

## NT warned on cannonball safety

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Darwin.

Australia's chief motoring body expressed strong concerns about public safety to the Northern Territory Chief Minister, Mr Marshall Perron, more than two months before the Cannonball Run, an inquest was told yesterday.

Counsel assisting the coroner, Mr Michael Adams, QC, said a Confederation of Motor Sport letter of 3 March expressed concern about the "sustained high speeds on open public roads required of largely unevaluated drivers in high performance vehicles not equipped with normal competition safety equipment".

The letter, from the confederation chief executive officer, Mr Guy Boileau, also expressed concern about the close interval between vehicles, the size of the fleet and "our current ignorance of any specific approval by your government of the concept and conduct of the event".

The coroner, Mr John Lowndes, is investigating the deaths of Japanese competitors Akihiro Kabe, 40, and Takeshi Okano, 35, and Cannonball volunteers Tim Linklater, 22, and Keith Pritchard, 31, on 24 May.

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The Japanese, driving a Ferrari, lost control of their vehicle about 95 kilometres south of Alice Springs, killing themselves as well as the volunteer stationed at a checkpoint.

Mr Perron's letter in reply, dated 10 March, said the competitors were bound by a manual of rules. He said a Cannonball steering committee had considered surveys of the 3800-kilometre route, and the effect on normal public traffic. He said drivers would be breath-tested daily.

Mr Adams told the inquest that Mr Perron's letter did not deal with key safety concerns of the CAMS letter.

Former deputy commissioner of the NT police, Mr Bill Goedegebuure, said that, to his knowledge, the CAMS letter was never seen by the run steering committee. He said he would have expected those matters to have been referred to the committee, of which he was a member.

Mr Lowndes said he was "astounded" the CAMS letter was not referred to the committee as Mr Perron's reply "purports to somehow reflect the views of the committee".

The inquest was told cars such as the Ferrari would have to average 198kmh to travel from Alice Springs to the checkpoint to avoid penalty points.

Mr Goedegebuure, who was subpoenaed to appear at the inquest, said he would have been personally concerned at such speeds had the committee been made aware of them.

He said the race had the full support of the NT Government. and Mr Perron and was "locked in" by early 1994.

Race organiser and former car racing champion Allan Moffat is expected to give evidence today.

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