
JURISDICTION : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
ACT : CORONERS ACT 1996
CORONER : SARAH HELEN LINTON, ACTING STATE CORONER
HEARD : 7 OCTOBER 2026
DELIVERED : 9 OCTOBER 2026
FILE NO/S : CORC 2103 of 2026
DECEASED : DEPCZYNSKI, ZYGMUNT

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, Acting State Coroner, having investigated the suspected death of **Zygmunt DEPCZYNSKI** with an inquest held at Perth Coroners Court, Central Law Courts, Court 85, 501 Hay Street, Perth, on 7 October 2026, find that the death of **Zygmunt DEPCZYNSKI** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was **Zygmunt DEPCZYNSKI** and that death occurred on or about 26 August 1973 in the Indian Ocean off the coast of The ‘Blowholes’, Torndirrup National Park, Albany, Western Australia, from an unascertained cause in the following circumstances:*

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION 3

KNOWN EVENTS 4

REFERRAL TO WA POLICE MISSING PERSON TEAM 6

RECENT INVESTIGATION..... 6

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Zygmunt Depczynski lived with his family in Albany, Western Australia, at the time of his disappearance in 1973. He was last seen alive at around 8.00 am on 26 August 1973 when he left his home to go fishing at the Blowholes in Torndirrup National Park. Mr Depczynski was a keen fisherman and regularly fished alone in this area. When he did not return home as expected his son reported him missing to police at 6.50 pm.
- 2 Police officers found Mr Depczynski's car locked in the car park at the Blowholes but there was no sign of him in the area. It was too dark to commence a search at that time, so it was planned to commence a search at first light the next day.
- 3 A search of the rugged coastline was conducted the following morning, but there was no sign of Mr Depczynski. It was noted that the terrain was characterised by high cliffs, and it was thought Mr Depczynski may have fallen from the cliffs or been washed into the sea while fishing. The search continued over several days; but no trace of Mr Depczynski was found.
- 4 The initial missing person investigation was finalised on 25 September 1973 on the basis that Mr Depczynski was believed to have drowned along the Albany coastline.¹
- 5 A recent review of this matter by officers from the WA Police Missing Person Team found no information to alter the position that Mr Depczynski died on or about 26 August 1973 at or near the Blowholes.
- 6 Based upon the information provided by WA Police, on 6 August 2026, I made a direction pursuant to s 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA) on the basis I have reasonable cause to suspect Mr Depczynski is deceased and his death was a reportable death. As a result, a coroner must hold an inquest into the circumstances of the suspected death.
- 7 I held an inquest on 7 October 2026. The limited documentary evidence that has been able to be located in relation to the original investigation

¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

into Mr Depczynski's disappearance was tendered² and Detective Acting Sergeant Rebecca Hill gave evidence at the inquest. Detective A/Sergeant Hill confirmed that there is no new information available in relation to Mr Depczynski's disappearance that would shed any further light on the circumstances of his disappearance.

KNOWN EVENTS

- 8 At the time Mr Depczynski went missing, the documenting of a missing person search and subsequent investigation was less comprehensive than today, and it seems what there was in the original police investigation file was not retained. Therefore, the majority of the information has come from the original Missing Person Report and an Accident Report that was provided to the National Safety Council of Western Australia – Water Division, as well as a few other historical documents.³
- 9 Mr Depczynski was born in Chicago, USA, on 22 August 1909. He was of Polish origin. Mr Depczynski married Maria Bochnacka and the couple had two children, a daughter Krystyna and son Lucian. The family were living in Belgium before they emigrated to Australia by ship on 5 January 1950. They landed at the port in Fremantle and later settled in Albany, where Mr Depczynski found work as a foreman. The couple went on to have a third child, Barbara, after their arrival in Australia.⁴
- 10 Mr Depczynski had a passion for fishing and would often fish from The Gap and the Blowholes in the Torndirrup National Park, near Albany. Even today this area is known to be treacherous and has led to loss of life, and back in the 1970's there would likely have been even more risk involved in fishing from these remote and inherently hazardous locations.
- 11 On a previous occasion, Mr Depczynski had suffered a medical event while fishing in the area, associated with his history of ulcers. On that occasion, his son found him at his fishing spot. There is no further evidence available as to Mr Depczynski's health conditions, other than a

² Exhibit 1.

³ Exhibit 1, Tab 2 and Tab 3.

⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 17.

note suggesting he was considered to be in good health other than the ulcers. He was 64 years old at the time he went missing.⁵

- 12 What is known is that Mr Depczynksi left his home in Albany at 8.00 am on Sunday, 26 August 1973. He told his family he was going to travel the eight miles or so to the general area of The Gap and The Blowholes, where he intended to fish. He was due to return home between 2.00 pm and 4.00 pm that day and the family were hoping to eat any fish he caught for their dinner.⁶
- 13 When he did not return home as planned, his son Lucian went to look for him. He located his father's vehicle locked in the car park at the Blowholes at 7.10 pm but there was no sign of his father. He then reported his father missing to police that evening.⁷
- 14 Due to the rugged and treacherous terrain, a search was not organised that evening as it would not have been safe. The search commenced the following morning at first light, but there was no sign of Mr Depczynski. It was noted at the time that "this is a dangerous coastline area, with high cliffs and it is extremely dangerous to negotiate; the seas are seldom less than moderate."⁸ Although there was no direct evidence, the police believed Mr Depczynski had been washed into the sea whilst fishing or else had accidentally fallen from the cliff into the sea. A search of the area continued for several days in the event his body might be located, but no trace of Mr Depczynski was ever found.⁹
- 15 Enquiries were made in the town of Albany, which established that no one had sighted him since his disappearance. It was noted by the police that there were no suspicious circumstances. Mr Depczynski was a family man and there is no evidence to suggest he would have had a reason to plan his deliberate disappearance and no reason to want to self-harm. All evidence pointed to an accidental death while fishing, likely by drowning.¹⁰

⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 15.

⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

¹⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 3 and Tab 4.

REFERRAL TO WA POLICE MISSING PERSON TEAM

- 16 In 2009, the original Missing Person report was transcribed into an Incident Report and associated Running Sheet and police completed, to the best of their ability, an updated Missing Person investigation. Due to the dearth of records available, the extent of the investigation report is understandably limited. Inquiries confirmed Mr Depczynski's wife Maria and son Lucian are deceased.¹¹
- 17 Mr Depczynski's youngest daughter Barbara is still alive and she provided a DNA sample to assist with a search of any unidentified remains. A review of the unidentified human remains register did not reveal any potential matches.¹²
- 18 Barbara was 21 years of age at the time her father disappeared. She recalled being at her parents' residence with her young son when he failed to return from his fishing trip at his usual time of 2.00 pm. Her brother Lucian went out to look for him but found no sign of him, so a report was made to police.¹³
- 19 Mr Depczynski's oldest daughter was in hospital at the relevant time, so she could not add any further information.¹⁴

RECENT INVESTIGATION

- 20 It is noted in the police investigation report that if he was alive today, Mr Depczynski would be 116 years old. I am, therefore, satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that he is deceased.
- 21 Limited proof of life checks have confirmed there has been no sign or record of Mr Depczynski since he was last seen by his family on the morning of 26 August 1973. A familial DNA sample has been checked against the unidentified remains database and no match has been identified.

¹¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

¹² Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

¹³ Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

¹⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

- 22 I understand that Mr Depczynski's family accepted that he had died many years ago, so my findings now are simply a formal record, and I am unfortunately unable to add any new details for them.
- 23 I am satisfied Mr Depczynski died on or about 26 August 1973 whilst fishing along the Albany coastline. I am unable to determine the exact cause of his death. He could potentially have had a medical event before falling into the water, given his age and previous history of a ruptured ulcer, although it is more likely he accidentally fell off a rock or was washed by a wave into the water, which is a not uncommon event when people are rockfishing in this region. In that case, he might have been injured in the fall or drowned once in the water.
- 24 In the circumstances, the cause of death must remain unascertained. However, I consider there is sufficient information for me to make a finding of accident as to how the death occurred.

S H Linton
Acting State Coroner
10 October 2026