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Editorial

I suppose you are all familiar by now with the tragic Vanner case, the South Taranaki dairy-farming family whose little daughter died when the quadbike she was driving overturned and her father was charged with manslaughter. I had not intended to write anything about this sad case; after all, it was well covered by all the Media, right up to Gavin Vanner's acquittal, by a High Court jury, on two very serious charges. What changed my mind and got my back up a bit was a front-page, large headlined article in the newspapers just two days after the closure of the above court-case, reporting strong criticism about some aspects of this case by no less a person than the Commissioner for Childred, Ms Cindy Kiro.

From the newspaper, quote, 'The Commissioner has criticised Gavin Vanner and the farming community

that supported him through this weeks' manslaughter trial in the High Court at New Plymouth. Ms Kiro also criticised the witnesses who went to court to testify for Mr Vanner. "It just means there are other people that make irresponsible decisions. They need to wake up, basically. I'm not suggesting the guy should be locked up or found guilty of murder or manslaughter or anything like it, but what he did was entirely preventable", the Commissions said'. Unquote.

The newspaper quoted a lot more from the Commissioner, about her deep concerns at the perceived lack of safety knowledge by operators of quad bikes in particular, urging all New Zealanders not to allow any young children on these "weapons". I completely agree with the Commissioner on these last sentiments. All operators of especially these machines

should be aware of the guidelines issued by Federated Farmers and OSH. They are very clear!!!

"Do not let a child under 12 years of age operate these machines alone". They are good, commonsense guidelines. But of course, as all country parents know, these machines hold a riveting fascination on all children from two to twenty-two years of age!!! What country parent has not seen the absolute euphoria on their child's face at the prospect of riding around the farm with 'Daddy' on the bike! And in these last words lies the crux of this tragedy, "with Daddy on the bike", not a very young child driving it alone. This was Gavin Vanners' fatal mistake, a split seconds' wrong decision during a few seconds of inattention. We are all painfully aware of his mistake.

What got my back up was Commissioner Kiro's criticism of the huge support for the Vanner Family from their relatives and friends as well as the wider farming community. She even criticised the witnesses who testified in court for Mr Vanner as to his good character and devotion to his family. Good Lord! What did the Commissioner expect? The poor, grieving fellow was facing very serious criminal charges on top of his absolute sorrow, of course his wider family and friends would rally to his support!

According to my 'Oxford Dictionary' the definition of the work 'manslaughter' is: "unintentional but not accidental unlawful killing of human being". As I see it, the crucial words are: "but not accidental". Was this not a tragic accident, period? So the jury was spot-on in their interpretation of the Law and decided their verdict accordingly. It is going to be 'a freezing day in Cairo' when court witnesses, whether called by the prosecution or defence, can not do so without any criticism from any Public Servant!!!

Gavin Vanner has already received a 'life sentence'; he does not need anyone to remind him of this. What he needs is the ongoing and strong support from his Family and friends for many years to come! Only those of us who have been through the same "mill" can fully comprehend the 'hell on earth' Gavin Vanner will have to go through during the next few years before the worst of the pain gradually eases. This will happen, I can assure him, but it will take a while. He has my fullest sympathy, no criticism or condemnation.

In conclusion, no, I have never met any of the Vanner Family nor, to the best of my memory, any of their friends.

**Cheerio everyone
from Paul!**

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