

# Body parts investigation

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In a finding handed down in September, Simon Cooper found pathologists unlawfully provided specimens from autopsies to Hobart's R.A. Rodda Museum of Pathology from the 1960s to the 1990s.

"It appears at this stage that now-dead forensic pathologist Dr Royal Cummings was the person who provided the large majority of coronial specimens to the museum," Mr Cooper found.

**DAVID KILLICK WRITES, P9**

# We'll find those responsible

David Killick

## Government pledge on body parts scandal

Allegations human body parts were retained without lawful authority or consent have been referred for possible prosecution as the government tries to identify who was responsible, state parliament has heard.

In a finding handed down in September, Simon Cooper found pathologists unlawfully provided specimens from autopsies to Hobart's R.A. Rodda Museum of Pathology from the 1960s to the 1990s.

"It appears at this stage that now-dead forensic pathologist Dr Royal Cummings was the person who provided the large majority of coronial specimens to the museum," Mr Cooper found, but said others appeared

to have been involved. "It was identified that the practice ... (was) finally ceased as recently as 1997, with the last specimen from a coronial autopsy having been provided in 1991."

Mr Cooper found that the practice was contrary to the Coroner's Act, which allows for body parts to be removed or retained only for the purpose of investigating the cause of death.

Attorney-General Guy Barnett told parliament the government was taking the findings seriously.

"The Coroner has confirmed that between the 1960s and



**Skeleton and specimen cabinets at the R. A. Rodda Museum.**  
Picture: University of Tasmania

early 1990s, 177 specimens of human remains were retained without lawful authority or consent," he said.

"I advise that following the release of the Coroner's report, I wrote to both the Director of Public Prosecutions and Tasmania Police to make them

aware of the report, and for their consideration of this matter.

"I further advise that the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing has instructed her department to undertake further work to establish, as far as is possible, the identity of any employees within that department during the period of the 1960s through to the early 1990s, who may have been involved in the retention of remains without lawful authority or consent."

Mr Barnett said the government would be apologising to families affected by the practice.

"The government also intends to develop, in consultation with those affected, an appropriate form of parliamentary apology, which all members of this House and the other place will have the opportunity to acknowledge and contribute to," he said.

Independent Member for Nelson Meg Webb said the apology was overdue.

"I welcome the public commitments made by Attorney-General Guy Barnett during Question Time that before the end of this year, a formal statement will be made in the parliament outlining the time

frame and steps the government intends to take to develop an appropriate parliamentary apology to all those affected by the coronial project he delivered next year," Ms Webb said.

"I acknowledge and thank the Attorney-General for taking on board much of the feedback I and others have raised with the government on behalf of the many hurt, angry and bewildered Tasmanians impacted by this shocking situation."

"It is also important for people to know the DPP, Tasmania Police and the Health Department have been asked to investigate any matters arising from the Coronial findings report, even if the passage of time means that not all questions can be answered."