

**05-19-2007 Ronald Hopkins – Volunteer – Boat Training – AUSTRALIA****Ronald Hopkins**

[https://www.longstreath.com/community/incidents/?sortby=col\\_1\\_desc,col\\_2\\_desc,col\\_3&sortdirection=desc&page=1](https://www.longstreath.com/community/incidents/?sortby=col_1_desc,col_2_desc,col_3&sortdirection=desc&page=1)

Aged 54, volunteer who drowned on a flooded boat training exercise in the Murray River at Mildura, body recovered the following day by NSW police divers the day after. Victoria State Emergency Services were convicted and fined \$75,000 and ordered to undertake a thorough and regular review of its workplace safety practices. Quote "Failing to ensure a person other than an employee was not exposed to risk", regarded as a significant conviction as it recognised that organisations have an obligation not just to their direct employees but also the volunteer members. Sydney Morning Herald

**Ses Volunteer Dies In Training Exercise**

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/ses-volunteer-dies-in-training-exercise-20070520-dq7.html>

May 20, 2007

A "passionate and proud" State Emergency Service (SES) volunteer has died after going missing during a training exercise on the Murray River.

The body of Mildura man Ronald Hopkins was found about 10am (AEST) on Sunday, 17 hours after he went missing during a boat exercise in Victoria's north-west.

Mr Hopkins' death comes one week after he joined SES colleagues in the search for two fishermen whose bodies were found near the river town.

On Saturday, his unit was forced to turn their training exercise into a real life emergency hunt as the Murray River claimed another victim.

SES volunteers on Sunday remembered Mr Hopkins as a good mate and a dedicated member of the Mildura unit for the past seven years.

"He was a very proud and passionate member of the local SES unit," SES media spokesman Allan Briggs said.

"It's certainly taken its toll on the unit ... (Mr Hopkins was) not only a colleague in volunteering but also a bloody good mate."

Mr Hopkins, 54, sparked a rescue operation about 5pm (AEST) Saturday when he went missing near the George Chaffey bridge at Mildura.

NSW police and SES volunteers from Victoria and NSW searched the Murray until 10pm, and the operation resumed with NSW police divers at first light on Sunday morning.

Mr Hopkins' wife and children had been maintaining a vigil at the search scene and were present when his body was found, Mr Briggs said.

Many of the volunteers involved in the operation were "quite shaken up" to have been searching for one of their own, he said.

Mr Briggs said Victoria SES would review its training procedure following the tragedy.

"The NSW police will be preparing the report on behalf of the state coroner and Victoria SES will be reviewing our training procedure in that area," he said.

"In an instance like this, it's only appropriate we conduct an internal review." A post-mortem examination will be conducted.

## **Body Of Ses Volunteer Found Near Murray River**

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/body-of-ses-volunteer-found-near-murray-river-20070521-ge4xqf.html>

May 21, 2007

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"In an instance like this, it's only appropriate we conduct an internal review."

A post-mortem examination will be conducted on Mr Hopkins' body. - AAP

SES faces prosecution over volunteer death

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-06-16/ses-faces-prosecution-over-volunteer-death/1714812>

15 Jun 2009

Victoria's State Emergency Service (SES) is being prosecuted over the death of a volunteer at Mildura, in the state's north-west, two years ago.

Ronald Hopkins, 54, was involved in a flood boat training exercise with the SES when he went missing in the Murray River near Mildura in May 2007.

His body was found 17 hours later.

An inquest into Mr Hopkins' death by the New South Wales coroner was terminated earlier this year after advice criminal proceedings would be initiated in Victoria.

The Victorian WorkCover Authority is now prosecuting the SES with failing to ensure a person is not exposed to risk and failing to provide a safe working environment.

The matter will come before the Mildura Magistrates Court again next month.

## **Ses Pleads Guilty To Charge Over Mildura Volunteer's Drowning**

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-11-25/ses-pleads-guilty-to-charge-over-mildura/1156494>

24 Nov 2009

Victoria's State Emergency Service (SES) has pleaded guilty to a charge over the death of a volunteer at Mildura in the state's north-west two years ago.

54-year-old Ronald Hopkins drowned while he was doing an SES swim test in the Murray River in May 2007.

WorkSafe is prosecuting the service for failing to provide a safe environment.

The Mildura Magistrate's Court heard today Mr Hopkins had completed a self assessment of his swimming ability before the exercise, in which he said he swam like a boat anchor. The court heard that assessment was never collected or reviewed by those running the test.

The case is continuing.

## **Ses Found Guilty Over Drowning**

<https://www.news.com.au/national/breaking-news/ses-found-guilty-over-drowning/news-story/f225157a438cc6838009c03671fda20f>

November 25, 2009

VICTORIA'S State Emergency Service has been convicted and fined over the death of a volunteer who drowned while on a training exercise.

The SES pleaded guilty in the Mildura Magistrates' Court today to one count of failing to ensure a person other than an employee was not exposed to risk, over the death of Ronald Hopkins two years ago.

Mr Hopkins, 54, died after getting into difficulties while diving during a flood boat exercise in the Murray River at Mildura on May 19, 2007.

His body was recovered by New South Wales police the next day.

WorkSafe Victoria spokesman Michael Birt said the SES was convicted and fined \$75,000 for the breach, and was ordered by the court to undertake a thorough and regular review of its workplace safety practices.

"It (the conviction) is significant because it recognises that organisations have an obligation to their direct employees, but also to the volunteer members of our community," he said.

## **Ses Fined Over Death**

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/ses-fined-over-death-20091125-jru8.html>

November 26, 2009

THE Victorian State Emergency Service Authority has been fined \$75,000 for the death of one of its Mildura volunteers in 2007.

In May 2007, SES volunteer Ronald Hopkins, 54, disappeared in the Murray River near the George Chaffey Bridge during a training exercise, which was described by the magistrate at Mildura Magistrates Court as "a disaster waiting to happen".

Mr Hopkins' body was found by NSW divers the next day and the Victorian WorkCover Authority followed with legal proceedings.

## How Much Does Poor Safety Management Cost?

<https://safetyatworkblog.com/2009/12/02/how-much-does-poor-safety-management-cost/>

December 2, 2009 by Kevin Jones

In late November 2009, the Victorian State Emergency Services (SES) was convicted of OHS breaches over the death of one of its volunteers and was fined \$A75,000. The SES has chosen to allocate \$A150,000 to a review of its safety management after strong criticism from the Mildura Magistrate, Peter Couzens.

In answer to the title of this article, a minimum of \$A225,000 and one person's life.

In May 2007, a volunteer with the SES a, 54-year-old Ron Hopkins drowned on a training exercise in the Murray River. WorkSafe Victoria provides the following scenario:

*"A boat took the four volunteers doing the [swimming] test out into the river and they got in to the water but Mr. Hopkins soon got into difficulty.*

*An oar was extended to him from the safety boat but he soon disappeared below the water.*

*Despite the efforts of the SES personnel to find him, his body was recovered the next morning by NSW police divers.*

*WorkSafe's investigation found the safety boat had life jackets for the two assessors who were in the boat, but there were no other buoyancy devices which could be used in an emergency.*

*Some other participants involved in the swim test also experienced difficulties in the cold water and after swimming to the centre pylon of the George Chaffey Bridge, they held on to bolt heads extending from a rubber buffer attached to the pylons at water level. They were later picked up by the safety boat.*

*At the time of Mr Hopkins' death the SES had no rule against carrying out swim tests in water where there was limited visibility or where a rescue could be difficult to carry out if someone got into trouble.*

*As a result, lakes and rivers were sometimes used as well as local swimming pools.*

*At the time of this incident there were a number of swimming pools with the facilities to help anyone one (sic) who got into difficulties in the Mildura area that could have been used for the test."*

Hopkins had been a member of the SES for seven years and had participated in searches associated with drownings previously, according to one AAP report. The SES expressed regret and sympathy at the time of the incident in a [media statement](#). A short report of Hopkins funeral is available [online](#).

As the Murray River runs on the boundary between Victoria and New South Wales a NSW coronial inquest was planned until the Victorian prosecution was [announced](#).

At the committal hearing in June 2009, the [magistrate](#) allowed Hopkins' widow, Meryl, some input in the Court procedures. And in the November 2009 hearing, Mrs Hopkins' [victim impact statement](#) is reported to have said that:

*"... since the incident Mrs Hopkins had felt her life had lost meaning and she sometimes wished she had drowned with him. The court heard she had experienced mental and physical health issues, including post traumatic stress, panic attacks, exhaustion and sleep disturbance."*

In 2003/04 Chris Maxwell undertook a review of the Victorian OHS Act and was critical of the special treatment provided to government authorities at that time and advocated that any organisation that breaches OHS law should be treated equally. Maxwell told the Central Safety Group in 2004:

"I have to address a meeting next week of the Heads of Department to talk to them about the chapter entitled "The Public Sector As An Exemplar". They need it explained a little more fully. It is good that the Public Sector wants to grapple with the issue "what does that mean for us?" It is a theme of the Report that the public sector should be treated exactly the same as the private. It shouldn't be otherwise but the history of prosecutions tends to make you wonder about that. I know John Merritt, the Executive Director is absolutely committed to that principle. It is interesting to note that the Education Department has recently received an Improvement Notice."

In his actual report he advocated that government departments should not only be treated the same but that they should become OHS role models. When comparing the Victorian situation with a UK review he wrote:

*"I would go further, however, and suggest that government (as employer and duty holder, and as policy maker) can, and should, be an exemplar of OHS best practice. By taking the lead in the systematic management of occupational health and safety,*

*government can influence the behaviour of individuals and firms upon whom duties are imposed by the OHS legislation.”*

If this had been embraced by the OHS regulator and government departments agencies imagine the state of OHS compliance on matters of workplace stress and manual handling in health care and other public service hazards. And maybe, the SES OHS program would have been further advanced than it was in 2007 when Ronald Hopkins died.