



Western

Australia

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

Ref No: 38/17

*I, Evelyn Felicia Vicker, Deputy State Coroner, having investigated the suspected death of **Gary John LYDDIETH**, with an Inquest held at Perth Coroners Court, Court 51, Central Law Courts, 501 Hay Street, Perth, on 17 October 2017 find the death of **Gary John LYDDIETH** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt, the identity of the deceased was **Gary John LYDDIETH** and that death occurred on a date unknown between 3 May and 1 August 2014, at a place unknown in the State of Western Australia, in the following circumstances:-*

Counsel Appearing:

Sergeant L Housiaux assisted the Deputy State Coroner

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
BACKGROUND	3
The Deceased	3
Medical	5
The Plan	7
Campervan	9
The Motorcycle	10
THE EVENTS 26 APRIL – 9 AUGUST 2014	11
Location of the Campervan	17
Post Location of the Campervan	22
CONCLUSION AS TO THE DEATH OF THE DECEASED	24
MANNER AND CAUSE OF DEATH	27

INTRODUCTION

Gary John Lyddieth (the deceased) had planned a surfing/holiday trip to Red Bluff on the north west coast of Western Australia with a close friend, Colin Bickmore, from Bruny Island, Tasmania.

The plan was to meet at Carnarvon Airport on 6 May 2014 after the deceased had driven from Melbourne and Mr Bickmore had flown from Darwin.¹

On 6 May 2014 Mr Bickmore arrived at Carnarvon Airport as arranged, but was not met by the deceased. Enquiries with the deceased's family indicated there had been no change in plan from their perspective and a decision was made to report him missing to the Carnarvon Police. That report was made on 7 May 2014 to Senior Constable Jake Corley who completed and filed a missing person report and commenced a number of enquiries.²

The deceased has not been knowingly seen or heard from since the missing person report was filed. He was 54 years of age.

In April 2015 Jan Lyddieth, the estranged wife of the deceased, wrote to Senior Sergeant Paul McComish requesting an inquest into her ex-husband's disappearance

¹ Ex 1, tab 7

² Ex 1, tab 8, Ex 1, tab 25

and probable death, which he forwarded to the Office of the State Coroner (OSC) with his own outline of the missing person investigation he had coordinated with respect to the disappearance of the deceased.

The State Coroner determined there was good cause to believe the deceased was dead and that his death was a reportable death. She directed the death be investigated (section 23 (1) of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA)). When the State Coroner has so directed an inquest is mandated to be held by a coroner to establish beyond all reasonable doubt the missing person is dead and, where possible, how death occurred and the cause of the death. (section 23 (2)).

The OSC received a full brief of the investigation with respect to police actions undertaken concerning the disappearance of the deceased and an inquest was held on 17 October 2017. The documentary evidence comprised of two volumes and a land map of the area in which it is believed the deceased went missing. Senior Sergeant McComish gave oral testimony based on those papers which were accepted into evidence.

BACKGROUND

The Deceased

The deceased was born on 31 January 1960 in Geelong, Victoria. He was the middle child, with an older brother and younger sister, and his recall of his childhood is

dominated by the fact he did not know his father.³ His father was a soldier who went to Vietnam when the deceased was seven years old. His father returned and there was a brief period while the family moved around as an army family, before the deceased's father went back to Vietnam. He died before he returned home in largely unknown circumstances, other than it was not as a result of enemy actions.

The deceased felt those events and the following years, without a stable base, affected his self-esteem and confidence greatly. While he had succeeded in a business sense, running his own construction company,⁴ depression and alcohol dependency had overtaken his life and seen it disintegrate from his perspective.

The deceased married at 22, had a son and a daughter and the family did well until the deceased's depression began to consume his life. He developed a serious alcohol issue and various physical ailments, all of which adversely affected his mental wellbeing. This seriously affected his relationship with his wife and children and saw the loss of his business, his separation, though not divorce, from his wife and numerous suicide attempts, some while he was in facilities attempting to assist his mental health diagnoses.

³ Ex 1, tab 2, Ex 1, tab 21

⁴ Ex 1, tab 7

The deceased and his wife separated in July 2013, though it is apparent he was still in close contact with his wife and children, despite his negative view of their feelings towards him. It is apparent he was well loved but impossible to live with.

Following his separation from his wife the deceased moved among various friends living out of a campervan. In the summers of 2012 and 2013 he had spent time with an old school friend, Mr Bickmore, who had been best man at his wedding. Mr Bickmore lived on Bruny Island, Tasmania. Mr Bickmore considered the deceased had been unwell for a considerable period of time, although he was able to mask his difficulties in the short term. He was known to have sudden and disastrous outbursts requiring his admission to various mental health facilities.

When the deceased was well enough he would help Mr Bickmore with his business, but otherwise was attempting to relearn the activities he had enjoyed in his youth, such as surfing and diving.⁵

Medical

At the time of his death the deceased had, other than various physical conditions such as diabetes requiring insulin, three main issues affecting his mental health. He was diagnosed with major depressive disorder, alcohol

⁵ Ex 1, tab 7

abuse and chronic pain. He had multiple admissions to Beleura Hospital in Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, for both psychiatric and medical problems.⁶

The deceased's consultant psychiatrist, Jeremy Stone, reported the deceased suffered significant suicidality with multiple admissions to Frankston Hospital through 2012 and had attempted suicide twice while in hospital.⁷ The deceased had significant conflict with his family which resulted in the separation with his wife in 2013, following a long hospital admission. On occasions the police had needed to be involved with the deceased's admissions to facilities to cope with his mental health issues.

Over summer 2013/2014 the deceased had been on Bruny Island with Mr Bickmore and attempted to stabilise his life. He and Mr Bickmore had developed a plan for a holiday and the deceased was feeling hopeful he could persuade his family to reunite. The deceased returned to Melbourne hoping to reconcile, but that was not possible. The deceased had great difficulty in accepting that decision and following police intervention was again admitted to Beleura Private Hospital on 10 April 2014.⁸

Dr Stone reported the deceased had done very well in hospital and was planning a new life in Western Australia.

⁶ Ex 2, tab 27

⁷ Ex 2, tab 27

⁸ Ex 2, tab 28

This did not alter the reality the deceased remained a “*very high chronic suicide risk*” in the “*context of depression, crisis and alcohol misuse*”.⁹

Dr Stone discharged the deceased on 23 April 2014 in the belief the deceased was able to deal with his changed circumstances. Although the deceased had been discharged by his psychiatrist arrangements were not finalised and the deceased actually left hospital on 25 April 2014 with appropriate arrangements for his future medications.¹⁰

The Plan

Mr Bickmore stated he and the deceased had known each other for about 35 years and in 1985 had spent five months in WA, surfing and diving at Red Bluff north of Carnarvon.¹¹

Mr Bickmore agreed the deceased had become unwell later in life and, while he was able to function quite well for short periods of time, he would then become very agitated. The deceased appeared to be well while he was occupied with activities, but once returning to a “*home*” environment he would relapse into depression. Mr Bickmore believed the deceased was battling serious mental illness.

Following his separation from his wife the deceased had been staying with Mr Bickmore and his wife during the

⁹ Ex 2, tab 27

¹⁰ Ex 2, tab 28

¹¹ Ex 1, tab 7

summer periods of 2013 and 2014. In that time Mr Bickmore and the deceased had decided to revisit the trip to Red Bluff which they had both thoroughly enjoyed and set about preparing themselves for the holiday.

The intention was for the deceased to buy a Honda motorcycle because they had used a motorcycle in 1985 and found it invaluable for accessing remote locations along the north west coastline. Mr Bickmore believed the deceased was a reasonable rider and had ridden in WA, NT, Indonesia and Thailand.

The deceased was to take their surf boards and the new motorcycle over to WA in his van while Mr Bickmore and his wife went to Darwin. Mr Bickmore would then meet the deceased in Carnarvon on 6 May 2014 for their holiday. The deceased intended to stay in WA until the following summer when he would return to Tasmania to spend time with the Bickmores. Mr Bickmore understood that was to be an ongoing arrangement with the deceased splitting his time between Carnarvon and Bruny Island.

Mr Bickmore received a text message from the deceased on 3 April 2014 telling him not to go to Carnarvon because the deceased would no longer be alive. Mr Bickmore responded by telling the deceased not to be so stupid and he, Mr Bickmore, would rather surf and dive with the deceased than go to his funeral.

Mr Bickmore then received another text message on 24 April 2014, while he was in Darwin, outlining the deceased's plans to buy a property on Bruny Island on return from their holiday in WA. From Mr Bickmore's perspective everything was fine with the deceased and he was well on the road to recovery.

Mr Bickmore did not know the deceased was actually in hospital on 24 April 2014, following an attempted reconciliation with his wife, serious domestic incident and the involvement of the police earlier in April. The text message supported Dr Stone's perception that by 23 April 2014 the deceased was well at discharge and future planning.

Mr Bickmore flew to Carnarvon from Darwin on 6 May 2014 in anticipation of their planned trip, having had no indication anything was amiss.

Campervan

The deceased owned a Nissan Urvan Camper, registration number ZWZ097 (Victoria). It was white with a blue stripe down the side and was fully equipped as a campervan with a sliding door and lift up tail gate with seating capacity for five people. There was a spare wheel attached to the front of the vehicle.¹²

¹² Ex 1, tab 19

When the van was located on 9 August 2014 in the vicinity of Mt Gascoyne it was damaged and un-drivable. It had a crash caused crushed engine oil reserve (sump) and the transmission gear selector rods were buckled (crash caused) which made it impossible to select a gear in the transmission. In addition the air conditioner was unusable to cool the vehicle because the compressor drive belt had not been fitted.

The Motorcycle

The motorcycle was a 2014 Honda Civic CRF250R four stroke, single cylinder, unicom motorcycle, registration number, A938Q, which the deceased had bought in Hobart shortly before he left Tasmania. It was registered in the deceased's name, but to the Bickmores' address and was bought specifically for the purposes of their holiday with the intention being the motorcycle could be stored in the campervan when the van was being used. Mr Bickmore reported the deceased was quite excited about the purchase of the motorcycle. He was an experienced off-road motorcycle rider and had owned motorcycles when growing up and also as an adult.

After the disappearance of the deceased Mr Bickmore received some recall notices with respect to that motorcycle model.¹³ He became even more concerned something may have happened to the deceased when he was on the

¹³ Ex 1, tab 20

motorcycle. When the deceased's campervan was located abandoned in the vicinity of Mt Gascoyne the motorcycle was not in the campervan and has never been located.

THE EVENTS 26 APRIL – 9 AUGUST 2014

Following his discharge from Beleura Mental Health facility in Victoria the deceased had breakfast with his family on 26 April 2014 as a send-off for his planned trip. He left after breakfast in his Nissan Campervan.¹⁴

The next contact the deceased's estranged wife received from the deceased was timed at 9.27 pm (EST) on 26 April 2014 stating "*I'm in Ceduna I'm guttered and I will die the bluff, buy my love of my life*". Ceduna is in South Australia, before the border with Western Australia. It is a distance of approximately 1500 km from Mornington, Victoria.¹⁵ It was a considerable distance for the deceased to have travelled since leaving his family that morning.

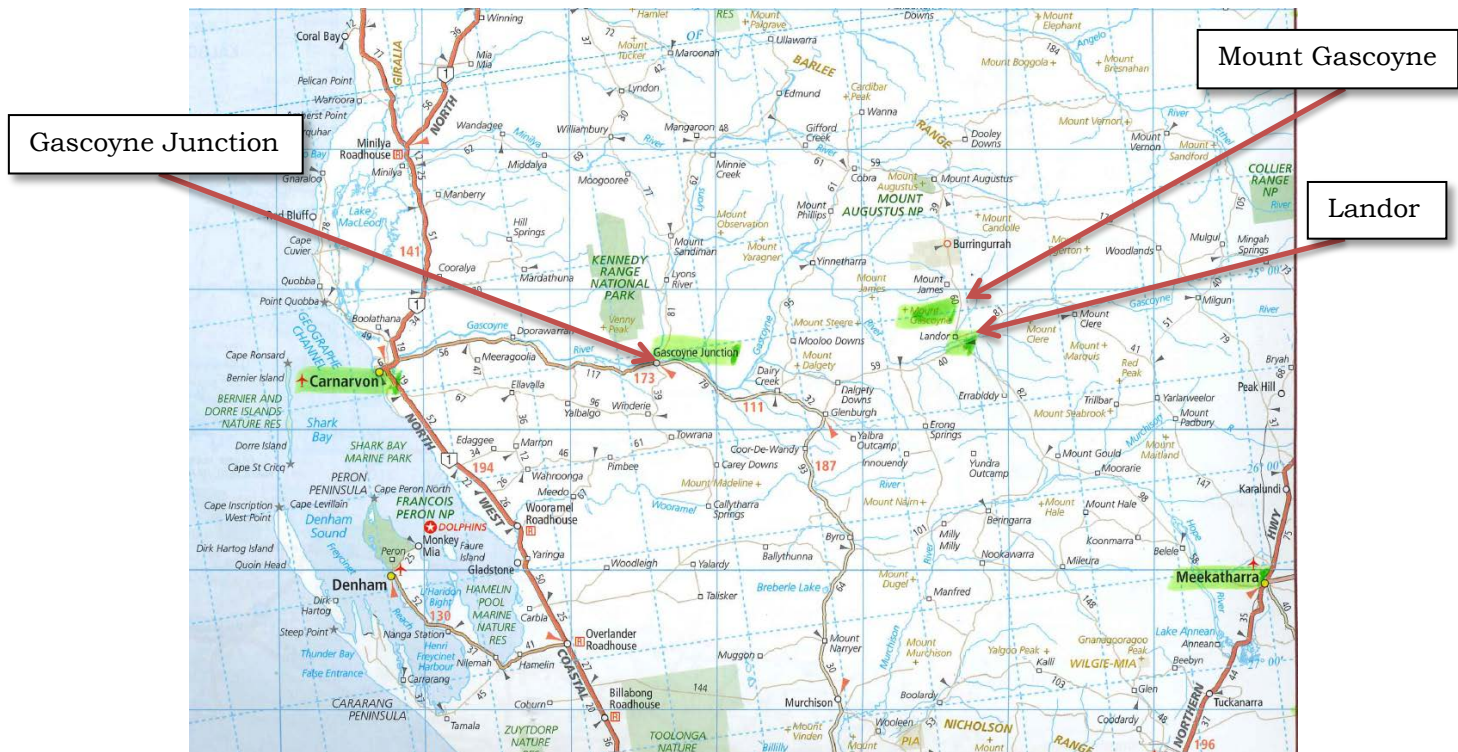
Ms Lyddieth assumed the deceased was referring to dying at Red Bluff on the WA northwest coast. Ms Lyddieth advised the court her husband frequently made such statements and they were reflective of his mood at any one time, but may or not remain his state of mind. At the time she was not particularly worried.¹⁶

¹⁴ † 17.10.17, p14

¹⁵ Ex 1, tab 2

¹⁶ † 17.10.17, p16

The next known location for the deceased was in Meekatharra WA on the Great Northern Highway. It appears from this the deceased's intention was to take the inland route to Meekatharra and then cut across to Carnarvon via Gascoyne Junction.



Above image depicts deceased's last known whereabouts.

On the morning of 3 May 2014 Sergeant Louis Faubert (Faubert) and Senior Sergeant Laura Russ (Russ) from the Burringurrah Multi Function Police Facility (MFPPF), approximately 300 km northwest of Meekatharra had parked at the Meekatharra Police Station at about 8.00 am. Russ had gone into the police station for a discussion and Faubert remained outside, next to the police vehicle.

The deceased approached Faubert and asked him for directions from Meekatharra to Gascoyne Junction. Faubert described the most appropriate route for the trip to Gascoyne Junction, northwest on the Meekatharra to Landor Road until just before the Gascoyne River, where he should turn left onto the Dalgety Downs-Landor Road. The deceased was told to follow the Dalgety-Landor Road until the end, and then turn right into the Carnarvon-Mullewa Road and travel northwest for about 110 km to reach Gascoyne Junction.

Faubert showed the deceased the way on a map and when Russ joined them she checked that the deceased appeared to be well equipped to undertake the journey. Both police officers found nothing unusual about the deceased's demeanour although they considered his speech to be a little "*strange*". The police officers left the deceased in Meekatharra and travelled to Burringurrah themselves. They did not see the deceased on route.¹⁷

Later police enquiries discovered the deceased had purchased fuel from the Caltex Service Station in Meekatharra on 29 April 2014, and he had also purchased a tap for his vehicle from the local hardware store.¹⁸

The purchases by the deceased in Meekatharra indicated he had arrived in Meekatharra sometime before 29 April 2014

¹⁷ Ex 1, tabs 9 & 10

¹⁸ Ex 1, tab 2

and was certainly still there by 3 May 2014. It was not clear where the deceased was staying during this time and it was likely he was living out of his campervan, somewhere in the vicinity of the town. Despite extensive posters referring to the deceased as a missing person, no one else came forward to say they had seen the deceased in Meekatharra during that time period or had spoken to him.

Certainly Mr Bickmore heard nothing from the deceased to indicate he did not intend to be at Carnarvon Airport on 6 May 2014. The distance from Gascoyne Junction to Carnarvon could have been covered in a day.

The deceased did not appear at Carnarvon Airport on 6 May 2014 and Mr Bickmore reported him missing on 7 May 2014. This initiated a series of checks in the Carnarvon, Gascoyne Junction, Meekatharra and Landor areas. It did not provoke any serious land searches (Land SAR), however, Mr Bickmore commenced searching for the deceased and the deceased's family travelled from the east and commenced searches of their own between Carnarvon and Meekatharra. Both the family of the deceased and the police distributed flyers and queries between Carnarvon and Meekatharra to try and see whether anyone recalled seeing the deceased or his vehicle.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ex 1, tab 4

Mr Bickmore remained in the Carnarvon area with the family searching for the deceased until approximately 17 or 18 May 2014. Police enquiries disclosed there were no transactions on the deceased's bank accounts following 29 April 2014 that were not direct debit requests. The Burringurrah MFPPF contacted relevant shires and requests were sent to various land holders in the upper Gascoyne to look for the deceased and his campervan.

On 21 May 2014 Senior Sergeant McComish (McComish) returned from leave to the Carnarvon Police Station. He took over the enquiries into the deceased's disappearance and organised a number of patrols in conjunction with the Burringurrah MFPPF in their relevant areas.

On 23 May 2014 Russ and Faubert conducted a patrol over the Landor-Mt Augustus Road onto the Landor-Dalgety Downs Road, but turned left onto Erong Road before the Carnarvon-Mullewa turn off. This was in case the deceased had taken a wrong turning on Dalgety Downs-Landor Road. The police then continued onto the Beringarra-Byro Road and then the Beringarra-Mt Gould Road, the Meekatharra-Landor Road, and the Landor-Dalgety Downs Road. This covered the route Faubert had suggested to the deceased, taking into account an erroneous left turn from the Dalgety Downs-Landor Road. They saw no trace of the deceased or his van and none of the land owners in the area reported any sightings.

McComish supervised the involvement of the police air wing, and two chartered fixed wing flights were conducted, one on the 23 May 2014 while Russ and Faubert were on patrol and, again the route via the main road the family had taken earlier from Carnarvon to Meekatharra, with two Meekatharra police officers on board as spotters.

Another flight was conducted on 27 May 2014 flying the Landor-Mt Augustus Road, the Landor Road and again following the route Russ and Faubert had taken on 23 May 2014, but including the Cue-Beringarra Road to Mt Jack, across to Landor-Meekatharra Road, and then back up to the Burringurrah MFPP on which occasion Russ and Faubert were aboard.²⁰ Again nothing was sighted nor was there any evidence of a stranded vehicle.

Throughout this period McComish received no additional information about the deceased's movements or his contact with any family or friends.

McComish and Sergeant Evans (Evans) from Gascoyne conducted a patrol from Carnarvon to Gascoyne Junction via the Carnarvon Mullewa Road and then drove onto the Junction of Beringarra-Byro Road, east onto the Beringarra-Mt Gauld Road and then left onto the Landor Meekatharra Road, left onto Erong Road to the junction with Beringarra-

²⁰ Ex 1, tabs 9 & 10

Byro Road and back down to Dalgety Downs-Landor Road. They returned to Carnarvon. Again, nothing was sighted and no information was received from persons in the area. There had been an extensive distribution of posters concerning the deceased and I have no doubt people in the area, using service stations or caravan parks, would have been aware of the fact the deceased was missing and have viewed a photograph of both him and the campervan.

Location of the Campervan

On 1 August 2014 a Geologist working with Aurora Minerals, Wendy Beets, was working near Landor Station and driving in the vicinity of Mt Gascoyne. At approximately 6pm that evening Ms Beets was driving with a fellow geologist and heading east on a track when they came across “*a white van parked on the western side of a dry creek bed*”.²¹ This was further north than the original search area.²²

Ms Beets remained in their vehicle while her fellow geologist walked around the van to see if there was anyone in the area. Ms Beets were aware the police were looking for a white van and its owner. The white van was secured and there was no evidence of anyone at or near the area. They left the area, but Ms Beets mentioned to the Landor Station owner, Richard Brennan, they had seen a van and where.

²¹ Ex 1, tab 15

²² † 17.10.17, p17

Later enquiries with Mr Brennan by police indicated he recalled seeing “*an adult male person riding a motorcycle south on the Landor Mt Augusta Road*”²³ at some stage around about the time “*a man was reported as missing, along with his white campervan*”. Mr Brennan had been sitting on his homestead verandah having a drink in the early morning when the person went by. He had no idea as to whether this was the deceased, only he had not seen the man before and he did not see him or the motorcycle again. He recalled a van had been located sometime after this, near Mt Gascoyne, on his property.

A few days after Ms Beets had seen the white campervan, a prospector who lived on Dairy Creek Station, Graham John Wright, was out prospecting in the area of Mt Gascoyne. On 9 August 2014 at 4.30 pm he came across a white Nissan van with a blue stripe parked along the creek. In Mr Wright’s words he could see the vehicle was bogged “*because you could see someone else had been digging*”.²⁴ It is not clear whether the digging had been visible to Ms Beets and her fellow geologist. It would appear to be the same vehicle.

Mr Wright noted fresh tracks, as though someone else had driven around the vehicle recently, most likely those of Ms Beets’ vehicle. Mr Wright drove to where there was

²³ Ex 1, tab 17

²⁴ Ex 1, tab 14

satellite phone reception and called '000' because he recognised the campervan from the posters he had seen. He believed that picture had been shown to him by relatives of the deceased. Mr Wright described the vehicle as 39 km west of Landor Racecourse. On his way back towards Landor Racecourse Mr Wright stopped and looked around the vehicle, calling out to see if he could get any response. He could see nothing inside the vehicle and there was no response so he kept driving to meet the police, whom he had notified of the location.

The evidence implied that after 3 May 2014, but before 1 August 2014, the deceased had been in the vicinity of Mt Gascoyne. Police later believed he may have been living at the Landor Racecourse, approximately 50 km away, for a period of time. There were buildings there to provide shelter and there was a source of water.²⁵

Russ and Faubert met Mr Wright and travelled to the white campervan where they secured it until police from Carnarvon arrived at approximately 10pm on 9 August 2014. They handed over to McComish and forensic officer Sergeant Teale (Teale) who camped alongside the vehicle overnight until conducting an investigation of the vehicle and surrounding area the following morning. The keys were located inside the campervan, along with a considerable amount of medication it was known the deceased required

²⁵ † 17.10.17, p17

on a regular basis. There was no food in the vicinity of the campervan and everything else looked untouched, other than the fact the motorcycle known to be in the vehicle was missing. There was no evidence of motorcycle tracks. In evidence McComish advised there was a small camp fire in proximity to the campervan, but nothing substantial enough to indicate any sort of prolonged stay.²⁶

The only logical explanation is that the deceased at some point drove his campervan from the Landor Racecourse, approximately 40 km in a north west direction along the survey track, off the western side of the Mt Augustus-Landor Road. McComish described the track as very rough and rocky in parts and not suited to a two wheel drive such as the campervan.

Later examination of the vehicle indicated it was un-drivable due to the undercarriage damage, with the engine sump being punctured which allowed oil to escape and the transmission was unusable. It appeared the damage had occurred after the campervan had been driven over the sandy creek on the track off Mt Gascoyne and could not be driven any further. The deceased apparently made a decision to continue to wherever he was going on the missing Honda. He did not take his helmet which was located inside the van.²⁷

²⁶ † 17.10.17, p20

²⁷ Ex 1, tab 2



Exhibit 1, tab 26, photograph 6

There was nothing in the van to indicate the deceased's intention once he had made the decision to secure the vehicle and leave, presumably carrying only food and water. His belongings were in the van, including a letter talking about his earlier life which was discovered at a much later date.²⁸ The presence of his regular medications could indicate an intention to return, his belief he no longer needed them, or complete indifference to his well-being.

McComish travelled both on foot and by vehicle much of the surrounding area in an attempt to locate some evidence of

²⁸ Ex 1, tab 21

the deceased or motorcycle. Nothing further was located in the area nor were there any further reported sightings of the deceased or motorcycle. The campervan was towed back to the Burringurrah MFPP where it was kept secure until examined by police mechanics. Their investigation confirmed that due to the undercarriage damage the vehicle would have been un-drivable.²⁹

Post Location of the Campervan

On 11 August 2014 the police chartered a helicopter and conducted a 5 hour search of the general area around Mt Gascoyne, south to the boundary of Dalgety Station and as many tracks and land marks as could be covered in that period. McComish was aboard the helicopter for the search but nothing was located. This was the first search that had covered the area north of the Dalgety Downs-Landor Road.³⁰

It was not possible to cover the entire radius from the campervan, which was potentially a search area, with the motorcycle having a range of approximately 300 km.

The deceased's family also paid for a private helicopter search in early September 2014 in and around the area in which the campervan had been located, but nothing was found of the deceased or the motorcycle. The fact the deceased was missing in the area was well publicised at the

²⁹ Ex 1, tab 19

³⁰ t 17.10.17, p17

time and also the location of the campervan was known to local land owners. It was certain the local community would have been on the lookout for the deceased, but he was not observed anywhere following the location of his campervan. Mr Brennan's sighting of a person, which could have been the deceased riding south from the area, was sometime before the location of his campervan.

There have been no bank transactions,³¹ communications or sightings of the deceased since 3 May 2014, other than the possible sighting by Mr Brennan.³²

The police are unclear as to whether the deceased travelled from Meekatharra to Landor, and then returned to Meekatharra on 3 May 2014 seeking directions, or whether he had been living in and around Meekatharra prior to moving onto Landor. McComish believed it was possible the deceased drove the Landor-Beringarra Road and located himself at the Landor Racecourse for a period of time while exploring the surrounding area on his motorcycle.³³ It was just not clear when.

It is possible the deceased discovered the track where he ultimately left his vehicle while exploring the area and, for whatever reason, attempted to take the campervan through that country. It is not clear whether this was before or after

³¹ Ex 1, tab 22, 23

³² Ex 1, tab 25

³³ † 17.10.17, p17

6 May 2014 when the deceased was supposed to meet Mr Bickmore in Carnarvon. It is also not clear whether the deceased had fluctuating suicidal thoughts during this time or how regularly he had been taking his medication prior to leaving the campervan.

It is also possible, in view of the deceased's history of fluctuating suicidal ideation depending upon situational crises, he could have decided to end his life and changed his mind a number of times during the period 26 April - 6 May 2014. It is impossible to determine what sorts of stressors in addition to the damaged campervan the deceased encountered or subjected himself to during a long, arduous trip on his own in hostile, difficult country.

CONCLUSION AS TO THE DEATH OF THE DECEASED

I am satisfied on the whole of the evidence the deceased was a 54 year old man who suffered extreme fluctuations in his mental state overlying his serious depressive disorder. I have no doubt the deceased had two children and an estranged wife who loved him greatly, but were unable to live their own lives usefully while exposed to the deceased's extremes of mood.

I am also satisfied that when relatively stable, the deceased was good company and a useful contributor to his community as described by Mr Bickmore, but had periods of time when his actions were very destructive, and he believed

it would be better for him to die. The deceased's psychiatrist stated the deceased always remained at chronic high risk of suicide, although when things were going well and he was stable on his medication he was not acutely at risk.

Unfortunately the goal the deceased set himself of travelling on his own from Mornington, Victoria, to Carnarvon was likely to expose him to isolation and stressors which could exacerbate any particular mood.

I speculate that at the time he sent the original text to his wife following leaving the family on 26 April 2014, he was intending to reach Carnarvon, meet with his friends and enjoy a holiday at Red Bluff reliving their youth. I also suspect he had decided he would be reckless in his activities while surfing and diving and expose himself to the risk of an accidental demise, doing the things he loved. The coast is notoriously dangerous. I also suspect his thought processes changed from time to time, he believed his friend may talk him out of reckless behaviour, or he may have been oscillating as to his intentions.

I am satisfied that on 3 May 2014 the deceased had decided he would meet his friend in Carnarvon and went about putting that plan into action and made his presence known to police for the best route. Sometime between 3 May and 6 May 2014 he may well have changed his mind and exposed

himself to hostile terrain in a reckless and illogical manner or simply become lost by taking a wrong turn. It is impossible to now determine or be satisfied as to what exactly occurred.

In view of the deceased's tendency to communicate acute suicidal thoughts by text I am unable to say I am satisfied he embarked upon the trip down the survey track with the campervan as a definitive means to ending his life. While there may have been no signal for the purposes of a text it would still have been possible to leave a message to be found later. Similarly the careful leaving of the vehicle secured, once it was un-drivable, does not indicate someone who was removing all his options of shelter.

Whatever the deceased's initial intention, the evidence is strongly indicative of the fact that by the time he left the campervan and had travelled some distance on the motorcycle, he no longer cared whether he lived or died, whether death be due to an accident or mental inclination is impossible to determine. It would have been a simple matter for him to return the 40 km with the Honda motorcycle to a reasonably well used route, where he could seek help.³⁴ It does not appear that was his choice.

I am satisfied beyond all reasonable doubt the deceased has died. Had the deceased still been alive I am satisfied that,

³⁴ † 17.10.17, p19

despite the area being hostile and inhospitable, a living person would have left some trace for the land owners and locals to understand there was someone alive in the area. Consequently, while I am satisfied beyond all reasonable doubt the deceased is now dead, I am unable to determine any other detail about his death.

While I accept there is evidence of chronic suicidal intent, the available evidence points as much to an accident as to an acutely suicidal incident occurring in the context of lack of medication and a specific trigger which, in these circumstances, it is impossible to identify.

The medication left in the campervan could be a sign the deceased intended to return before his medication became critical, it could indicate his intention not to take his medication, and the amount left may indicate he had been noncompliant with his medication for a long period of time before he left the campervan. There is no evidence upon which to make a reasonable determination as to the events around the deceased's disappearance.

MANNER AND CAUSE OF DEATH

While I am satisfied beyond all reasonable doubt the deceased is no longer alive, I am unable to determine how, when or where the deceased met his death.

It is not possible to determine whether he took his life, met with an accident while attempting to find help, became delusional as to his circumstances due to the environment, or was so reckless as to his future welfare he decided to take a chance and head off into nowhere and see what happened.

It is likely the deceased died sometime between 3 May and 1 August 2014, possibly somewhere within a 200 km radius of his abandoned campervan, but the cause of his death remains unexplained.

Accordingly, I make an Open Finding as to the manner of death of the deceased.

E F Vicker
Deputy State Coroner
30 January 2018