



**CORONERS COURT OF
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Inquest:	Inquest into the death of Saso Ristevski
Hearing dates:	9 April 2024
Date of findings:	9 April 2024
Place of findings:	Coroners Court of New South Wales, Lidcombe
Findings of:	Magistrate Teresa O'Sullivan, State Coroner
Catchwords:	CORONIAL LAW - cause and manner of death, homicide
File numbers:	2011/388406
Representation:	Ms K Mackay, Coronial Advocate Assisting the Coroner
Findings:	<p>The findings I make under S81(1) of the <i>NSW Coroners Act</i> are:</p> <p>Identity - The person who died was Saso Ristevski</p> <p>Date of death – Saso died on 28 September 2011</p> <p>Place of death -Saso died at Lake Heights, NSW 2502</p> <p>Cause of death- The cause of Saso's death is a single gunshot wound to the chest.</p> <p>Manner of death - The manner of Saso's death is homicide.</p>
Recommendation:	To the Commissioner of NSW Police: I recommend that the death of Saso Ristevski be referred to the Unsolved Homicide Unit of the NSW Police Homicide Squad for further investigation in accordance with the protocols and procedures of that Unit.
Non-publication orders:	See Annexure A

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Introduction

1. On the evening of 28 September 2011 Saso Ristevski, was fatally shot by an unknown male person outside the Saso family home. The offender was in the company of two other men, all three fled from the scene.
2. An extensive police investigation conducted over a number of years revealed two of the three offenders, however the person who fired the deadly shot has not been identified.

Why is an inquest held?

3. A Coroner's function and the purpose of an inquest are provided for by law as set out in the *Coroners Act 2009 (the Act)*. One of the primary functions of a Coroner is to investigate the circumstances surrounding a reportable death. This is done so that evidence may be gathered to allow a Coroner to answer questions about the identity of the person who died, when and where they died, and what the cause and the manner of their death was. The manner of a person's death means the circumstances surrounding their death and the events leading up to it.
4. Section 6(1)(a) of the Act defines a reportable death to be one which occurs in circumstances where a person died a violent or unnatural death. As Saso died from an injury sustained from a gunshot wound his death is clearly regarded as being both violent and unnatural, making it a reportable death. Further, section 27(1)(a) of the Act provides that an inquest is mandatory if it appears to a coroner that a person died or might have died as a result of homicide. In this case, the evidence establishes that the gunshot wound was inflicted by another person or persons, meaning that Saso died as a result of homicide. It is therefore mandatory to hold an inquest into Saso's death.
5. In this context it should be recognised at the outset that the operation of the Act, and the coronial process in general, represents an intrusion by the State into what is usually one of the most traumatic events in the lives of family members who have lost a loved one. At such times, it is reasonably expected that families will wish to attempt to cope with the consequences of such a traumatic event in private. The loss experienced by family members does not diminish significantly over time. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that both the coronial process and an inquest by their very nature unfortunately compel a family to re-live distressing memories and to do so in a public forum.

Saso's life

6. Understanding the impact that the death of a person has had on their family only comes from knowing something of that person's life and how the loss of that life has affected those who loved that person the most. Therefore, it is extremely important to recognise and acknowledge Saso's life in a brief, but hopefully meaningful, way.
7. Saso Ristevski was born at Wollongong hospital on the 22 July 1974 to parents Tome and Verka. Saso had one older sister, Suzanna. Their parents had immigrated to Australia in the late 60's where they settled in the Illawarra region and raised their children.
8. Saso completed secondary schooling at Smith Hills High School Wollongong and went on to the University of Wollongong where he completed a Bachelor of commerce. During this time, he worked casually at the Amcal Chemist, Wollongong.
9. Between 2004 and 2010 Saso spent time in NSW corrective services custody. Following this he resided with his parents at an address in Lake Heights, near Wollongong. Saso lived on the ground floor of their two-story home. He was enthusiastic about his fitness and had a personal gym setup. This was to avoid interaction with persons he had been associated with prior to his incarceration, and to avoid conflict between Saso and several people in the local community.
10. Around this time, there was information circulating at the time that Saso had a large amount of cash hidden near or at his residence and was known to loan large amounts of cash to associates. There were several reports of disputes between Saso, and a group of local men associated with the supply of illegal drugs.
11. There is no doubt that Saso is greatly missed and loved by his family and his many friends. The sudden and violent circumstances in which Saso's life ended are both extremely tragic and distressing.

The events of 28 September 2011

12. In the morning of the 28 September 2011 Saso attended several small businesses in the Wollongong area where he completed personal tasks, such as having a haircut and enjoying lunch at a beachside café. In the evening he visited an associate's house in Wollongong and enjoyed dinner with a friend. He returned to his home afterwards, as he had a pre-arranged date with a female friend about 8:30pm that night.
13. Between 8:30pm and 8:45pm, Three males attended the Ristevski home and confronted Saso. A firearm was produced and he was fatally shot.

14. All three males left the location, two of the three were last seen running toward Flagstaff Road. The 3rd male is believed to have run down Barina Ave, in a southerly direction.
15. Police were contacted and a lengthy investigation was initiated.

What was the cause and manner of Saso's death?

16. Saso was later taken to the Department of Forensic Medicine where an autopsy was performed on 30 September 2011 by Doctor Rebecca Irvine, forensic pathologist. The autopsy identified a single missile in the mid chest overlying the vertebral column. Associated injuries included massive left haemothorax with modest atelectasis of the left lung.
17. In her autopsy report dated 29 June 2012 Doctor Irvines opined that the cause of Saso's death was a gunshot wound to the chest. Having regard to the events of 28 September 2011 it is clear that Saso died as a result of the actions taken by a group of persons as part of alleged criminal activity. The manner of Saso's death is, therefore, homicide.

What investigation was conducted into Saso's death?

18. Saso's death was investigated over a number of years by experienced and senior investigators from the NSW Police. The brief of evidence tendered in the coronial proceedings contains a large number of witness statements, forensic reports and other documentary and electronic material gathered over the course of the investigation.
19. An extensive police investigation, employing a variety of investigative strategies, identified two of the offenders and criminal proceedings followed. One of these males was found guilty before a jury and is serving a term of imprisonment. The second male was found not guilty before a judge alone trial. Whilst the police investigation identified a third person of interest, criminal proceedings have not yet been commenced against the person who fatally shot Saso.

Should any recommendation pursuant to section 82 of the *Coroners Act 2009* be made?

20. Section 82 of the Act allows a Coroner to make recommendations in relation to any matter connected with a person's death may be made if a Coroner considers them to be necessary or desirable. Such recommendations are often made with view to hopefully improving public health and safety.

21. The discharging of a firearm in a public location resulting in the death of a person is unquestionably a matter of utmost seriousness which impacts upon the safety of members of the community. There is obviously considerable public interest in having the person responsible for such a criminal act being brought to justice.
22. Accordingly, the following recommendation is both necessary and desirable: / ***recommend that the death of Saso Ristevski be referred to the Unsolved Homicide Unit of the NSW Police Homicide Squad for further investigation in accordance with the protocols and procedures of that Unit.***

Findings

23. Before turning to the findings that I am required to make, I would like to thank Ms Karissa Mackay for her assistance during both the preparation for the inquest, and the inquest itself. I also thank Former Detective Senior Constable Peter Brain, and Detective Ryan Paget, for conducting a comprehensive investigation and compiling the extensive brief of evidence.
24. The findings I make under section 81(1) of the Act are:

Identity

The person who died was Saso Ristevski.

Date of death

Saso died on the 28 September 2011.

Place of death

Saso died at Lake Heights, NSW 2502.

Cause of death

The cause of Saso's death is a single gunshot wound to the chest.

Manner of death

The manner of Saso's death is homicide.

Epilogue

25. On behalf of the Coroners Court of NSW I extend my sincere and respectful condolences to Saso's family and many friends for their painful and tragic loss.

26. I close this inquest.



Magistrate Teresa O'Sullivan
State Coroner

9 April 2024

Coroners Court of New South Wales