Multiorgan failure, due to, or as a consequence of
- 1(b). Burns⁵

Investigation

QPS Investigations

- [31] DSSgt. Nathan McCormack of the QPS Internal Investigation Group – Ethical Standards Command (**ESC**) conducted an investigation into the events leading to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto’s deaths.
- [32] A concurrent homicide investigation was conducted by Detective Sergeant Lisa Shields of the Ayr Criminal Investigation Branch (**CIB**).
- [33] The house was declared a crime scene, and a homicide investigation was carried out, including forensic examinations, taking of witness statements and investigation of the origins and extent of the fire. QPS BWC footage was obtained and reviewed.
- [34] The ESC conducted interviews with Const. Stafford and Const. Shields in respect of their interactions with Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto when they attended the house on 9 August 2022.

⁴ Autopsy Report, Navutovuto, p 12.

⁵ Autopsy Report, Navutovuto, p 13.

- [35] A Clinical Incident Review was obtained from QAS in respect of the attendance by Acute Care Paramedics (ACPs) McCallum and Beahan.
- [36] During the investigation, all QPS DV interactions with Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto were reviewed, including the occurrence immediately before the fire. DSSgt. McCormack obtained expert opinion from Inspector Melissa Dwyer of the State Domestic and Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Command (DFV&VPC).
- [37] DSSgt. McCormack advised in his investigation report that, on the basis of the evidence gathered during the homicide investigation, DS Shields “was preparing to commence criminal proceedings for murder against [Mr Navutovuto]”,⁶ had he survived his injuries.
- [38] DSSgt. McCormack made the following findings and conclusions as a result of his investigation:
- i. No misconduct was identified in relation to QPS responses to incidents with Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto prior to 9 August 2022;
 - ii. The response by Constables Stafford and Shields on 9 August 2022 was “less than optimal and greater insight should have been demonstrated”⁷ by the officers;
 - iii. However, he has been unable to determine “if any further investigation [by the officers] would have changed the outcome in this circumstance”;⁸
 - iv. There was a reluctance by Ms Reuben and her family and neighbours to disclose Mr Navutovuto’s violence and threats to QPS; and
 - v. While the QPS response on 9 August 2022 was less than optimal, “investigations indicate [Mr Navutovuto] made certain decisions and responsible for the death of [Ms Reuben] and himself.”⁹
- [39] DSSgt. McCormack also gave details in his report of the following QPS DV training initiatives which have been implemented between 2022 and 2024 (not all of these post-dated the deaths):
- i. DFV Policing Enhancement – online training (2022);
 - ii. Coercive Control – online training (2022);
 - iii. DFV: The Holistic Approach – 3 day in person (2022);
 - iv. DFV: The Holistic Approach Extension Course – 2 day in person (2023);
 - v. Recruit Training – 23 days on DV-specific areas (2023);
 - vi. Coercive Control – in-person training (2024);
 - vii. DFV Specialist Course – 5 day in person training t(2024);
 - viii. DFV Specialist Course – Communications and Policelink – 5 day in person (2024); and
 - ix. Operational Skills and Tactics Training – now in line with recent inquest recommendations (including the Clarke/Baxter Inquest).¹⁰

⁶ QPS Report, para 14.1.

⁷ QPS Report, para 19.2.

⁸ QPS Report, para 19.2.

⁹ QPS Report, para 19.5.

¹⁰ QPS Report, para 19.4.

Forensic examination of scene

[40] The scene of the fire was examined by QPS Senior Scientific Officer, Sergeant Luke Bartulovich.

[41] Sgt. Bartulovich examined the house and determined that the fire had originated in two separate locations within the house, namely, the northern side of the front entry and the southern lounge room. Petrol residue was found on the following items:

- i. Burnt clothing and rug found in the backyard;
- ii. Ms Reuben's clothing and the sheet she was wrapped in which were collected at the Ayr Hospital; and
- iii. Mr Navutovuto's clothing which was collected at Ayr Hospital.

[42] Sgt. Bartulovich was unable to rule out an electrical cause of the fire in the lounge room, but he considered that an electrical cause was unlikely. He was unable to determine which room had caught fire first.

[43] Sgt. Bartulovich's opinion was that:

...the most likely cause of the fire was the result of human involvement (either deliberate or accidental) due to there being two seats of fire and the presence of petrol residues on clothing of the deceased persons Reuben and Navutovuto.¹¹

QAS Clinical Review

[44] The QAS Clinical Incident Review was conducted by Michael Grainger, a QAS Senior Clinical Educator. Mr Grainger determined that Mr Navutovuto had demonstrated capacity to make decisions, made the following findings in respect of the assessment of Mr Navutovuto by ACPs McCallum and Beahan:

- i. *Patient did not meet EEA Requirements;*
- ii. *Conspicuous effort proportional to the risk of leaving patient on-scene demonstrated;*
- iii. *Excellent Documentation with free narrative demonstrating sound logical decision making and correct sequencing of clinical pathway/s; and*
- iv. *No obvious variance detected.¹²*

[45] Mr Grainger recommended that this case be presented within QAS "to demonstrate the clinical effort/decision making process".¹³

Constables Stafford and Shields

[46] Const. Stafford took part in a directed interview with ESC Investigators on 10 August 2022. She advised that she had been a sworn QPS officer for 5 years,

¹¹ QPS Report, Appendix 16 – Statement of Sgt. Bartulovich, para 31.

¹² QPS Report, Appendix 63 – QAS Clinical Review Report, p 2.

¹³ QPS Report, Appendix 63 – QAS Clinical Review Report, p 2.

and that this had been her first interaction with both Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto.

[47] Const. Stafford was asked about the point at which she told Mr Navutovuto he was under arrest for domestic violence. She said during her directed interview that she had said that out of frustration, and did not really consider that DV had occurred in her presence. Then, when Ms Reuben said there was no domestic violence, Const. Stafford thought it would be difficult to prove DV had occurred without Ms Reuben's support for a prosecution. Const. Stafford said that, although she knew the interaction was captured on BWC, she still did not think there was enough evidence of DV.

[48] Const. Stafford said that she could have called the District Duty Officer (**DDO**) for advice while she was at the scene, but that:

I didn't feel that I needed to. I, I know, you know, I know, like, I know DV well. Like, I'm, I'm the DVLO.¹⁴

[49] Const. Stafford was asked about her role as Domestic Violence Liaison Officer (**DVLO**) and said she had been in that role over two years. She said she had not done any specific training for the DVLO role, other than spending a day with other DVLOs in Townsville where she was shown how to categorise extreme DV offenders and a seminar on high risk.

[50] Const. Shields also took part in a directed interview with ESC Investigators on 10 August 2022. He advised that he had been a sworn QPS Officer for two months, and that this had been his first interaction with both Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto.

[51] Const. Shields said that he was happy with the decisions which he and Const. Stafford had made during the interaction, and that "I trust my partner and I was happy with the calls that she made".¹⁵ He said that they spent an "extensive" time speaking to both Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto, and that informed their decisions.

[52] Const. Shields was asked whether, at the time that Const. Stafford arrested Mr Navutovuto, Const. Shields thought there was sufficient evidence of DV to make the arrest. He said that he thought Mr Navutovuto was agitated, but that that was not enough to constitute DV, and he did not feel that anyone was in danger. He said he trusted Const. Stafford's opinion, and he did not recall the particular words Mr Navutovuto used towards Ms Reuben which prompted the arrest.

[53] On the basis of these interviews, DSSgt. McCormack determined that Constables Stafford and Shields "would be assisted in future policing duties by immediate education and training".¹⁶

¹⁴ QPS Report, Appendix 11 – ROI Const. Stafford, p 94.

¹⁵ QPS Report, Appendix 13 – ROI Const. Shields, p 12.

¹⁶ QPS Report, para 13.1.

[54] Both Constables have since participated in and successfully completed the following training:

- i. Intensive training concerning DV legislation and procedures (3 – day course);
- ii. Court processes – evidence in DFV Criminal and Civil Applications;
- iii. Incident management;
- iv. Correct arrest procedures; and
- v. Conversation management.

[55] In addition, DSSgt. McCormack determined that no misconduct had been identified in relation to Constables Stafford and Shields’ interactions with Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto on 9 August 2022.

Expert medical evidence

[56] The Court obtained expert evidence from Dr Michael Muller, General Burn and Trauma Surgeon at the RWBH and Professor at the University of Queensland, in respect of Ms Reuben’s injuries. Dr Muller was asked whether, based on medical records and photographs of the burns to Ms Reuben’s body, he could determine how Ms Reuben came to be in contact with the accelerant – that is, was it poured on her, did she roll in it, did it splash on her et cetera. He was also asked to comment generally about the care Ms Reuben received.

[57] In a report dated 2 June 2023 Dr Muller confirmed that, in his opinion:

- i. Ms Reuben’s injuries were unsurvivable;
- ii. The care provided to her was “of a high standard, appropriate and timely”;¹⁷
- iii. “The pattern a nature of injury is almost certainly that of ignition of flammable liquid”;¹⁸ and
- iv. It was impossible to say whether Ms Reuben had ignited the accelerant herself or whether it had been lit by another person.¹⁹

[58] In respect of what the pattern of Ms Reuben’s burns suggested about how she came to be doused in petrol, Dr Muller made the following comments:

Although it is impossible to state definitively, the pattern is that we see when the person has poured liquid over themselves and most likely when lying supine. The deepest burn is front and back of chest and buttocks with less deep areas increasing as the burn extended inferiorly towards the feet. A less deep area is present over the small of the back. This is sometimes seen with this pattern.

It is possible that another person poured the flammable liquid over the deceased, but the deceased would need to have been restrained or unconscious

¹⁷ Report of Dr Muller, p 1.

¹⁸ Report of Dr Muller, p 1.

¹⁹ Report of Dr Muller, p 2.

to have sustained the pattern demonstrated in the images examined. As the deceased walked to the neighbouring house, unconsciousness is less likely.

When liquid is thrown, the patient is likely to turn away and move away and so have deeper burns on the side of the torso and more than likely have run more inferiorly.

Consideration of circumstances leading up to the deaths

- [59] Isei Navutovuto was born on 27 October 1956 in Fiji. Mr Navutovuto and his son, Aporoso Namovi, moved from Fiji to Sydney in 2010. Mr Navutovuto was married to a woman in Sydney named Joyce, who had sponsored him and his son to move to Australia. In 2014 Mr Navutovuto and Joyce moved to a small town near Cooktown after Mr Navutovuto got work on a banana farm. Joyce went back to Sydney soon afterwards, and by 2015 their relationship had broken up. Around that time, Mr Navutovuto moved to Mareeba.
- [60] Note, Mr Navutovuto’s first name, Isei, is pronounced “Easy” or “Izzy”. It is sometimes spelled that way in statements and QPS documentation quoted in these findings.
- [61] At the time of his death Mr Navutovuto was being treated for Type 2 Diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure, and was taking medication relating to these conditions. The medical records that are before the Court do not show any history of mental health issues or treatment.
- [62] Lizzie Reuben was born on 10 June 1977 on Thursday Island to Hannah and Tom Reuben. Ms Reuben was also known to her family as “Florrie”, ‘Flo’ or ‘Kory/Kori’, and is referred to by these names interchangeably in statements and other official documentation. Ms Reuben is survived by her two adult sons Tom Reuben-McCoy and Leonard (Lenny) Reuben-McKechnie.
- [63] At the time of her death, Ms Reuben had recently been treated for an iron deficiency. She had been noted as having anxiety and depression in 2018 and was put on a Mental Health Plan by her GP. She was not prescribed medication for those conditions.
- [64] Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto began a relationship in 2018. Those of Ms Reuben’s relatives who gave statements to QPS described Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto’s relationship variously as on-again, off-again, rough, toxic, no good and not healthy. One of Ms Reuben’s sisters, Rosie Narasimulu, told QPS that:

When I think about their relationship, I would say that Izzy was very violent towards my sister. He was always threatening her, saying things like 'I'll kill you' and 'I'll burn you with the house'. This was a constant thing. He has never worried about making these threats in front of other people. I have heard him say these things to Florrie before, during arguments. My sister was always afraid of him, always afraid to leave him.²⁰

²⁰ QPS Report, Appendix 50 – Statement of Rosie Narasimulu, para 12.

- [65] Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto would fight when they were drinking and would often fight over money. When they fought, Mr Navutovuto would verbally abuse Ms Reuben and sometimes he would escalate to physical violence against her. Sometimes Ms Reuben would be aggressive and argumentative also. Members of Ms Reuben's family called the QPS on a number of occasions in order to report DV by Mr Navutovuto and to request that QPS attend and intervene.
- [66] The first record of a DV call to the QPS was on 9 June 2018 at about 3:00am. Ms Reuben's sister, Raniet Reuben, called the QPS to her address in Mareeba where Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto were temporarily residing together. At that stage they had been in a relationship for about six months. Raniet told attending QPS that Mr Navutovuto had driven to the house while intoxicated. Later, he asked Ms Reuben for the car keys and then slapped her in the face. The couple were calm and polite by the time QPS arrived, both denied any physical altercation had taken place and Ms Reuben had no visible injuries. Mr Navutovuto made admissions to having driven under the influence of alcohol earlier in the night. The attending QPS ultimately determined there was insufficient evidence to support an application for a DV protection order.
- [67] QPS was called to the same Mareeba address by Rosie Reuben on 13 August 2018 who reported that she had seen Mr Navutovuto punch Ms Reuben in the face the night before. Another witness told QPS that everyone had been drinking the night before, and that the informant was a friend of Ms Reuben's "and is jealous". The attending QPS located Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto nearby. Ms Reuben denied the assault or that any argument had occurred the previous night and advised that she was not fearful of Mr Navutovuto. No injuries were observed and no action was taken, but QPS offered Mr Navutovuto and Ms Reuben referrals to community support services, which they accepted.

Protection order

- [68] Only an hour or two later that same day, QPS was called again by a witness who said that Mr Navutovuto had stolen Ms Reuben's wallet, ripped her shirt and run off down the street. Ms Reuben ran after Mr Navutovuto. Attending officers located Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto nearby and spoke to Ms Reuben away from Mr Navutovuto. The QPS DV occurrence made by the attending QPS officer recorded:

Police spoke to the aggrieved who confirmed the witness's version, adding that he was yelling 'my money' as he snatched the purse. He then placed \$240 into his right sock that he took from the aggrieved's wallet. The aggrieved stated that he just went crazy and she has never seen him like that before. She further stated that she does not wish to make a criminal complaint because it was a one off and nothing like this has happened before. Police spoke to the respondent who corroborated the above versions stating that he did nothing wrong because the aggrieved owed him money. The aggrieved is supportive of a domestic violence application. Police believe that it is necessary and desirable for a protection order to be made to protect the aggrieved from

*further acts of domestic violence against the respondent. The aggrieved is not very cooperative with Police and they intend to continue the relationship. Police believe that a domestic violence order will prevent any further acts of domestic violence.*²¹

[69] The application for a protection order was made by the QPS in the name Florri Reuben, with Ms Reuben as the aggrieved and Mr Navutovuto as the respondent. The application was returnable on 20 August 2018. Mr Navutovuto attended court, and the order was made on that day. The order had effect for a period of 5 years and required Mr Navutovuto to be of good behaviour towards Ms Reuben and not to commit domestic violence against her in that period.²²

[70] The QPS next received a DV report on 30 January 2019. Ms Reuben's sister Raniet called QPS at about 6:00am. She told the attending QPS officers that they had been drinking the night before and she and Ms Reuben became involved in an argument about Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto staying at her house. After an extended period, Mr Navutovuto got involved and hit Ms Reuben on the side of the face. Ms Reuben's sister did not wish to provide a formal statement. Officers interviewed Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto, both of whom denied any assault or that any argument between them had occurred. There was no observable injury or damage to property. QPS officers concluded that the report was unfounded and may have been made by Raniet as "an attempt to have [Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto] removed from her property".²³

[71] Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto did move out of Raniet's house at some point after this report, and in 2019 and 2020 they were staying with Ms Reuben's cousin, Elena ('Sana') Reuben, at her house in Gordonvale. Sana said that:

When they were staying with me, they were on and off again relationship. He was very violent with her. It was constant violence, too many times I could not even say how many times I saw him hurt her. I would always try to tell her to leave him, but she would always defend him and not listen to me.

I can remember that when they were fighting, he would punch her, kick her, drag her around by the hair. He would break her clothes. I would always try to get in the way and stop them fighting.

*I would tell Florrie that I don't want him in my house anymore, but she would always convince me to not kick him out. He never picked up a weapon in front of me, but he is a very huge strong man and very violent. I would tell Florrie that he will kill her one time, but she would not listen to me.*²⁴

²¹ QP1801489415, p 4.

²² Police Protection Notice 200766 and QPS Report, Appendix 64- DFPA- Protection Order and Appendix 65 – QPS DV Review, p 11.

²³ QP1900206964, p 5 and QPS Report, Appendix 65 – QPS DV Review, p 11.

²⁴ QPS Report, Appendix 52 – Statement of Elena Reuben, paras 6 – 8.

[72] One DV report was made to the QPS while Mr Navutovuto and Ms Reuben were at Sana's house. On 1 September 2019 QPS were called to the house where the couple had been drinking. They were not at the house when QPS arrived but were located nearby. Both were affected by alcohol. Both said that Ms Reuben had requested that Mr Navutovuto keep drinking with her, and that he had refused and tried to leave. She grabbed his bag and tried to pull him back, but she fell on the ground. Ms Reuben told the attending QPS officers that she was emotionally depressed. The QPS officers recorded that they could find no evidence of a DV offence having occurred.

[73] In 2020 Ms Reuben received compensation arising from the death of her former partner. His death having occurred before she met Mr Navutovuto. With the compensation she received, she bought a house at 6 Katoomba Street, Mount Sheridan (the Mount Sheridan house), and she and Mr Navutovuto lived there together with Ms Reuben's sons Tom and Lenny.

[74] On 4 October 2020, at about 1:30am, Ms Reuben's sister Raniet called QPS to the Mount Sheridan house as Mr Navutovuto had assaulted her (Raniet). The attending officers recorded their attendance as a "street check" rather than a DV response, and recorded that:

Raniet Rueben stated the house belongs to her sister Lizzie Flori Reuben. Raniet stated that lizzie's boyfriend Isei Navutovuto and his family were at the address and they were all drinking together for several hours. Raniet then said to Isei 'Are you all leaving because this is my sisters house.' Isei was holding a guitar at the time and used the guitar to hit Raniet on her right side of the torso. He then grabbed her around the throat and pushed her up against the wall. Lizzie ran outside to hide and call the police. Isei got in his car with his family and left the address to go back to his own home. All parties intoxicated. Raniet advised she would like to make an assault complaint. Police advised Raniet to go to her doctor to get a report of her injuries (nil visible injuries at time that police attended) and for Raniet and Lizzie to attend Edmonton station to provide statements. Both females agreeable to attend the station to Provide statements on 5/10/20. Assault occurrence to be furnished once statements obtained from Raniet and Lizzie.²⁵

[75] No assault complaints were made by Ms Reuben or Raniet following this incident.

[76] On 7 November 2020 Ms Reuben called QPS just before 2:00am. She said that she and Mr Navutovuto had a fight, and Mr Navutovuto grabbed her by the shirt and pushed her. Her head hit the wall. Lenny, who was around 13 years old at the time, intervened and Mr Navutovuto grabbed Lenny by the throat and pushed him against the wall. Mr Navutovuto then drove away from the house. Attending QPS officers noted that Ms Reuben was affected by alcohol when they spoke to her, and that Mr Navutovuto was unable to be located at the house or in the area. Lenny told QPS officers that he would be willing to give a statement, and an appointment was made for him to attend the local police station the following day. The incident was noted as a breach

²⁵ QPS Intelligence Log Summary, QI2002064777, p 1.

of the protection order, although Ms Reuben was reluctant to give details of the order to QPS.

- [77] Lenny did not attend the station the following day and did not make a statement despite the QPS following up with him on a number of occasions over the next few months. No steps were taken by QPS to vary the protection order to include Lenny as a named person.
- [78] On Tuesday 1 December 2020, Ms Reuben presented to the Mareeba Hospital Emergency Department (ED) at around 6:00pm. Her left ankle was very sore and swollen and she could not bear any weight on that leg. The medical records note that Ms Reuben said that she “jumped about 6 feet onto gravel from a window [Saturday] night. [Patient] states she had a few alcoholic drinks and was being silly”.²⁶ An x-ray showed a fractured fibula, and Ms Reuben’s ankle was put in a cast. In his statement, Ms Reuben’s son Tom said that this incident happened when Ms Reuben was trying to get away from Mr Navutovuto, and she was climbing through a window. Tom also said that this incident happened when Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto were living with Sana, but there was no statement from Sana to confirm this, and Ms Reuben had purchased the Mount Sheridan house by this time. It is possible that she was staying with Sana, or that Tom was mistaken about the place that the incident occurred. Either way, there was no report made to QPS in respect of this incident.
- [79] On 1 January 2021 Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto were in Ayr. They had been drinking for some time at an unknown location. Mr Navutovuto demanded that Ms Reuben call a taxi, and another person at the location challenged Mr Navutovuto about the way he was talking to Ms Reuben. Mr Navutovuto and the other person got into a fight, and Mr Navutovuto called QPS. While attending QPS officers recorded that Mr Navutovuto was “being rude to his wife”,²⁷ they did not record this incident as a DV incident.
- [80] On 22 May 2021 Ms Reuben called QPS to the Mount Sheridan house in the early hours of the morning. She and Mr Navutovuto had been drinking all night, celebrating the event that Ms Reuben had just sold the Mount Sheridan house. They got involved in an argument, and Ms Reuben threw a pot plant at Mr Navutovuto’s car. Mr Navutovuto spat in Ms Reuben’s face. Eventually Mr Navutovuto tried to get into the car and drive away, but Ms Reuben would not let him as he was intoxicated. She called QPS to prevent him from driving and endangering himself and members of the public. By the time QPS officers arrived, Mr Navutovuto had gone inside and fallen asleep. QPS officers made this report of their attendance:

Police arrived at approximately 0615hrs and spoke with the informant/aggrieved in this matter. The aggrieved was UIL at the time, and she reported the incident as per the MO. The aggrieved's story was inconsistent, and police were unable to get full details of the story. She was avoiding the subject and being evasive with questions. The Aggrieved stated that there was no one else around at the time the incident was occurring so nil

²⁶ Mareeba Hospital Medical Records, p 13.

²⁷ QPS Report, Appendix 65 – QPS DFV&VPC Review, p 9.

witness/s to this incident. The aggrieved stated to police that she caused property damage to the vehicle, as she is the one that paid for the vehicle, but the vehicle is in the respondent's name. The respondent comes and goes as he pleases at the house with the aggrieved being aware of this. Police observed dents on the vehicle along with the pot plants being broken on the ground. There was no physical violence or threats besides the respondent spitting in the aggrieved's face. Aggrieved willing to provide police with a statement later throughout the day once she has sobered up in relation to the assault and DV breach. The aggrieved stated she was happy for the respondent to stay at the address as he is now asleep, and she does not feel threatened or unsafe that he is there. The respondent was highly intoxicated and was sleeping. Police were unable to speak to him at the time. Nil injuries observed...²⁸

- [81] Later that day, Mr Navutovuto was 'picked up' by QPS while driving under the influence. He was charged with drink driving and, while at the station, was offered an interview in relation to the DV report. The QPS officer who recorded this information noted that Mr Navutovuto "provided a BAC [of] 0.058 and as a result was far less affected by alcohol than the aggrieved".²⁹ Mr Navutovuto accepted the offer of an interview and his version was recorded as follows:

The aggrieved is always intoxicated and has spent tens of thousands of dollars on pokies recently. He stated that during an argument he informed the respondent that he didn't move from Fiji to Australia for Indigenous persons, he moved for white people because they help each other, unlike indigenous persons who only care for themselves and play loud music every night, upsetting neighbours.

This caused the [aggrieved] to become enraged and yell and scream at him, so he went outside to leave, however she followed him and continued to yell and scream at him. He then hugged her and told her he loves her to calm her down, which wasn't successful. He then went to bed to sleep to avoid her, and when he woke up, he went to drive to Ayr, however the aggrieved locked him out of the house when he tried to get back inside to retrieve his wristwatch. He then began his journey to Ayr when he was intercepted by Police.

The suspect was challenged in relation to the allegations he spat on the aggrieved. He appeared genuinely shocked by these allegations and asked Why the aggrieved would say such a thing. He then vehemently denied the allegations stating all he did was hug the aggrieved to calm her down and tell her he loved her.

As the aggrieved did not wish to make any criminal complaint and has not and will not provide a statement in relation to this incident, the lack of any corroborating evidence supporting the aggrieved's claims, no witnesses and no admissions by the suspect. The respondent was released without being charged for this matter.³⁰

²⁸ QP2100935176, pp 4- 5.

²⁹ QP2100935176, p 6.

³⁰ QP2100935176, p 6.

[82] On the basis of Mr Navutovuto's account a DV occurrence was opened in the QPS system with Mr Navutovuto as the aggrieved and Ms Reuben as the respondent. QPS attended the house again to make enquiries with Ms Reuben, who was reportedly still "highly intoxicated" and her "version of events was extremely vague".³¹ Ultimately, the QPS officers determined it was unnecessary to make a DV application. This was based on their review of the previous reports of DV made, not to mention the fact that this was the first time Ms Reuben was named as respondent.

[83] On the same day, Mr Navutovuto was interviewed by QPS in relation to the incident on 7 November 2020 involving Lenny. Mr Navutovuto's version of events and the outcome of the QPS investigation was recorded as:

He stated that he had been involved in an argument with his partner, however he was holding her in his arms and hugging her whilst speaking to her calmly to try calm her down.

Suspect denied the allegations, stating the child was pushing him and trying to push him away, at which time the suspect lightly held the child back with the back of his forearm as he didn't want a child to witness his mother's behaviour.

Suspect stated that the allegations against him were not true and the circumstances of the complaint were not true. He stated that the informant was yelling and screaming abuse, and he hugged her to help calm her down. Which is when the son observed the incident and took it out of context. He explained that once the son realised what actually happened, he said sorry and they hugged each other.

The suspect has provided a contradictory and plausible version of events in contradiction of the complainants, and as there is no statements from the informant/victim, no co-oborating [sic] evidence, no other witnesses there is currently insufficient evidence to prosecute the suspect.³²

[84] Another QPS officer attended the house to follow-up with Ms Reuben on 29 May 2021. The house was empty and Ms Reuben had not left a forwarding address.

[85] Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto moved to Ayr. Mr Navutovuto's cousin, Susana Saketa, said they moved because Ms Reuben's money had run out, and they thought it would be cheaper to live in Ayr. Ms Saketa gave Mr Navutovuto money to move their things into storage in Ayr, and Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto lived with Ms Saketa and her family for while they were looking for a house.

[86] Ms Saketa saw Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto fighting while they were staying with her, and at one point, told Mr Navutovuto he could not stay there

³¹ QP2100935817 and QPS Report, Appendix 65 – QPS DFV&VPC Review, p 9.

³² QP2002314425, p 8.

anymore because she did not like the way he treated Ms Reuben. Ms Saketa said that “one thing about Lizzie is no matter what he does she never reported it to police. I don’t know why”.³³

[87] On 3 July 2021, at about 3:00pm the QPS was called to Susana’s address in Ayr. The occurrence report does not record who made the call. Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto had had a disagreement over the ownership of a car that Ms Reuben had purchased but registered in Mr Navutovuto’s name. Attending QPS officers made enquiries with witnesses at the address, none of whom had seen any acts of DV. The incident was finalised as a property dispute.

[88] On 10 July 2021 QPS was called by a witness at around midnight. Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto had been drinking together at a pub. One of them won \$2,250.00 on the pokies, and they had a disagreement about to whom the money belonged. Witnesses saw Ms Reuben running across the street with her shirt torn off, yelling for someone to call QPS. When attending QPS officers spoke to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto, both claimed they had won the money. Mr Navutovuto said he had given it to Ms Reuben to hold for him, and she now refused to give it back. Ms Reuben said that Mr Navutovuto wanted the money and she refused to give it to him. She also said that she had torn off her own shirt, and that she refused to return to the motel room with Mr Navutovuto. Ms Reuben was recorded as the respondent in this occurrence, as Mr Navutovuto’s phone had been damaged during their altercation. The attending QPS officers made this note of the occurrence:

*It is not necessary or desirable for a PPN as neither party need protection. Neither party is supportive of police intervention and are unwilling to provide complaints in relation to what has occurred. Neither party reside with each other and it appears that the relationship is over.*³⁴

[89] The following day, QPS spoke to Mr Navutovuto, noted previously as the ‘victim’, and he formally withdrew the complaint of wilful damage relating to his phone.

First contravention of protection order

[90] By mid to late August 2021 Ms Reuben had bought the house. Mr Navutovuto may have been staying with her there, but perhaps not consistently. On 23 August 2021 at around 2:00am the QPS was called to Ms Reuben’s house. It is not clear from the QPS records who made the call. Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto had gotten into an argument about their relationship, and Mr Navutovuto wanted to leave. Ms Reuben went inside the house and locked Mr Navutovuto out. Mr Navutovuto kicked the door open and went inside. He grabbed his belongings and put them in his car. Attending QPS officers made this report of their discussions with Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto:

...At approximately 0230hrs on 23/08/21, Police attended 34 Home Hill Rd. AYR. Police spoke to both parties separately where the AGG appeared to be

³³ QPS Report, Appendix 53 – Statement of Susana Saketa, para 53.

³⁴ QPS Report, Appendix 65 – QPS DFV&VPC Review, p 7.

*heavily intoxicated, the RESP was compliant with police and did not show signs of intoxication. There is a currently DVO order between the parties with mandatory conditions only. AGG stated when she has arrived home, the RESP was at the address where he has broken the back door to gain entry and proceeded into the dwelling towards the bedroom to collect his property. When the RESP has walked past the AGG, the AGG claims to have been struck by a bag. When questioned by police, the AGG was belligerent towards police, was heavily intoxicated as she has been consuming alcohol since the morning of 22/08/21, and would not provide any detail or refused to explain the incident towards police other than demanding police to take the RESP away. The AGG told police that she wanted to make a formal complaint, however, due to the AGG being heavily intoxicated, a statement was unable to be taken at the time. The AGG stated that she would attend Ayr police station during the day (23/08/2021) to provide police with a formal statement. Police spoke to the RESP who stated that he has been sleeping in his car waiting for the AGG to come home from The Commercial where they were drinking and playing on the pokies. When the AGG has finally came home and was heavily intoxicated, she has entered the dwelling and locked the back door so the RESP could not enter. The RESP wanted to enter the dwelling to grab his belongings before leaving the address. The RESP has gained entry by kicking the rear door and has proceeded to obtain his belongings before leaving the address. Police located the RESP outside next to his vehicle. The RESP was compliant with police and was forthcoming with information. The RESP made admissions to kicking the door in, but stated that he did so because he wanted to go in to obtain his belongings. Police transported the RESP to 27 Mary St, AYR where he currently resides with a family member. In relation to the wilful damage complaint, police were unable to determine ownership of the property at the time. Further inquiries to be made when the AGG attends to provide a formal statement.*³⁵

- [91] It does not appear that Ms Reuben made a statement, and on 24 August she withdrew her complaint of wilful damage in relation to the door. As Mr Navutovuto had made admissions to kicking the door in, he was issued with a notice to appear for a contravention of the protection order. On 20 September 2021 he appeared before the Ayr Magistrates Court and pleaded guilty to the contravention. As this was his first criminal offence, he was fined \$250.00 and no conviction was recorded.

Second contravention of protection order

- [92] At about 8:15pm on 21 November 2021 the QPS was called to a residential address in Gordonvale. Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto had been at the residence with a number of other people. Attending QPS recorded the reported incident as follows:

During the offence times the informant and offender have been consuming alcohol at the offence location as guests. For an unknown reason the offender has approached the informant who was speaking with another guest in the carport of the offence location. The respondent was witnessed to strike the

³⁵ QP2101560996, p 8.

informant to the head area with a closed fist and commenced grabbing at her with his other hand. The offender has wrestled the informant to the ground and continued to strike her with his hands. During the struggle the informant has had her shirt ripped and handbag strap torn. Witness MARRIOTT who observed these events has intervened and grabbed hold of the offender and wrestled him off the informant and pinned him to the ground until other witnesses assisted Witness MARRIOTT. Other guests have grabbed the offender and forcefully removed him from the residence. The offender has eventually walked away from the offence location and didn't return. The informant didn't suffer any visible injury.³⁶

- [93] Mr Navutovuto was located, arrested and charged with a contravention of the protection order. Although he initially denied the incident had happened, he pleaded guilty to the contravention when he was brought to court on 22 November 2021. He was sentenced to 6 months' probation and no conviction was recorded.
- [94] On 23 November 2021, Ms Reuben formally withdrew her complaint of assault against Mr Navutovuto and her withdrawal was recorded on QPS body worn camera.
- [95] On 28 November 2021, Lenny, who had been located by the QPS for another reason, refused to provide a statement in respect of the incident on 7 November 2020, and provided written instructions to QPS to that effect.
- [96] On 15 July 2022 QPS was called to Raniet's address in Mareeba at about 2:00am. Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto had been at a gathering at the house and had gotten into an argument over cultural differences. A family member called QPS, and the argument could be heard in the background of the call. However, by the time attending QPS officers arrived, Mr Navutovuto had left the address, and Ms Reuben denied feeling any fear for her safety. The QPS officers found insufficient evidence of DV as there appeared to have been nothing more than a heated argument.
- [97] From reports of family members made in their statements, it seems that in late July 2022, Mr Navutovuto made threats to Ms Reuben that he would burn the house down. It is unclear whether Mr Navutovuto had made like threats previously. As noted, in paragraph 65 above, Ms Reuben's sister Rosie said Mr Navutovuto was always making that type of threat, but the remaining family members who gave statements (outlined below) seemed to be of the view that this threatening behaviour was a new development or escalation in their relationship.
- [98] Susana said that, in July 2022:
- Lizzie called me and said, "[h]e's losing it, he's walking around with a jerry can of fuel and he is trying to burn the house down. He can't deny it because he is on the neighbours CCTV camera walking around with the jerry can."*

³⁶ QP2102174501, p 6.

I told Lizzie “This is serious you better call the police now before anything happens because the next minute, he will burn you down.”

Lizzie said, “I don't know why he wants to burn the house down I told him just pour fuel on me and burn me down.”:

I said, “sounds like you are losing it call the police.”

Lizzie said, “okay sis.”:

Lizzie then hung up it was only a quick conversation.

I called her back later the same day to check on her and she said, “It's okay now he is in the house it's all good.”

I said, “this thing is getting serious go to the cops it's not okay.”

Lizzie said, “it's okay.” Lizzie then hung up the phone.³⁷

- [99] 29 July 2022, Margaret Doolah, Ms Reuben’s cousin, was drinking with Ms Reuben at Margaret’s house. She said:

Whilst we were sitting there having a few drinks, Kori told me about an incident with Izzy:

Izzy had threatened her some days earlier. She told me that she had walked down the back stairs and saw Izzy holding a jerry can full of petrol and a lighter. He told her that he was going to burn the house down. He followed her around the house holding the jerry can and the lighter. She told me that she said to him, if you are going to burn the house down you will have to do it with me inside.

I think what she meant was that she wasn't going to let him burn the house down whilst she wasn't there.

The house belonged to Kori and Izzy was always trying to claim that he had ownership over the house. I told her that she needed to leave him and go to the police. She told me that she was going to report it to police, but I don't know if she ever reported it.³⁸

- [100] Sana spoke to Ms Reuben on her mobile phone while Ms Reuben was at Margaret’s house. Sana recalled that:

She told me that Isei was going crazy. He was not at Margaret's house I don't [know] where he was. She said he was more crazy than ever and that he "wanted to burn me". She said that Isei had been walking around their house with a jerry can of petrol threatening to burn her. I was just telling her to be

³⁷ QPS Report, Appendix 53 – Statement of Susana Saketa, paras 188 - 127.

³⁸ QPS Report, Appendix 51 – Statement of Margaret Doolah, paras 41 - 47.

*safe and stay at Margaret's house for the night. I heard the others at the house tell her to stay with them and I know she did stay there the night.*³⁹

- [101] On 3 August 2022 Ms Reuben told her son, Tom, over the phone, that “[Mr Navutovuto] come [sic] to the house with a jerry can and a lighter, threatening to light the house an [sic] me on fire”.⁴⁰ Tiffany heard Ms Reuben tell Tom this as the phone was on speaker.

August 2022

- [102] On Friday 5 August 2022 Ms Reuben’s sister Rosie, her husband Sari and their kids arrived at Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto’s to stay for a few days. Sari usually stayed with them when he was in Ayr for work. This time, and for no particular reason, Rosie and the kids also decided to visit as well.

- [103] Rosie and Sari had a few drinks with Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto on the Friday night when they arrived, and Rosie said that “[t]hey seemed happy. They were not drunk, just happy”.⁴¹ Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto went to bed shortly after Rosie and Sari did.

- [104] At about 4:00am the next morning, Mr Navutovuto’s son Steven, his girlfriend, Kayla, and their baby arrived from Atherton. Later that day, Ms Reuben, Mr Navutovuto, Steven and his family and Rosie and her family went to Alva Beach to go swimming and fishing and have a BBQ. In her statement, Rosie said that everyone seemed happy that day, and that Mr Navutovuto did not drink more than two cups of wine while they were at the beach.

- [105] Rosie noticed that, when they got back from the beach at about 6:30pm that evening, Mr Navutovuto seemed to change. She said:

He was all of a sudden just sitting there and looking at us, looked like he was thinking hard, I don't know what he was thinking about, but something had definitely changed from the way he was at the beach. I did noticed that when we were at the Beach Izzy was up the top of the beach by himself while Florrie and all of us were having fun down at the beach, but nothing was said about it.

*I noticed that every time Florrie would say something to Izzy, he would just snap at her. He started making fun of her body. Just being nasty to her. I thought this was strange because only at the beach everything was fine. I had seen Izzy act like this before with Florrie, but this was the first time since we had arrived in Ayr this time his whole-body language changed.*⁴²

- [106] Rosie and her family went out for dinner that night and went to the beach again the next day. Mr Navutovuto and Ms Reuben stayed home. Steven and his

³⁹ QPS Report, Appendix 52 – Statement of Elena Reuben, para 25.

⁴⁰ QPS Report, Appendix 49 – Statement of Tom Reuben-McCoy, para 21.

⁴¹ QPS Report, Appendix 50 – Statement of Rosie Narasimulu, para 18.

⁴² QPS Report, Appendix 50 – Statement of Rosie Narasimulu, paras 22 - 23.

family left sometime that day. When Rosie and her family got back from the beach at about 3:00pm on the Sunday, Rosie recalled:

...Izzy was still in a snappy mood. Still staying mean things to Florrie. He was calling her "Cunt" calling her 'Filthy'. Florrie just kept it all inside. She didn't say anything. What could she say? If I was to have a talk with her sister to sister he would have stood and listened to us, so she was just quiet.

*Nothing else happened that night, we all had dinner, we all went to bed.*⁴³

[107] On Monday 8 August 2022, at around lunch time, Rosie, Sari and the kids left to go back to Mareeba. Rosie said in her statement that:

*I noticed that Florrie was uneasy. She even asked me to stay for the week. I said, 'I'll be back on Friday, I'll see you then'. She looked scared when I think back at this, I should have stayed. I didn't know.*⁴⁴

[108] Rosie and her family saw Mr Navutovuto in town just before 1:30pm. Rosie said that “[h]e was still acting funny, but I don’t know what he was thinking. He didn’t seem happy. His face looked angry”.⁴⁵

[109] That night Tom spoke to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto on the phone, around 8:30 to 9:00pm, while he was out fishing. He spoke to Ms Reuben for a while then she gave the phone to Mr Navutovuto while she went to the toilet. Mr Navutovuto said he was cooking dinner and they were having a couple of drinks before going to bed. Tom tried to call Ms Reuben back the next day but there was no answer. He thought she might be sleeping or hungover. Tom said in his statement that “Mum had a bit of a problem with alcohol, there were times where she would be nonstop drinking for days”.⁴⁶

Tuesday 9 August 2022

QPS attendance

[110] At 2:16am on Tuesday 9 August 2022, Ms Reuben called 000 and said that she was concerned that her ex-partner was going to commit suicide. She said that he had gone into the shed and made threats that he was going to kill himself. When asked how Mr Navutovuto said that he wanted to kill himself, Ms Reuben mentioned a power cord. She said she was too scared to go and check the shed, and that there was no light in the shed so she could not see. Ms Reuben said that Mr Navutovuto had not done this before and “it’s a bit strange”. Ms Reuben said that she thought Mr Navutovuto had his phone on him, but she did not know the number and her phone had no credit so she could not look for the number. Ms Reuben sounded scared and upset on the phone call, but not noticeably intoxicated.

⁴³ QPS Report, Appendix 50 – Statement of Rosie Narasimulu, paras 26 - 27.

⁴⁴ QPS Report, Appendix 50 – Statement of Rosie Narasimulu, paras 29 - 30.

⁴⁵ QPS Report, Appendix 50 – Statement of Rosie Narasimulu, paras 32 - 34.

⁴⁶ QPS Report, Appendix 49 – Statement of Tom Reuben-McCoy, para 29.

[111] QPS Constables Monica Stafford and Ethan Shields from the Ayr Police Station were tasked to attend Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's address and arrived there at 2:34am.

[112] The attendance by the QPS officers was recorded on their BWC, as was the attendance by QAS paramedics thereafter. The BWC footage shows both Mr Navutovuto and Ms Reuben were relatively calm throughout the interaction with QPS and QAS until they both became agitated and upset towards the end. There was neither evidence of any violence or altercation having occurred in the house, nor any evidence of any injuries to either Ms Reuben or Mr Navutovuto. Conclusions about their level of intoxication cannot be drawn with any certainty. While both made admissions to having consumed alcohol that evening, neither of them displayed indicia of excessive alcohol consumption, such as slurring or stumbling. Against that, while neither Ms Reuben nor Mr Navutovuto were incoherent, they both spoke in a rambling fashion and neither was easy to direct in conversation.

[113] On arrival, the QPS officers went straight to the shed and found it locked. Ms Reuben gave Const. Stafford the key, and when they opened the door, Mr Navutovuto was found, asleep on the floor. He woke up and seemed surprised to see the QPS but happy to speak with them. Const. Shields stayed to talk to Mr Navutovuto while Const. Stafford went to the house to find Ms Reuben.

[114] Mr Navutovuto told Const. Shields that he came into the shed to sleep because he and Ms Reuben were fighting because she was drunk. He denied wanting to commit suicide. He said he sometimes slept in the park because he wanted to avoid a problem with Ms Reuben. He said the problems with he and Ms Reuben were because she was younger, he was from Fiji, and when she was drunk, she was "off". He said that he was a Jehovah's Witness, and he tried to leave Ms Reuben, but she was smart, and she always talked him into coming back. While he was talking about his and Ms Reuben's relationship the following exchange occurred:

IN: *I work in Mareeba in 2014. She met me and he want to come to me, stay. I told her I'm married. Don't mind, I stay with you, I love you. I told her I have got a girl in Sydney. Is a white woman. She got everything. I (ui). But (ui⁴⁷) stay (ui), no. Is life you know.*

Const. Shields: *Yeah.*

IN: *Is life hey?*

Const. Shields: *Yeah.*

IN: *(ui) go with that. I'm a married man. I'm from Nambucca Head. My wife is there. My trust is 100% because Fijian I want to tell you one thing (ui). We are full feeling for Christian. (ui) life. We are church people. We are not, I'm staying in Australia. It's very hard. Those people it's not (ui) all drink. Like her. Drink, socialating. Do everything.*

Const. Shields: *Yeah.*

⁴⁷ Unintelligible

IN: *It's so hard for Fiji. So, I just turn away and sleep in here to make...*

Const.Shields: *Yeah. I get that.*

IN: *I don't like problem.*

Const. Shields: *Yeah. I get that. Yeah.*

IN: *Yeah, I don't like problem.*⁴⁸

[115] Mr Navutovuto told Const. Shields that, that day, he got \$300 from Centrelink and Lizzie took all the money and “she go to the pub and play about \$300 of my money”. He said that he wanted to leave Ms Reuben but his religion meant he had to be patient. He said he just came to the shed to sleep. He said “I’m not hanging! She’s mental and her mind is not good”. He apologised to Const. Shields for the trouble. He said they fought about the house because they bought it 50/50 but it was put in her name. He said that he paid all the bills for the house with his Centrelink pension, and Ms Reuben paid nothing. He then said that he had given her the \$300 that day to pay the bills.

[116] Const. Stafford was inside the house with Ms Reuben, who had made a cup of tea. Const. Stafford tried to open the back door of the house near the shed so she could see Const. Shields, but the door was tied shut from the outside with rope. Ms Reuben said “he shut the thing outside” and “that’s how I know he’s going a bit cuckoo”. She gave Const. Stafford a knife and Const. Stafford cut the rope and opened the back door. There seemed to be some confusion on the part of Const. Stafford about what Ms Reuben said – she asks about the rope and said “so that was when he does the gardening”. Ms Reuben said “yeah”.⁴⁹

[117] Ms Reuben told Const. Stafford that she and Mr Navutovuto were drinking that night. She said he was her ex-partner but she was trying to take care of him, and he had his own room in the house. She also said that night he kept saying “I will die I will kill. I will die myself”, and he kept talking about an extension cord which Ms Reuben eventually took away from him. She expressed a view he was going to do something to harm himself with the cord, telling QPS Mr Navutovuto said “I’m going to do something stupid to myself” and “no-one cares about me, I will end my life”. Ms Reuben said he went and locked himself in the shed. She said she tried to talk to him and he said “leave me in the dark, I want to die”. After that, Ms Reuben said Mr Navutovuto came back inside, for a while, and sat with her, and then went back out. She said: “and that’s when I realised he put that, you know that thing, the string (referring to the rope on the back door)”. Ms Reuben said she then went out the front door and across to the shed. She called out to Mr Navutovuto and there was no response, which was what prompted her to call 000.

[118] Ms Reuben told Const. Stafford that she had drunk a six-pack and a glass of red wine. She said she did not know how much Mr Navutovuto had to drink, but recalled he was drinking beers, and then drinking cask wine mixed with soft drink. Const. Stafford said that she would get QAS to come and do a mental

⁴⁸ QPS Report, Appendix 7 – BWC footage Shields, Transcript, p 8.

⁴⁹ QPS Report, Appendix 6 – BWC footage Stafford, Transcript, p 5.

health assessment upon Mr Navutovuto. Ms Reuben said: “Just letting you know I am willing to help him”.

[119] Const. Stafford asked whether Ms Reuben wanted Mr Navutovuto charged with a domestic violence breach, and the following exchange occurred:

Const.Stafford: Do you think he's going to do domestic violence against you?
LR: No.
Const.Stafford: Okay.
LR: It's more like mentally I think.
Const.Stafford: To yourself? Yeah, to you though?
LR: To him. To him. I'm (ui) about him.
Const.Stafford: Him. I'm trying to work out if you think he's done this to upset you? Or you think he's doing it because he actually wants to harm himself?
LR: I think it's more to harm himself.
Const.Stafford: Okay. Yeah.
LR: Too much in his head (ui)...
Const.Stafford: Were you upset by what's happened tonight?
LR: I'm very concerned. Not upset.
Const.Stafford: Okay.
LR: Like he needs help please.
Const.Stafford: Okay. Yeah. Um, has he had mental health issues in the past?
LR: Not that I know of.⁵⁰

[120] While they were waiting for QAS to arrive, Mr Navutovuto told Const. Shields he and Ms Reuben had an argument that night, and that he had said to her “...to stay with you is so hard...is better is dead or something like that. Get away from you”. Const. Shields queried this with Mr Navutovuto, stating “is that what you meant?...It's better to be dead than to be with you?”.⁵¹

[121] The QPS officers discussed the matter away from Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto. Const. Stafford was of the opinion that Ms Reuben was intoxicated. She asked Const. Shields if he thought Mr Navutovuto was intoxicated, and he said “it's hard to tell”. They noted that Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's versions contradicted each other.

[122] Const. Shields continued the conversation with Mr Navutovuto near the shed, and Mr Navutovuto told him that he and Ms Reuben were black and white (meaning opposites). He said that Ms Reuben had drunk a carton of beer that night after drinking all day in the pub, and he had a six-pack. He said he had a problem with Ms Reuben drinking because in Fiji, once you are married, you do not drink any more.

⁵⁰ QPS Report, Appendix 6 – BWC footage Stafford, Transcript, p 21.

⁵¹ QPS Report, Appendix 7 – BWC footage Shields, Transcript, p 32.

- [123] Const. Stafford came out to talk to Mr Navutovuto and asked him about the rope on the back door. He said it was there all the time and they used it to lock the door when they go out.

QAS assessment

- [124] QAS Advanced Care Paramedic (ACP) Jodie McCallum was working with ACP Sarah Beahan that night when they were called to Ms Reuben's house to attend upon Mr Navutovuto. They arrived at around 3:20am. ACP McCallum asked Const. Stafford what the situation was, and Const. Stafford explained. Const. Stafford said: "it's fine, I'm not worried".⁵² ACP McCallum asked ACP Beahan to speak to Ms Reuben. ACP McCallum went over to the shed and spoke to Mr Navutovuto. In her statement, she described the conversation as follows:

Isei was standing stationary and occasionally moving from side to side; however, my impression was that this was for comfort and also due to the cold weather rather than any psychological or clinical reason. Isei was not unsteady on his feet. There was a minor language barrier, but I did not notice any slurring of his words. I did not form the impression that Isei was intoxicated.

Throughout the assessment, Isei would occasionally lean towards me, use his hands expressively and step towards me. I noticed that each time this occurred, Ethan would also step closer in what appeared to be a protective manner (towards myself). I did not feel physically threatened by Isei. When he got close enough to what I deemed potentially a risk, I would take a step back.

When asked questions relating to suicidality and Isei's mental health, Isei would raise his voice. I did not interpret this raised voice as aggressive in nature. My interpretation was that his raised voice was used to express emphasis of his point.

Isei also raised his voice when talking about his partner, Florri.⁵³

- [125] In her statement, ACP Beahan gave the following account of her conversation with Ms Reuben:

When I asked about the comments Isei made tonight regarding suicide, Florrie said something like: "I took a cord and removed it from outside". I believe she was referring to either an electrical or extension cord. According to Florrie, Isei had an issue with this as Florrie was removing it from where it was normally kept on the property. He allegedly said to Florrie: "I know what you are thinking", several times. Florrie recounted this story several times.

Florrie stated that at one point, Isei stood in the kitchen in the dark and wouldn't respond to Florrie when she called out to him. Florrie's timeline was not perfect, but she stated Isei was in the kitchen for around 30 minutes as

⁵² Statement of ACP McCallum, para 11.

⁵³ Statement of ACP McCallum, paras 16 - 19.

described. She then stated she went into the kitchen and saw that Isei was gone. She assumed he went into the shed. She stated that Isei had locked himself in the shed and this prompted her to call the QPS.

I kept asking Florrie what made her concerned about Isei tonight and she provided the following:

- Isei's recent "memory loss". When prompted, Florrie stated words to the effect of: "Isei forgets things like leaving the stove on or the fridge door open".*
- Isei's alcohol consumption. Florrie stated Isei: "drunk two and a half six-packs and some wine mixed with soft drink". She pointed to a clear plastic bottle of soft drink still sitting on the counter in the kitchen. It was approximately 75% full of a pink/red coloured-liquid (looked like creaming soda). In relation to her own alcohol consumption, Florrie stated: "I counted my drinks". She did not give an exact number of alcoholic drinks she had consumed and I did not push her for this information.*
- Isei's mental health history. Florrie reported that Isei was prescribed medication for depression.*
- Isei was not attending medical appointments. Florrie reported that Isei was ignoring letters from his doctor requesting an appointment.*

Monica asked Florrie to retrieve the doctor's letters. While Florrie was away, Monica spoke to me quietly. She said that: "Florrie's statement now was different to what she had originally said to me". Monica provided that: "originally, Florrie had stated that Isei wanted to hang himself with the cord, and had gone for it first". From what Florrie was now telling us, Florrie seemed to have started the conversation about suicidal ideation with Isei, by taking the extension cord away.⁵⁴

[126] ACP McCallum asked Ms Reuben if she would be comfortable with him staying there tonight, and Ms Reuben said "maybe not...I mean I can make it, I can try..."⁵⁵ When asked if she could stay with any family, Ms Reuben said no.

[127] ACP McCallum said in her statement that:

Sarah, the QPS officers and I all agreed and confirmed with each other that Isei did not present any indications of a threat to himself or others. It was not my opinion from my assessment of Isei that Isei's behaviour indicated an immediate risk of serious harm.⁵⁶

[128] At about an hour and twenty minutes after QPS had first arrived at the home, QPS and QAS officers spoke to Mr Navutovuto about his intentions. He denied having said anything at all about suicide and said that all he wanted to do was to sleep. He said he had no family to go to, and if he was kicked out of the property, he would sleep in the street. ACP McCallum said that Ms Reuben

⁵⁴ Statement of ACP Beahan, paras 15 - 18.

⁵⁵ QPS Report, Appendix 6 – BWC footage Stafford, Transcript, p 58.

⁵⁶ Statement of ACP McCallum, para 25.

had said he could stay there, and Mr Navutovuto thanked the officers very much for coming. The QPS and QAS officers returned to the house.

[129] When Ms Reuben was told that Mr Navutovuto was going to sleep in the shed, she said “not in an open shed...he can sleep in the chair or go to his room. No, not the shed...”.⁵⁷ Const. Stafford told Mr Navutovuto he could come in, and he started laughing and told her to get Ms Reuben to tell him that. It is clear that Const. Stafford became quite frustrated at this point and said “I’m done”. The QPS officers then effectively tried to get both Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto to go to bed in the house. Ms Reuben told Mr Navutovuto to stop being funny, and Mr Navutovuto became heightened and started swearing. The following exchange occurred:

QAS: Isei. She’s going to have a problem if you’re out there. She wants you here so she can make sure that you’re okay.

IN: Bullshit.

LR: Hey, (ui), stop it. Please. I’m trying my hardest here. (ui).

IN: You bullshit. You chase me all the time. Leave me in this house and go.

LR: Well what do you want to do?

IN: You talk that when the cops here.

LR: What do you want to do?

IN: When we stay together you kick me off.

LR: Please. I’m a grandmother...

IN: Come on. Change your (ui)....

LR: Grandmother (ui)...

IN: Change your mouth.

LR: Please. Stop it.

IN: Stupid mouth. Bullshit mouth. You kick me off. When cops here you change.

LR: Please.

Const. Shields: Isei. Come on man, we don’t do this.

LR: Stop it. (ui)...

IN: No, I go outside.

Const. Shields: (ui) any option.

IN: I go outside.

Const. Stafford: No, no. This, at the moment it’s bed and you guys stop or you’re coming with us into Police custody and you’re going to (ui)...

IN: I know. I go to Police custody, stay there, I don’t care. But I don’t like to stay with her with her bloody (ui) stupid life. Talking like that.

LR: Oh, (ui) talk to me like that.

Const. Stafford: Okay, you’re under arrest for domestic violence.

LR: No, not domestic.

Const. Stafford: Yeah.

Const. Shields: That’s what it is...

⁵⁷ QPS Report, Appendix 6 – BWC footage Stafford, Transcript, p 77.

Const. Stafford: Hands out of your pocket please.
Const. Shields: It's domestic violence.
IN: (ui) culture is.
LR: No, it's not domestic violence (ui) ...
Const. Stafford: What he just said to you is.
LR: No.
She's a (ui) mouth.
LR: No, it's not domestic violence.
*Const. Stafford: What do you want from us? Like what do you two want from us, honestly?*⁵⁸

[130] The verbal argument between Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto continued, and Ms Reuben eventually said “remove him from my yard please”.⁵⁹ Mr Navutovuto said the QPS officers could drop him in the park or take him to the police station. Const. Stafford said that was not an option and tried to get him to go to family members, but he refused. Ms Reuben said to Mr Navutovuto “you understand, they’re trying to help” and Const. Stafford told Ms Reuben, “you’re making this more difficult as well, okay. Do you want us, if you want us to take him its domestic violence...otherwise it’s nothing. He stays here and you both shut up and go to bed”.⁶⁰

[131] After a further discussion, ACP McCallum and Const. Stafford decided to go back to the plan of either Mr Navutovuto sleeping in the shed, or QAS taking him to the hospital. Const. Stafford returned to Ms Reuben and said, “he needs to sleep in the garage”.⁶¹ Ms Reuben started yelling and insisting he be removed. She asked if she needed to “go higher”. Const. Stafford said that it was extremely difficult for QPS to determine who was telling the truth when both of them had been drinking. Ms Reuben said she was telling the truth and seemed to get upset. She then calmed down and began apologising. The following exchange occurred:

Const. Stafford: Why can't he sleep in the garage?
LR: Well if he sleep, no, I can't let him sleep in the house, what will happen?
Const. Stafford: Sleep, sleep in the garage. Lock the garage. He doesn't come in here. You lock the house and he can't come in here.
LR: No. No, it's not secure. I'm thinking ahead.
*Const. Stafford: He wants to go to sleep Florrie. He doesn't want to, he just wants to go to sleep, that's all he wants to do. He doesn't want it to be in here with you. Why can he not just sleep in the garage? Everything solved.*⁶²

[132] Ms Reuben then said, “I leave”. Const. Stafford offered to take her anywhere she wanted to go. Ms Reuben became upset. Const. Stafford said that Mr

⁵⁸ QPS Report, Appendix 6 – BWC footage Stafford, Transcript, pp 80 - 81.

⁵⁹ QPS Report, Appendix 6 – BWC footage Stafford, Transcript, p 85.

⁶⁰ QPS Report, Appendix 6 – BWC footage Stafford, Transcript, p 84.

⁶¹ QPS Report, Appendix 6 – BWC footage Stafford, Transcript, p 89.

⁶² QPS Report, Appendix 6 – BWC footage Stafford, Transcript, p 92.

Navutovuto did not meet the criteria to be taken into custody for domestic violence or to be taken to hospital for mental health reasons.

[133] There was further conversation between the two and Ms Reuben said: “well it’s not going to be on my head if anything happens, okay”.⁶³ Const. Stafford then asked what referrals she could make for Ms Reuben, and Ms Reuben asked for legal advice about ownership of the house and car, and personal counselling. Ms Reuben thanked Const. Stafford for her time. Const. Stafford went out and told Mr Navutovuto he could sleep in the shed, and he laughed and joked as he said goodbye to the QPS and QAS Officers.

[134] In her statement, ACP McCallum said all of the officers left the house at around 4:20am, and that all officers were in agreement that it was safe to leave Mr Navutovuto there. Just before her BWC footage cut out, Const. Stafford said to one of the QAS officers:

*This is one of those, like I mean, well they’re not usually this friggin annoying. This is, this is kind of one of the more annoying ones where like he’s not, he’s not done enough.*⁶⁴

The fire

[135] On 9 August 2022, Mr Navutovuto and Ms Reuben’s neighbour, Ethan Bell, got up at about 5:15am and got ready for work. When he walked out onto his front patio, he could hear what he later described as “a lot of commotion” from Mr Navutovuto and Ms Reuben’s house. He heard a female screaming and things being thrown, and he could hear a female moaning in pain. He thought to himself that Ms Reuben was getting “bashed”. He could hear a male voice swearing.

[136] He heard a female scream, which he later described to police as a “she’s about to die kind of scream”⁶⁵, and then saw glimpses of flames coming from the house. He then heard Ms Reuben screaming “like she was on fire”. He jumped the fence and ran towards the house. He saw Mr Navutovuto running into the bathroom and heard water running.

[137] Mr Bell banged on the front door and, when no one answered, he kicked the door down. To his left, the room was engulfed in flames. Mr Bell saw Mr Navutovuto run in front of him towards the back of the house. The back of Mr Navutovuto’s t-shirt and shorts were melted. It looked to Mr Bell as if Mr Navutovuto was pouring an accelerant as he ran, because a straight line of flames followed him as he ran.

[138] By this stage, Mr Bell could not hear Ms Reuben screaming any more. He ran out the front door and around to the back of the house. Mr Bell saw Mr Navutovuto lying on the ground in the patio, covered with a mat. Parts of him were on fire. Mr Bell dragged Mr Navutovuto out into the back yard and rolled

⁶³ QPS Report, Appendix 6 – BWC footage Stafford, Transcript, p 93.

⁶⁴ QPS Report, Appendix 6 – BWC footage Stafford, Transcript, p 96.

⁶⁵ QPS Report, Appendix 58 – Statement of Ethan Bell, para 15.

him to put him out. Mr Navutovuto was screaming and smelled strongly of petrol.

[139] Mr Bell asked whether there was anyone else in the house, and Mr Navutovuto said that his wife was inside. Mr Bell called 000.

[140] Mr Bell ran back into the house through the back door. He could smell petrol strongly. The house was engulfed in flames. Then he heard his father yelling for him to get out because Ms Reuben was at the front. Mr Bell went back out through the back of the house and stayed with Mr Navutovuto until emergency services arrived.

[141] Patrick Kenyon was driving along Home Hill Road on his way to work at around 5:30am when he saw flames coming out the front door of Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's house. He pulled over and called 000.

[142] Mr Kenyon went to the front of the house and noticed Ms Reuben standing between two bushes. He called 000 again to request QAS. He asked Ms Reuben if she was alright and she said: "he's going to kill me, he's going to kill me"⁶⁶. Ms Reuben got herself over the front fence and onto the footpath, and Mr Kenyon supported her. He observed she was burned all over her body, and there was clothing or skin hanging off her arms. She said "[g]et me away from here, hide me, he's going to kill me".⁶⁷

[143] Mr Bell's mother, Tracey Bell, and his father had come out of their house to help. Mrs Bell also saw Ms Reuben in the front garden and could see that the fire had burnt away her clothes. She ran back to her house to get a sheet which she soaked in water.

[144] Frederick Bosel was backing his car out of the carport of his home which was next door to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's property, Ms Reuben tried to get into Mr Bosel's car, and said "[Isei] is coming to kill me, he's got a knife".⁶⁸

[145] Mr Kenyon and Mr Bosel helped Ms Reuben into the Bosel's carport where Mrs Bell brought over a wet sheet to wrap around Ms Reuben. When the sheet was wrapped around her, Ms Reuben said "shut the door, shut the gate, he is trying to kill me" to Mrs Bell.⁶⁹

[146] ACPs McCallum and Beahan were dispatched to the scene. Two other ambulances were also dispatched. ACP Peter Kane was in one of these, and transported Mr Navutovuto and then Mr Bell to hospital (separately) after they were treated at the scene. ACP Kane stated that while he was in the ambulance, Mr Bell told him "over the last few weeks I heard several loud arguments coming from the residence" and "I heard Isei yelling statements like, I'm going to burn the house down with you in it".⁷⁰ Mr Bell's statement mentions he had

⁶⁶ QPS report, Appendic 62 – Statemetn of Patrick Kenyon, para 15.

⁶⁷ QPS Report, Appendix 62 – Statement of Patrick Kenyon, para 19.

⁶⁸ QPS Report, Appendix 61 – Statement of Frederick Bosel, para 23.

⁶⁹ QPS Report, Appendix 59 – Statement of Tracey Bell, para 36.

⁷⁰ Statement of ACP Kane, para 29.

heard Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto argue frequently, but does not say anything about Mr Navutovuto threatening to burn the house down.

- [147] ACP Kane also stated that when he returned to the house after taking Mr Navutovuto to hospital, he saw his friend Jan, who used to work at the Ayr District Hospital. He thought that Jan lived next door to Ms Reuben. ACP Kane recalled Jan saying to him "Isei had been threatening to do this for the last two weeks" and "I had heard several loud arguments over the last couple of weeks".⁷¹ A statement from a person called Jan was not provided by QPS in respect of these proceedings. Female neighbours residing either side of Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's home, namely Mrs Bell and Beverley Bosel, did not attest to hearing threats or loud arguments over the last two weeks in their statements to QPS.

Issue one: Whether, overall, the QPS response to the DV complaints (and other call-outs) relating to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto was in accordance with QPS policy and procedure in place at the time

- [148] Inspector Dwyer conducted a review of the QPS response to the 13 DV-related incidents which were reported to the QPS, as well as the QPS response on 9 August 2022. She provided a report of her review to DSSgt. McCormack.
- [149] DSSgt. McCormack gave evidence during the inquest that he had received the review as part of his investigation into the deaths, and that he agreed with the conclusions reached by Insp. Dwyer.
- [150] Insp. Dwyer gave evidence that, generally, she found that QPS officers had conducted the relevant investigations in accordance with relevant legislation and procedures, and conducted appropriate interviews with Ms Reuben, Mr Navutovuto and any witnesses.
- [151] Insp. Dwyer made these general comments in her report about the QPS responses to the DV between Mr Navutovuto and Ms Reuben:

The respondent admitted to drink driving which appeared to be a common theme of the alleged offending behaviour given reports of the respondent demanding keys and the aggrieved becoming concerned about the risk of drink driving. There were occasions of third-party reporting of domestic violence to Police, however in some of those instances the informant or persons present at the premises did not witness or observe the domestic violence, but had heard 'arguing' which may have presented grounds for a variation to the order if Police examined these arguments in the context of domestic violence behaviours. It is also noted that the aggrieved was less than engaging with the Police on many occasions impacting the ability to secure evidence to support civil or criminal proceedings, often with the aggrieved having a different opinion of the occurrence to that she had stated to witnesses. There does not appear to have been long-term engagement with the aggrieved to develop a rapport and seek a deep understanding of the significance of domestic violence in her relationship with the respondent. There also does not appear to have

⁷¹ Statement of ACP Kane, para 32.

been significant case management by the QPS. There was no High Risk Team operating in the area where the aggrieved resided.⁷²

[152] Insp. Dwyer also noted that:

There were opportunities for a more effective response, including:

- *There did not appear to be any case management of the matters, and a failure to manage repeat calls for service in compliance with QPS policy;*
- *There was a lack of developing a rapport which may have supported referrals to a DV Service Provider to address safety planning;*
- *Lack of engagement and uptake by the parties regarding referrals that may have addressed issues impacting the relationship including alcohol misuse and mental health of the respondent;*
- *An incident focus as opposed to a holistic approach;*
- *Previous DV-PAF risk factors, fear level and risk levels do not appear to be considered by members when responding to a domestic violence occurrence;*
- *Lack of identifying all relevant risk factors and a lack of making appropriate assessments of risk level noting this latter matter is a subjective assessment to be made by Police on each occasion;*
- *Remembering that covert behaviour is an important indicator of aggrieved fear level which may also including initiating contact with the Police;*
- *Application for additional conditions upon the increased frequency and seriousness of occurrences for the safety of the aggrieved;*
- *More deeply exploring allegations of domestic violence through open questioning;*
- *Ensuring all incidents of related domestic violence (i.e. involving other family) are recorded as domestic violence incidents;*
- *Identification of named persons and making application for them be included on the protection order;*
- *Identification and understanding of perpetrator manipulation and taking action to hold them accountable; and*
- *Identification of other statutory offences (including traffic offences such as repeat drink driving) which provides for a more thorough perpetrator profile and capacity to deter offending.⁷³*

[153] In her evidence, at inquest, Insp. Dwyer explained that, when attending DV callouts, QPS used a DV - Protective Assessment Framework (**DV-PAF**) in order to help them to assess risk factors and risk levels. She said that, in her view, officers attending call-outs relating to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto had consistently recorded “not fearful” in the DV-PAF, but that this was not a correct assessment in the circumstances. Insp. Dwyer confirmed that the fear intended to be recorded was not a measure of the fear reported by the aggrieved at the time of the incident, but a more objective measure of fear of DV

⁷² QPS Report, Appendix 65 – DFV&VPC Review, p 12.

⁷³ QPS Report, Appendix 65 – DFV&VPC Review, pp 12 - 13.

occurring in the future, based on the DV history and the behaviour of the perpetrator over time.

[154] She also explained that an under-reporting of the risk level had the potential to give future investigating officers an unrealistic view of the history of DV and the risk posed to Ms Rueben. She said that, by the last few occurrences in the history, because of the number and frequency of the occurrences, the risk posed to Ms Rueben was high or extreme and should have been recorded as such in the DV-PAF.

[155] Some incidents were not recorded as DV incidents at all when, in Insp. Dwyer's opinion, there were indicators which would have allowed the incident to be classed as a DV incident and investigated accordingly. She gave evidence that proper classification and recording may have allowed better protection for Ms Reuben and other family members who were also assaulted by Mr Navutovuto, and a better understanding of Mr Navutovuto's overall offending by officers looking at his QPS history in the future.

[156] Insp. Dwyer also noted that there were occasions on which Mr Navutovuto was exhibiting DV perpetrator behaviour, such as possible financial control, as well as manipulative tactics, which should have sparked professional curiosity in investigating police and led to a more in-depth investigation of the circumstances.

[157] However, Insp. Dwyer also made it clear in her report and in oral evidence that these were not straight-forward attendances for the officers involved, and noted the following complexities faced by officers at each attendance:

- *Communication challenges, including English as a second language for the respondent, and intoxication of both the aggrieved and respondent;*
- *Disengagement of the victim who declined to provide statements;*
- *Reluctance of witness/es to provide statements to Police;*
- *Frequent image management by the respondent and perpetrator tactics to avoid identification as the respondent;*
- *Aggrieved denying domestic violence had occurred when engaged by Police and spoken to separately from the respondent;*
- *Inability to develop a rapport with the aggrieved.*⁷⁴

[158] On the basis of the evidence of Insp. Dwyer, with which DSSgt. McCormack agreed, I find that, although some shortcomings and missed opportunities have been identified with the benefit of hindsight and *exhaustive* review, the QPS response to the DV complaints (and other call-outs) relating to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto was, generally, in accordance with QPS policy and procedure in place at the time.

⁷⁴ QPS Report, Appendix 65 – DFV&VPC Review, p 13.

Issue two: Whether there is any appropriate action which could have been taken by QPS Officers on 9 August 2022 which could have prevented the incident which led to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's deaths

- [159] As noted above, following the fire which caused Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's deaths, Constables Stafford and Shields both participated in directed interviews with DSSgt. McCormack and gave their respective accounts of their attendance that night.
- [160] Both officers attended DV training following their interviews and participated in the ongoing suite of DV training developed and implemented by the QPS between 2022 and 2024.
- [161] In his oral evidence, DSSgt. McCormack stated that, in his opinion, the response by officers Stafford and Shields on 9 August 2022 was "less than optimal", and that it could have been better. He considered, however, that the officers had tried their best in during the incident which was of a dynamic nature and that they were hampered by barriers to communication and incident management. He said that, in hindsight, there were missed opportunities to take Ms Reuben to a place of safety and properly establish the history between the two, and that the officers should not have been influenced by Ms Reuben's views when she insisted that there was no DV.
- [162] DSSgt. McCormack re-iterated during his evidence, however, that these assessments were made in hindsight and he noted that, since August 2022, significant changes had been made to the law and police policy and magnified and intensified DFV training had been provided to all members of the QPS.
- [163] DSSgt. McCormack gave evidence that, in his view, that there was no appropriate action that either officer could have taken on 9 August 2022 which could have, with certainty, prevented the fire which led to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's deaths.
- [164] Insp. Dwyer also gave evidence in her report and at inquest as to the response by officers Stafford and Shields on 9 August 2022.
- [165] Insp. Dwyer noted in her report that threats of suicide may amount to "emotionally and psychologically abusive behaviour"⁷⁵ by a DV perpetrator under section 8(1)(b) of the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012 (DFVPA)*. She considered the officers could have explored that possibility further, and that it may have been something that Ms Reuben herself was unaware of but, was something that could still be considered DV behaviour.
- [166] Mr Navutovuto's behaviour could also have been considered "coercive behaviour"⁷⁶ under section 8(1)(e) of the DFVPA. Insp. Dwyer identified Mr Navutovuto's strong gendered beliefs as reflecting his view that men were dominant, and noted that, despite the fact that he made these beliefs quite clear,

⁷⁵ QPS Report, Appendix 65 – DFV&VPC Review, p 2.

⁷⁶ QPS Report, Appendix 65 – DFV&VPC Review, p 2.

and verbally abused Ms Reuben in front of QPS, the officers continued to ask him for his input as to what should occur that night. Insp. Dwyer commented in her report that this resulted in a further loss of autonomy for Ms Reuben.

- [167] Insp. Dwyer considered that, while the officers investigated in accordance with the requirements of the DFVPA and the QPS Operational Procedures Manual (OPM), “the investigation appeared to focus on the most recent DFV event”.⁷⁷ She noted that:

*DFV incidents need to be understood in the context of a pattern of abuse and regard to the history of violence when determining action to take to protect the aggrieved. When only one incident is considered, risk assessments are skewed, and victim safety can be compromised. An assessment of QPRIME entries identified an escalation in domestic violence including a recent occurrence in which there was protracted violence. The respondent was convicted and ordered to probation for 6 months from 22 November 2021 for that offence. The respondent had also made admissions to responding Police to being dealt with by police on several occasions and for having been subject of a probation order. Attending police were in possession of QLiTE devices. It is unknown whether those devices were used to obtain understanding of the pattern of offending, however it presents as a potential missed opportunity to effectively appraise themselves of the circumstances, the pattern of domestic violence, previous risk assessments and action to take to protect the victim and hold the perpetrator to account. (Reference omitted)*⁷⁸

- [168] In oral evidence, Insp. Dwyer described this as a “single incident context consideration”, and that much of the DV training developed by the QPS was aimed at ensuring that officers take a more “holistic” view when attending DV incidents.

- [169] Insp. Dwyer noted in her report that a DV-PAF was conducted by officers Stafford and Shields, but her view was that the level of risk which was recorded was too low given the history and circumstances of the incident. The level of risk was recorded as “medium” and should have been recorded as “high”. In addition, the “fear” indicator was completed as “not fearful” based on Ms Reuben’s answers to questions posed by the officers. Insp. Dwyer noted that while Ms Reuben “denied feeling fear, her demeanour and behaviour may suggest otherwise”.⁷⁹

- [170] In her report, Insp. Dwyer provided the following summary of her consideration of the response on 9 August 2022:

Police placed significant amount of control in the hands of the respondent, and despite arresting the respondent for behaviour they witnessed, they determined to unarrest the offender and they left the premises, with both the aggrieved and respondent remaining at the address. The officers failed to recognise the significance of prior DV occurrences including significant violence which

⁷⁷ QPS Report, Appendix 65 – DFV&VPC Review, p 3.

⁷⁸ QPS Report, Appendix 65 – DFV&VPC Review, p 3.

⁷⁹ QPS Report, Appendix 65 – DFV&VPC Review, p 3.

conflicted with his comments to members on this night, prior protective needs assessments, prior court actions, perpetrator tactics, manipulation and image management to avoid detection as the perpetrator. Police failed to identify phraseology during this investigation including the respondent would rather be dead than be with the aggrieved. This action failed to protect the aggrieved and failed to hold the perpetrator to account for his behaviour. Both members were subject to intensive training a short time after the homicide occurred with the training commencing prior to the death of the respondent.⁸⁰

- [171] In oral evidence, Inspector Dwyer qualified these comments significantly. She said that she recognised these tactics because of her expertise in DV, and she would expect QPS officers to recognise these tactics now given the significant amount of DV training which is now delivered to recruits and serving officers. However, that training was not in place at the time that officers Stafford and Shields attended the house, so she would not have expected either officer to be able to identify Mr Navutovuto's perpetrator tactics at that time.
- [172] Constable Stafford, now a Senior Constable, and Constable Shields both gave evidence at inquest.
- [173] In her evidence at inquest, SC Stafford was honest and forthright about her conduct during the interaction with Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto.
- [174] She gave evidence that, having now had the additional DV training, she would have done things differently. In particular, she would have asked questions of Ms Reuben differently. She would not have been so frustrated, and she now recognised that her frustration may have affected the way that Ms Reuben responded to her. SC Stafford also said that she could have questioned Mr Navutovuto herself, given Const. Shields's lack of experience. She admitted having had a very isolated view of what she was going to, and that she did not allow other factors to be brought up by Ms Reuben which could have led to other actions.
- [175] SC Stafford said that it would have assisted her if she had notice of the sort of information that the family knew about previous threats of harm/violence by Mr Navutovuto. She explained that, at the time, she had a quick look at their history, but she did not remember that triggering how she investigated the incident. She said that an easily available DV history would have helped in that type of situation, and that other information from family and friends about threats would have helped her to ask other questions of Ms Reuben.
- [176] SC Stafford also said that this was her last night shift out of seven, and that she was exhausted. She said that in hindsight, her exhaustion would have had an effect on how she was able to respond to the situation as it unfolded.
- [177] In cross-examination SC Stafford said that, having now had the benefit of the DV training that is now available to QPS officers and staff, she takes a more holistic approach to DV callouts, which involves an in-depth investigation into

⁸⁰ QPS Report, Appendix 65 – DFV&VPC Review, p 5.

the history of the couple and looking at the relationship as a whole rather than as an isolated single incident call-out.

[178] SC Stafford also made some comments about the mode of the new training. She said that most of the new training was face-to-face training, whereas prior to that no training outside of the Academy was face-to-face. She found that face-to-face scenarios were particularly useful in order to give trainees an example of indicators they might miss in the course of dealing with complex situations. She said that face-to-face training also meant that you must engage in the training rather than just skipping through a PowerPoint training online.

[179] Const. Shields was equally forthcoming in his evidence at inquest. He said that he went there on that night to help someone who he thought was trying to commit suicide. He said that since he received the further training, he now felt better able to help other people in similar situations.

[180] Const. Shields also said that further information about previous threats would have been helpful to him on that night.

[181] I find that officers Stafford and Shields gave an honest accounting of themselves and demonstrated insight into their own actions on the night incident. I further find they have both also satisfactorily demonstrated the knowledge and experience they have now gained from the additional training they have completed.

[182] I find that there was nothing which occurred during the interaction between them and Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto which could have indicated to either of these officers that the night would end in such tragic circumstances.

[183] On the basis of the evidence of DSSgt. McCormack and Insp. Dwyer, I find that, absent the benefit of hindsight, there was no appropriate action which could have been taken by QPS officers on 9 August 2022 which could have prevented the incident which led to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's deaths.

Issue three: Whether the QPS has made appropriate changes to training, policy and procedure to address any shortcomings identified in respect of DV responses relating to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto

[184] At the conclusion of her review, Insp. Dwyer made the following comments:

Effective training and supervision are vital to addressing the issues identified in this review. The two police officers who were involved in the police response on 9 August 2022 were prioritised for training in the DFV: The Holistic Approach course. They have since completed this 3-day training which covered topics on key issues such as holistic investigations, coercive control; respondent image management; understanding complex trauma; identifying the person most in need of protection and identifying risk factors and conducting DV Protective Assessments. This training was implemented state-

*wide and has been delivered to all members who responded to these DV occurrences.*⁸¹

[185] In oral evidence, Insp. Dwyer explained that the QPS investment into the DFV training conducted from 2022 onwards was the first of its kind and constituted a fundamental shift for the QPS from a singular incident focus, and a narrow mindset, to a holistic approach. She said that a holistic investigation was a fundamental shift into victim centric, trauma informed policing, and gave officers a better understanding that there is “ideal” victim. Officers also gained an understanding of what perpetrator tactics look like in practice.

[186] Insp. Dwyer explained that the training, which she had been responsible for developing, focussed on providing police with not just theory, but with material relating to real callouts and occurrences with the intention that demonstration itself provided an enhanced learning environment for operational police, as opposed to a course based in theory only. The training itself was followed by further suites involving coercive control and identification of persons most in need of protection, not to mention First Nations and cultural capability training, and measures implemented following the Hear Her Voice reports. The training was provided to recruits in the academy upwards. Insp. Dwyer said that, as a result, police are now expected to be able to recognise and respond to domestic violence in a more informed and more accurate way.

[187] Both Insp. Dwyer and DSSgt. McCormack gave details of the QPS DV training initiatives and modules which have been implemented between 2022 and 2024 in their documentary evidence which was provided to the Court. Insp. Dwyer explained in oral evidence that the suite of DFV training included training and education on responding to and preventing DFV in First Nations populations, and that further specific cultural capability training is provided to QPS officers and staff. She also advised that QPS have implemented various DFV measures and training in response to the Hear Her Voice Reports released by the Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce, and that QPS Operational Skills and Tactics Training was now in line with recent inquest recommendations arising from recent DV-related coronial investigations (including the Clarke/Baxter Inquest).

[188] On the basis of the evidence of DSSgt. McCormack and Insp. Dwyer, I find that the QPS has made appropriate changes to training, policy and procedure to address any shortcomings identified in respect of DV responses relating to Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto.

Whether any changes to procedures or policies could reduce the likelihood of death occurring in similar circumstances or otherwise contribute to public health and safety or the administration of justice.

[189] In her report, Insp. Dwyer made the following comments:

⁸¹ QPS Report, Appendix 65 – DFV&VPC Review, p 12.

With significant investment in system enhancements QPS members now have real-time access to previous DFV incidents, however Police are still required to inspect individual occurrences to identify information regarding methods of DV perpetration by the respondent (i.e., descriptions of prior history). Value may rest in having an alert screen or pre-populated summary of incident details for past DV Reports - to allow police to profile the perpetrator more accurately and efficiently; more easily identify respondent manipulation and better apply their professional judgement. It would provide police with detailed information at a glance and assist in supporting a holistic approach. It is understood further development is occurring in this space.⁸²

[190] In her evidence at inquest Insp. Dwyer advised that this suggestion had been accepted by QPS and was one of a number of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) projects which have been scheduled for completion by QPS technology staff.

[191] Further information provided by the Commissioner of Police during the inquest advised that:

The details of the ICT project which aims to provide Police Officers with a, “quick flash guide/timeline” of the history of domestic violence between the parties are as follows:

Project title: *Old Police DFV Reform Discovery Project*

Project Objective: *A collaborative review to identify where innovative and modern technology could be implemented alongside system enhancements, process improvements, and legislative reform to support an effective and consistent response to policing Domestic and Family Violence.*

Initiative: *Interactive timeline of DFV events*

Initiative goal: *Enhance investigative capabilities for QPS officers in NextGen by introducing a timeline view feature. This feature addresses pain points such as the challenge of building a holistic picture of a relationship, and events due to information overload or presentation of details. By emphasising past behaviours as a significant predictor of future actions, the timeline view will also allow officers to delve into specific details and filter information. This tool aims to streamline the process, making it easier to obtain a comprehensive review of previous interactions with police, the status of DFV incidents before the courts, relationship to support officers to more easily identify escalating behaviours.*

[192] DSSgt. McCormack supported this recommendation by Insp. Dwyer at the conclusion of his ESC investigation report.

[193] In addition, DSSgt. McCormack made the following recommendation based on the knowledge, obtained during the investigation, that members of Ms

⁸² QPS Report, Appendix 65 – DFV&VP Command Review, p 5.

Reuben's family knew of the domestic violence being perpetrated by Mr Navutovuto, and his recent threats, but did not report them to police:

It is recommended a facility be made available for associates to report DFV, for the QPS to commence engagement with the victim survivors. At present there is a facility to report Crime anonymously through Crime Stoppers. There is no facility currently available to report DFV anonymously or is there any education programs to educate associates about the possibility of reporting DFV. There are many different resources available for victim survivors to seek assistance for DFV.

*The ability for associates to report acts of DFV, will provide a level of freedom of reporting without fear of reprisal by the offender and sometime by the victim survivor.*⁸³

[194] DSSgt. McCormack gave evidence that, to his knowledge, the QPS has no specific facility by which members of the public and anonymously report DFV.

[195] In further information which he provided during the inquest, DSSgt. McCormack advised that:

In my report I outline the possibility of a mechanism for members of the public to report acts of DFV to a dedicated reporting line or area either by leaving their name or anonymously, similar to what is in place with Crime Stoppers. Evident through this inquest has been the knowledge by family and neighbours of the serious acts of DFV against Ms Reuben by Mr Navutovuto, including in the weeks leading up, Mr Navutovuto threatening to burn the house down with Ms Reuben inside.

[A practical structure for developing this mechanism] would be:

- *Inquiries made into the feasibility of establishing a dedicated reporting system for the community, allowing them to report acts of DFV by either leaving their details or anonymously.*
- *Upon this information / intelligence being received by the QPS it is directed to the District DFV&VP Unit for review of the current intelligence and history of the parties involved.*
- *Upon review of the information, a admiralty scale is given to the intelligence and disseminated to the local police for attendance and engagement with the nominated victim survivor.*
- *A media campaign would also be required to highlight this avenue of reporting.*

Points for further consideration:

- *The current Crime Stoppers could be expanded to include acts of DFV, a media campaign to inform the community this is an avenue for reporting.*

⁸³ D22 - QPS Report, para 21.3.

- *This can be abused by members of the community falsely reporting anonymously, however this currently occurs with Crime Stoppers.*
- *This will create extra work load on DFV&VP Units and General Duties officers.*

[196] In my view, these recommendations by serving QPS officers have significant value, and the evidence obtained during this inquest suggests that both recommended improvements, if they can be implemented, may be tools that can assist QPS officers and members of the public in addressing DV more effectively.

[197] Accordingly, I make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: That the Commissioner of Police consider prioritising the implementation of the Qld Police DFV Reform Discovery Project; and

Recommendation 2: That the Commissioner of Police consider the feasibility of establishing a dedicated reporting system for the community, allowing them to report acts of DFV by either leaving their details or opting to make the report anonymously.

Conclusion

[198] It is abundantly clear that Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's relationship was, from almost the very beginning, characterised by varying manifestations of abuse and violence. It also seems clear that arguments between the two occurred frequently when they were drinking and often occurred in front of relatives and friends.

[199] It appears that members of both Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto's respective families were of the opinion that Ms Reuben should not remain in the relationship, but Ms Reuben refused, or was too scared, to leave. At the time of their deaths Ms Reuben told QPS that Mr Navutovuto was her ex-partner, but she was still trying to "help him".

[200] Mr Navutovuto's behaviour towards Ms Reuben escalated over time, and, at least on one version of events, he also assaulted her sister and her younger son, as well as an unknown member of the public, following arguments with Ms Reuben. This pattern of escalating violence did not appear to be recognised by QPS officers who responded to DV calls, and any QPS response was hindered (although not prevented) by the reluctance of Ms Reuben and family members to follow through with complaints against Mr Navutovuto.

[201] However, Mr Navutovuto's violence was not, in relative terms, serious enough to give anyone any indication that he would take the actions that he did on 9 August 2022.

[202] Given the information which was available to the Constables when they attended Ms Reuben's address, I find that there is no reasonable basis on which anyone could have foreseen the events which occurred after they left. It is only with the benefit of hindsight that any recommendations could be made about

what should have occurred, but even then, there is no evidence before the Court to suggest that any alternative action taken by the officers that night would have prevented the deaths.

[203] As to the fire that caused the deaths, forensic examination has shown that an accelerant, petrol, was used. There were two separate seats of fire, which suggests that the most likely cause of the fire was that it was, either deliberately or accidentally, started by a person. The evidence of the neighbour who went into the house was that he saw Mr Navutovuto running down the hall with a line of fire following him. The neighbour said it looked like Mr Navutovuto was pouring accelerant as he ran. The neighbour did not see Ms Reuben while he was inside the house.

[204] There is medical evidence about the burns to Ms Reuben, and how they may have been caused, which conflicts with the view that Mr Navutovuto may have poured petrol on her. The evidence of Dr Muller was that the burn pattern he saw on Ms Reuben was inconsistent with accelerant having been poured on her unless she was unconscious at the time.

[205] While the police were preparing to charge Mr Navutovuto with murdering Ms Reuben, that was when Mr Navutovuto was still alive and could have been in a position to give his version of events. Now that he is unable to do so, as is Ms Reuben, I consider that I do not have sufficient evidence to make a determination as to exactly how the fire started, or to determine conclusively that it was started by Mr Navutovuto.

Findings required by s 45 of the *Coroners Act 2003*

[206] I make the following findings:

Identity of the deceased – The deceased were Lizzie ('Florrie') Reuben (DOB: 10/06/1977) and Isei Navutovuto (DOB: 27/10/1956)

How the deceased died – At about 5:15 on the morning of 9 August 2022 neighbours noticed a fire at Ms Reuben's house, where Mr Navutovuto was staying at the time. Despite the efforts of neighbours to get Ms Reuben and Mr Navutovuto out of the house, both were badly burned. Ms Reuben suffered burns to 97% of her body, and Mr Navutovuto suffered burns to 45% of his body.

Forensic evidence suggests that the fire was started by a person (rather than, for instance, an electrical fault) as there were two seats (origins) of fire, and an accelerant (petrol) was present.

There is insufficient direct evidence, however, to definitively determine whether the fire was deliberately or accidentally lit, how it was lit, or by whom.

Place of death – Ms Reuben passed at the Townsville University Hospital at 100 Angus Smith Drive, Douglas, Qld.

Mr Navutovuto died at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital at Butterfield Street, Herston, Qld.

Date of death– Ms Reuben passed on 9 August 2022.

Mr Navutovuto died on 29 August 2022.

Cause of death – Ms Reuben's cause of passing was burns.

Mr Navutovuto cause of death was multiorgan failure, due to, or as a consequence of burns.

I close the Inquest.

Stephanie Gallagher

Deputy State Coroner

BRISBANE