

Legislative Council

HANSARD

Tuesday 23rd September 2025

**No. 11 - Unlawful Retention of Human Remains**

**Ms WEBB question to LEADER for the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL,  
Ms RATTRAY**

In relation to the Coronial Project currently underway into the autopsy specimens retained by the R. A. Rodda Museum of Pathology at the University of Tasmania, and noting the independence of the Coroner's Office as established under the *Coroners Act 1995* to report, investigate and hold inquests into deaths, fire and explosions, can the government please:

- (1) Clarify the scope of the Current Coronial Project inquiry including whether the Project is investigating the deaths of those individuals from whom the autopsy samples were contained in the Museum of Pathology collection, or the autopsies of those individuals, and any other matters regarding the circumstances surrounding the Museum of Pathology's collection;
- (2) Confirm whether there has been any request for additional resourcing, or any other form of assistance, from the Coroner's Office to assist with matters associated with the Coronial Project including community consultation, and if so, please detail the request and any government response provided;
- (3) Clarify whether, on the conclusion of the Coronial Project, family members who wish to do so will be consulted on the eventual disposal or repatriation of their family member's remains; and
- (4) Detail whether the government has received updates from the Coroner's Office on the progress of the Coronial Project, including but not limited to, the expected completion date.

**ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the honourable member for the question.

The Magistrates Court of Tasmania, including the Coroner's Court, is an independent statutory authority.

From the outset, I note that the coroner's investigation was complex; a significant period has elapsed since the autopsy specimens were retained, and that different legislation was in operation at the time of the deaths.

Coroner Cooper handed down his findings on 8 September 2025, which were published on the Magistrates Court website on 11 September 2025.

- The Coroner confirmed that between the 1950s and early 1990s, 177 specimens of human remains were retained without lawful authority or consent.
- With respect to additional resourcing, in 2023, an additional Senior Administration Officer position was approved for six months to undertake duties specifically related to the Museum Cases Project. This position was filled from 2 August 2023 to 1 February 2024, and was extended to 1 June 2024.
- In February 2025, the Coronial Division and the Department of Justice established and offered access to appropriate professional support through Converge International, a leading provider of mental health and wellbeing support and the Department of Justice's Employee Assistance Program provider, to family members impacted by the project. Family members can access support at any stage and utilise several free appointments with a qualified clinical professional.
- Of the 177 retained specimens, approximately 100 have been identified and either returned to families or respectfully disposed of in accordance with their wishes and legislative requirements.
- 'Disposal' of human remains, within the meaning of the *Coroners Act*, means things such as cremation, burial (including burial at sea), or placing remains in a mausoleum or similar. While the Coroner authorises the 'disposal' of human remains, the Coroner does not have any role in determining the manner of disposal.
- The existing practice, according to the court publication 'The Coroners Court - A Guide for Families and Friends', is for the senior next of kin to be notified by the court once the certificate authorising release is signed.
- It is expected the senior next of kin, possibly in consultation with other family or friends, will then determine the preferred option for 'disposal'. For the sake of completeness, I note there are different provisions that apply where human remains are suspected to be remains of an Aboriginal person.
- Coroner Cooper has noted from his findings that, given current coronial and forensic procedures, it is highly unlikely that such practices will recur, and accordingly no recommendations were required.
- More information about coronial procedures, including how families are supported, is available on the court website at [www.magistratescourt.tas.gov.au/coronerscourt](http://www.magistratescourt.tas.gov.au/coronerscourt).