

Inquest into the death of Muraka Jenny Vearncombe

Ms Vearncombe died on 3 March 2010 from head injuries due to ejection of a section of steel pipe from a slasher. She was walking on a footpath in Townsville, about 15 metres away from slasher when the slasher blade came into contact with a length of steel pipe lying on the ground. A section of the pipe was ejected under the force of the rotating blade, passing through a chain curtain at the rear of the slasher and fatally striking Ms Vearncombe in the head.

Coroner Kevin Priestly delivered his findings of inquest on 28 March 2013.

The Queensland Government responds to recommendations directed to government agencies at inquests by informing the community if a recommendation will be implemented or the reason why a recommendation is not supported. Further information relating the implementation of recommendations can be obtained from the responsible agency named in the response.

Recommendation 1

Workplace Health and Safety consider issuing a safety alert targeting contractors and organisations that might engage contractors in slashing operations with objective of raising awareness about:

- the limits to personal experience, however much experience an individual operator might have
- the availability of collective knowledge and experience of the industry in various publications such as that in the New South Wales WorkCover guidelines on slashing
- a reminder about the need to use, and demonstrate the use of, manufacturer's safety information in the development and implementation of operating procedures
- a reminder about the application of a basic risk management process in deciding on what mix of control measures is necessary.

Response and action: the recommendation is agreed in part and implementation is complete.

Responsible agency: Queensland Treasury.

The Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland agree there is an opportunity to raise awareness within the industry of slashing operations. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland convened a meeting with representatives of the Local Government Association of Queensland and a number of regional councils around South East Queensland. Local councils (and their subcontractors) were selected as parks and gardens; sports and recreation; and footpath maintenance programs were significant users of this type of equipment.

The Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland considered that direct engagement would be more effective than the proposed safety alert.

The Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland had previously published *Slashers: a guide on health and safety standards* which provides practical guidance for designers, manufacturers, suppliers and users of slashers. In addition the Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland wrote to the Local Government Association of Queensland about slasher safety issues, drawing attention to this publication. The Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland will also engage with Clubs Queensland in relation to the guide.