

---

**JURISDICTION** : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
**ACT** : CORONERS ACT 1996  
**CORONER** : SARAH HELEN LINTON, DEPUTY STATE CORONER  
**HEARD** : 4 SEPTEMBER 2024  
**DELIVERED** : 4 SEPTEMBER 2024  
**FILE NO/S** : CORC 3330 of 2023  
**DECEASED** : PETERA, MAREK

---

*Catchwords:*

Nil

*Legislation:*

Nil

**Counsel Appearing:**

Senior Constable C Robertson assisted the Coroner.

**Case(s) referred to in decision(s):**

Nil

Coroners Act 1996  
(Section 26(1))

**RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH**

*I, Sarah Helen Linton, Deputy State Coroner, having investigated the death of **Marek PETERA** with an inquest held at Perth Coroners Court, Court 85, Central Law Courts, 501 Hay Street, Perth, on 4 September 2024, find that the death of **Marek PETERA** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was Marek PETERA and that death occurred on or about 27 July 1999 in an unknown place within the vicinity of Drysdale River Station, North Kimberley, as a result of an unknown cause in the following circumstances:*

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

INTRODUCTION..... 3  
BACKGROUND..... 3  
LAST CONFIRMED SIGHTING ..... 5  
DISCOVERY THAT MR PETERA WAS MISSING ..... 6  
THE SEARCH ..... 6  
RECENT POLICE REVIEW..... 8  
CONCLUSION ..... 8

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. Marek Petera left his home in New South Wales in June 1999 to embark on a four-wheel driving trip through northern Australia. On 27 July 1999, he had made it as far as Drysdale River Station on the Gibb River Road in Western Australia. He went to the homestead, where he refuelled and paid for one night's camping. He then set up his camp in the Miners pool camping area for the night. That was the last time Mr Petera was seen alive.
2. On 29 July 1999, Mr Petera was reported missing from the campsite after his campsite was noticed to be unattended. A six day land and air search was conducted, but it failed to locate Mr Petera.
3. On the basis of the information provided by the WA Police in relation to Mr Petera's disappearance, I determined that pursuant to s 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996 (WA)*, there was reasonable cause to suspect that Mr Petera had died and his death was a reportable death. While acting as the State Coroner, I made a direction that a coroner hold an inquest into the circumstances of the suspected death.<sup>1</sup>
4. I held an inquest at the Perth Coroner's Court on 4 September 2024. The inquest consisted of the tendering of documentary evidence compiled during the police investigation conducted into Mr Petera's disappearance, as well as hearing evidence from Detective Senior Constable Ellie Wold from the Homicide Squad Missing Persons Team, who prepared the report to the State Coroner.

## **BACKGROUND**

5. Mr Petera was an only child. He was born on 25 June 1958 in Bratislava, Slovakia (formerly Czechoslovakia). After leaving school, he participated in compulsory army training in Slovakia although in his heart he was a pacifist; he did not choose to harm people or animals without cause. Mr Petera married his wife, Yanka Petera, on 19 December 1980 in Slovakia. The couple emigrated as refugees with the assistance of the United Nations after claiming political asylum. They moved through Yugoslavia first and eventually arrived in Sydney, Australia, the following year. On 15 January 1984, their only daughter Judy was born.<sup>2</sup>
6. Mr Petera's ex-wife later told police that Mr Petera had suffered from depression for most of the time she had known him. Mr Petera had come from a broken family and had a very difficult relationship with his mother, which had impacted him into his adult life. He took medications, including diazepam, to manage his symptoms, but he still struggled at times. In late 1987, Ms Petera found her husband had overdosed on his medication. She advised he required hospitalisation, but recovered. Mr Petera had a high IQ but was emotionally immature. He was extremely introverted and struggled with anxiety in social situations. It seems he felt that he was not fulfilling his potential and that people didn't appreciate his talents, which worsened his mental state.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Section 23 *Coroners Act* Direction of A/State Coroner dated 30 August 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 6.

<sup>3</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 6.

7. Mr Petera continued to struggle with his depression, which put a strain on his marriage. Mr Petera and his wife eventually separated in 1991 and divorced amicably in October 1993. They severed their finances but shared custody of their daughter after their marriage ended and they remained in regular contact over the following years.<sup>4</sup>
8. Mr Petera remained living in Sydney and was involved in a few more relationships, but did not remarry. He was described as a good and loyal friend to the people he knew and it is clear he loved his daughter very much, although he could be difficult to be around, even with the people who loved him. He was very intense and moody and struggled to maintain relationships, both personal and at work, which led him to change jobs often.<sup>5</sup>
9. Prior to his disappearance, it appears that Mr Petera's mental health had deteriorated and he felt his prescribed medication was no longer having the desired effect.<sup>6</sup>
10. Judy was 15 years old when she last saw her father. They had lunch together at a shopping mall in New South Wales in early June 1999. He did not tell his daughter he was planning on leaving the State during their conversation, although she was aware he had always wanted to do a big road trip across the top of Australia. She did recall later that he was being unusually agreeable to her during the lunch, so possibly he had already made up his mind to leave at that time. About a week later, Judy recalled she became concerned as she had not been able to contact her father on the phone. She went with her mother to his apartment to check on him, using her key to enter. Her mother also recalled that Mr Petera dropped off his keys to his apartment into her letterbox. Judy and her mother found in the flat a long letter Mr Petera had left that was addressed to Judy. The letter was written in two parts, dated Saturday, 12 June 1999 and Sunday, 13 June 1999, and was in the form of a 'suicide note'.<sup>7</sup> Judy recalled that her mother called the NSW Police and reported Mr Petera missing.<sup>8</sup>
11. In the letter, Mr Petera said goodbye to his daughter. Mr Petera was clearly an intelligent man and he wrote a very detailed and articulate letter explaining his situation. He told her his daughter he had suffered from a medical condition all his life, it had recently got worse and there was no cure. He described himself as suffering from 'neural disfunctionality' in the socio-emotional part of his brain, which he attributed to his difficult childhood.<sup>9</sup> As a result, he had no social confidence and he wrote that he had become an 'extreme introvert'. He had been prescribed medication for many years that had helped him to continue functioning socially, but he had recently discovered the medication was no longer working and he had been unable to find any helpful alternative. He had stopped attending work and decided that he was going to take a final "adventure trip through tropical Australia on a one-way ticket."<sup>10</sup>
12. Later enquiries established that Mr Petera had emailed his work contract coordinator on 14 June 1999 and advised them that he had a terminal illness and had decided to

---

<sup>4</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 6.

<sup>5</sup> Exhibit 1, Tabs 4 to 8.

<sup>6</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 6.

<sup>7</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4, Tab 5 and Tab 8.

<sup>8</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 8.

<sup>9</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 6.

<sup>10</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5, p. 5.

travel around Australia. Attempts were made to contact him, as he had loaned out an expensive piece of equipment that he had confirmed he still had not returned, but he could not be contacted by phone or email.<sup>11</sup>

13. Mr Petera told his daughter he didn't know if the journey would take days or weeks or even where exactly he would travel, but it is clear he was not intending to return. He told her, "Ideally I wish to perish without a trace,"<sup>12</sup> but if his body was found then he gave instructions as to what he wished to be done in terms of funeral arrangements. His letter left no doubt that he intended to end his life while on his travels, although he did not discuss how he intended to do so.
14. Mr Petera was an amateur nature photography. He was said to have "a respect for nature and understood it better than he understood people."<sup>13</sup> Mr Petera was scientifically minded and he had dreamed of becoming a marine biologist, but he never completed his studies so he was largely self-taught. He enjoyed snorkelling and preferred the wetlands and seashores to dry bushland. He often went four-wheel driving and spent time camping alone for days at a time, so he was very experienced at being out in the bush on his own. He could read a compass and nature signs, so he didn't get lost. His former wife recalled he was always well equipped for camping and very particular about his possessions. He drove a Toyota LandCruiser Troop Carrier at the time of his death and Ms Petera recalled he loved his car and was very careful with it and all his belongings.<sup>14</sup>
15. It appears that Mr Petera set off on his planned journey north around 14 June 1999 and travelled for quite some time without incident. He kept in touch with his daughter by mail after he left, sending her some photos and souvenirs from his trip. It was known from the items inside that he had been to North Queensland and the Northern Territory, including Uluru (known more commonly as Ayers Rock at that time) before he arrived in Western Australia. He often wrote on the back of the photos, documenting his feelings and reflections of his trip, using them as a form of a journal. The letters, photos and cards have been lost over time so the exact words he used are not known.<sup>15</sup> However, Judy recalled that on the last set of pictures, "he opened up about how he was struggling to cope with life. He stated that he was running out of money, alcohol and his anti-depressant tablets and indicated that this was going to be the end."<sup>16</sup> According to a note made by police at the time of the initial investigation, the last parcel was sent by Mr Petera to Judy from Darwin on 26 July 1999.<sup>17</sup>

### **LAST TIME KNOWN TO BE ALIVE**

16. Shortly after he sent this last package to his daughter, Mr Petera drove in to Drysdale River Station. It is a station on the Gibb River Road in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The Koeyers family owned and ran the station. They lived in a homestead and had a campsite at Miners pool for guests. Mr Petera arrived at the

---

<sup>11</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 20.

<sup>12</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6 [11].

<sup>14</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 6.

<sup>15</sup> Exhibit 1, Tabs 6 to 8.

<sup>16</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 8 [21].

<sup>17</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 7 and Tab 14, p. 10.

station on Tuesday, 27 July 1999, in his white LandCruiser Troop carrier and was checked in by the station owners' son, Paul Koeyers. He then drove to the Miners pool campsite and set up camp. He was seen that Tuesday night around his car, although it doesn't seem he spoke to any other campers.<sup>18</sup>

17. It was common for groups to arrive in the afternoon and then pack up and leave the next day. There was a check-in system, but no check-out system, so it took a couple of days for it to become apparent that Mr Petera had not returned to his campsite.<sup>19</sup>

### **DISCOVERY THAT MR PETERA WAS MISSING**

18. Late on the Thursday afternoon, Anne Koeyers, who ran the station with her family, was approached by other campers who expressed concern for Mr Petera's welfare. They advised they had seen him set up camp around his vehicle on the Tuesday night but had not seen him since.<sup>20</sup>
19. Ms Koeyers went to the Miners pool campsite with an employee and spoke to other campers at the campsite. No one had seen him for around two days. His car and camp were both searched by Ms Koeyers and her employee. He appeared very organised, with full eskies of food and beer and a bed and table and chairs set up, but Mr Petera was not present. At 7.00 pm that evening, Ms Koeyers rang the nearest police at Wyndham Police Station and reported that Mr Petera appeared to be missing. She advised he was last confirmed to be alive on 27 July 1999.<sup>21</sup>

### **THE SEARCH**

20. Three uniformed officers and an Aboriginal Police Liaison Officer (APLO) arrived at Drysdale station early the next day, being Friday, 30 July 1999. They were accompanied by a local Aboriginal man, Mr Dickie Dadyaya, who had agreed to assist with tracking Mr Petera in the local bushland. They were joined by Ms Koeyers' husband and began an initial land search. The official Wyndham Police Station Running Sheet records that Mr Dadyaya and the APLO initially walked two kilometres east along the Drysdale River bed, following footprints that matched Mr Petera's before they stopped and the searchers returned to Drysdale Station. As well as a foot search, a helicopter with spotters was used to conduct an aerial search that day, but they found no sign of Mr Petera.<sup>22</sup>
21. Mr Petera's camp was searched by police and it was noted he had set up camp approximately 100 metres from the river and there was a pair of shorts in the rear of his vehicle, suggesting he had taken them off and gone for a swim. As a result, it was felt that a boat search was also appropriate.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 10 and Tab 11.

<sup>19</sup> Exhibit 1, Tabs 10 to 12.

<sup>20</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 11.

<sup>21</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 12 and Tab 16.

<sup>22</sup> Exhibit 1, Tabs 12 to 16.

<sup>23</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 16.

22. Ms Koeyers and her husband recalled that it was dry enough for the searchers to follow Mr Petera's footprints down the sandy river bed of the Drysdale River to almost the junction of the Gibb River, then the footprints went up out of the riverbank and into the long grass and they couldn't follow his trail anymore. It was noted that there were pools of water along the way, so it was felt it was unlikely he had died from a lack of water out in the bush.<sup>24</sup>
23. The WA Police Running Sheet and Briefing Notes confirm that the police and Mr Dadyaya followed Mr Petera to the junction of the Gibb River and Drysdale River, many kilometres from the campsite, but no further.<sup>25</sup>
24. Over the following days, the search continued on foot, by air and on water with the use of a boat. The search carried on until 4 August 1999, but Mr Petera was not found.
25. As part of the search, Mr Petera's former wife was contacted by police on 2 August 1999. She advised that it was not like him to leave his vehicle unlocked, with the keys inside, and not to care for his property. She explained to the police that Mr Petera had left his daughter a letter saying goodbye to her and she believed any search for him would be fruitless.<sup>26</sup> Ms Petera also told police that she had received a phone call from a woman in Darwin sometime prior who had expressed concern for Mr Petera's welfare. The woman had been talking to Mr Petera and he had made statements that he was going to kill himself and talked about death, but he also said he "was not going to make it easy for anyone."<sup>27</sup>
26. When Judy was informed that her father's vehicle had been found and he was missing, she thought about his behaviour towards her at the end, along with his letter and photographs, and formed the view he had travelled until his money ran out then found somewhere to go walking into the bush, with the intention that he pass away and not be found.<sup>28</sup>
27. On 2 August 1999, while reviewing the known information, it was noted that Mr Petera had been at the Miners pool campsite after 5.00 pm on 27 June 1999, as he had left a slip in the honour box after it had been emptied at 5.00 pm that day, but there had been no sightings of him in the area by other tourists and nothing else to show him being at the campsite after that night. It was noted that the search was dangerous for searchers on foot due to the hot weather, rugged landscape and risk of snakes, so there were limits to the ground search.<sup>29</sup>
28. The APLO and tracker were able to find more tracks on 3 August 1999 that appeared to be fresher, but it was difficult to identify how recent they were. By that stage, Mr Petera had been missing for several days. This prompted further searching, assisted by the station owners, who knew the area well. However, by the end of the night the station owners indicated they would have explored every possibility.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 12.

<sup>25</sup> Exhibit 1, Tabs 15 to 16.

<sup>26</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 7.

<sup>27</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 16.

<sup>28</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 8.

<sup>29</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 16.

<sup>30</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 16.

29. An entry in the WA Police Running Sheet at 3.30 pm on 4 August 1999 recorded that the search had been unsuccessful and it appeared to the searchers that Mr Petera's tracks showed he was walking in circles, with the tracks leading back to the starting point at the junction of the two rivers. Based upon the tracks, it appeared that Mr Petera was deliberately changing direction and was seeking shelter under rocks and trees and possibly hiding to avoid the air search. It was noted that if Mr Petera had been in the area and wanted to be found, he would have seen the large fire that was lit overnight by searchers camping in the area and he would also have been able to see the helicopter and aircraft flying above, as the tracks had remained in the main search area. His family had explained that he was an experienced bushman and he could easily avoid detection if he wished to do so. It was concluded that there was nowhere left for searchers to go and they had exhausted all practical options. A decision was made to terminate the search, after six days of searching, at 5.30 pm on 4 August 1999.<sup>31</sup>

### **RECENT POLICE REVIEW**

30. Ms Koeyers, who still lives at the Drysdale River Station, told police in 2021 that for many years later they would keep an eye out for any bones or other sign of Mr Petera when mustering, but they never found anything.<sup>32</sup>
31. Enquiries with the NSW Police Force established that Mr Petera's NSW driver licence had expired in January 2001 and there was no other record of him being in contact with NSW Police or Corrections. They had confirmed that his employer had never been able to contact him about the missing equipment. Other states and territories also confirmed there was no record of Mr Petera since the time of his disappearance.<sup>33</sup>
32. Attempts to locate Mr Petera's General Practitioner in NSW were unsuccessful as the GP had retired and the GP surgery had closed.<sup>34</sup>
33. Mr Petera's daughter, Judy, provided a DNA sample to police in March 2021 to assist with identification of any located unidentified remains, but there has been no match to date.<sup>35</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

34. There is compelling evidence before me that Mr Petera had made a decision to end his life when he left NSW on or about 14 June 1999. He planned to go on one last road trip to the northern parts of Australia and never to return home. Mr Petera bid farewell to his daughter but then still sent her some souvenirs and photographs from his trip until he posted a last package on 26 July 1999. His notes that accompanied those last items strongly indicated he had reached the end of his journey. She did not receive any

---

<sup>31</sup> Exhibit 1, Tabs 12 to 14, Tab 16.

<sup>32</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 9 and Tab 12.

<sup>33</sup> Exhibit 1, Tabs 20 to 24.

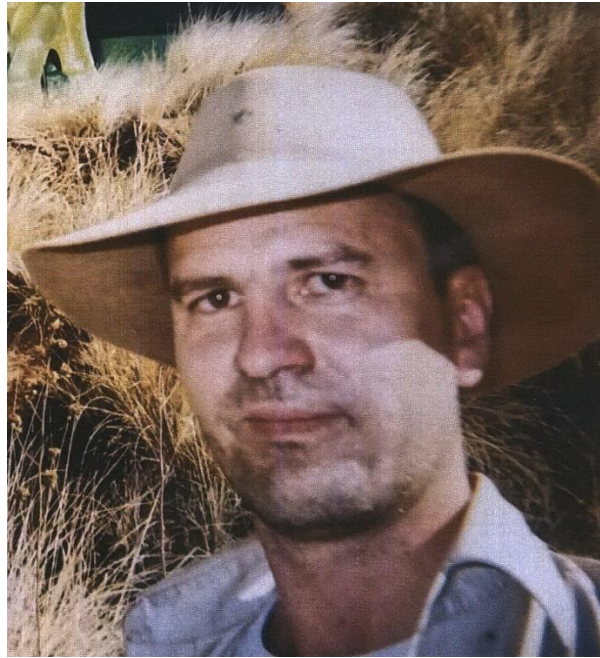
<sup>34</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 26.

<sup>35</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 26 and Tab 28.



further communications from him and he was last seen the following day at the Miners pool campsite. The fact he left his keys with his car when he left his campsite on that date was an indicator to his family that he had left the campsite with the intention that he would not return, as he was usually very particular about his belongings, and his car in particular. He has never been seen again.

35. I am satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that Mr Petera died on or about 27 June 1999, when he was last seen at Drysdale River Station. I am also satisfied that he died by way of suicide, either through doing an act to harm himself or by omission in the sense of putting himself deliberately in a situation where he would die from exposure to the elements without food or water. There is insufficient information available for me to reach a conclusion as to his cause of death given his remains have never been found. My findings will come as no surprise to Mr Petera's family, as they long ago accepted that he has died, but this now provides a formal recognition of his death.



S H Linton  
Deputy State Coroner  
4 September 2024