

JURISDICTION : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

CORONER : SARAH TYLER, CORONER

HEARD : 9 FEBRUARY 2026

DELIVERED : 19 FEBRUARY 2026

FILE NO/S : CORC 2942 of 2025

DECEASED : PODMORE, BARRY JOHN

Catchwords:

Nil

Legislation:

Nil

Counsel Appearing:

Senior Constable Craig 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 Tyler, Coroner, having investigated the disappearance of Barry John PODMORE with an inquest held at Perth Coroner’s Court, Court 85, CLC Building, 501 Hay Street, Perth, on 9 February 2026, find that the death of Barry John PODMORE has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was Barry John PODMORE and that death occurred on or shortly after 6 December 2024 in remote bushland between Karroun Hill Nature Reserve and Mount Jackson, Western Australia, in the following circumstances:

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 3
BACKGROUND 4
BARRY’S DISAPPEARANCE 6
MISSING PERSON REPORT 8
THE SEARCH FOR BARRY 8
DISCOVERY OF BARRY’S CAR 15
FURTHER SEARCHES FOR BARRY 17
MR HEATON’S RECOMMENDATIONS 19
PROOF OF LIFE CHECKS 21
MR HEATON’S ANALYSIS 22
WESTERN AUSTRALIA POLICE FORCE ANALYSIS 23
CONCLUSION 23

INTRODUCTION

1. Barry John Podmore (Barry) was 73 years old when he went missing on 6 December 2024.
2. Barry spoke with his daughter Lauren Podmore (Lauren) on the phone on 5 December 2024, and told her he was planning to go gold prospecting the following day. Barry told her that he was planning to return home in the afternoon of 6 December 2024, and they agreed that Lauren would call him then.
3. Over the following days, Lauren tried to call her father multiple times, but the phone didn't ring and her text messages were not answered. Lauren discovered that other family members were also unable to reach Barry. On 11 December 2024, the family arranged for a friend to go to Barry's home in Beacon to check on him, and they discovered that he, and his vehicle, were not there.
4. Despite an extensive search by his loved ones, the Western Australia Police Force, and intensive efforts from a volunteer searcher from the organisation Missing Persons Australia, Barry has never been found.
5. Barry has not made any confirmed contact with any of his family, friends, or associates from the time of his disappearance. A recent review by the Western Australia Police Force, including proof of life checks, has found no evidence that Barry is alive.
6. On the basis of information provided by the Western Australia Police Force in relation to Barry's disappearance, Acting State Coroner Linton determined that pursuant to section 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996 (WA)*, there was reasonable cause to suspect that Barry had died, and that his death was a reportable death. The Acting State Coroner made a direction that a coroner hold an inquest to investigate the circumstances of Barry's suspected death.
7. I held an inquest into Barry's suspected death in Perth on 9 February 2026. The inquest involved the tendering of the documentary evidence compiled during the Western Australia Police Force investigation into Barry's disappearance, supplemented by oral evidence from Detective Senior Constable Ellie Wold, from the Western Australia Police Force Missing Person Team, and oral evidence from Mr Rick Heaton, a civilian search expert from Missing Persons

Australia, who personally undertook extensive search efforts in the Mount Jackson area to try to locate Barry.

8. Members of Barry's family, including his daughter Lauren Podmore, ex-wife Linda Podmore, and brother Eric Podmore, also attended the inquest, and provided a valuable contribution to the process.

BACKGROUND

9. Barry was born in Victoria Park, Western Australia on 14 August 1951.
10. He was born to his now deceased parents, Marie Agnes Podmore (nee Gray) and William George Podmore. He was one of seven children of that relationship.
11. Barry left school early, and became an apprentice carpenter. He became a qualified roof carpenter, and worked for himself for most of his life.¹ By the time of his disappearance, he had been retired for many years.
12. In 1968, when Barry was 17 years old, Barry met Linda Podmore (nee McKenna) and they married two years later, in 1970. They became parents in 1975 with the arrival of their daughter Jacqueline. In 1979 their daughter Lauren was born.
13. In around 1990, Barry and Linda separated, and ultimately divorced.
14. In the early 2000's, Barry moved to Beacon, and he remained living in Beacon at the time of his disappearance.² Beacon is a small town in the shire of Mount Marshall, Western Australia. Beacon is a town on the northeast border of the Wheatbelt region, and is 333 km northeast of Perth by road.
15. Barry and Linda remained friends after their separation, and would spend time together, and with their children, when Barry would visit Perth. Barry had his own room in the home Linda and Jacqueline shared, for when he would come to visit.
16. Barry was well liked in the Beacon community, and had a close and loving relationship with his family. He maintained social contact with a number of long-term friends. Barry's move to Beacon allowed him to indulge in his love of the outdoors, and in particular, his passion for prospecting. He would go out

¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 2.

² Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 2.

prospecting regularly, on multi-day and multi-week trips, and would take longer prospecting trips a couple of times a year.

17. When Barry took longer prospecting trips, he would generally tell his daughters exactly where he was going prospecting, including GPS coordinates, apparently for safety reasons. However, when Barry took shorter prospecting trips, he shared only general information about his location, and was quite secretive about locations of interest for prospecting.³
18. In April 2013, Barry was diagnosed with prostate cancer. In December 2016, he was diagnosed with a superficial looking bladder cancer.⁴ At that stage, Barry elected not to have active treatment, and instead opted for an approach known as ‘watchful waiting’ which focuses upon maintaining quality of life, over active treatment. By 2020, Barry’s prostate cancer had progressed. At this time, the cure rate was very high with treatment and Barry was encouraged to undertake treatment for his cancer but having heard the side effects of treatment and being told about the risks of potential metastatic disease without treatment Barry told his doctors that he was certain that he did not want to have treatment at that time.⁵
19. Barry experienced some progressive symptoms associated with his prostate cancer, including ongoing bleeding, in April and August 2022. Barry was advised that these symptoms were likely related to his slow growing cancer, but again declined treatment for his cancer.⁶
20. Barry also had a history of heart issues, including damage to his heart from childhood rheumatic fever. He was admitted to hospital in 2016 and 2021 for investigations in relation to his heart, and suspected second-degree heart block⁷, but it appears that Barry was not being actively treated for any heart condition at the time of his disappearance, other than potentially taking a medication for high blood pressure.⁸
21. Barry’s daughter Lauren understood that Barry may have been trying natural treatments for his health conditions.⁹
22. Barry’s family found a letter in Barry’s home after his disappearance, regarding a pre-admission appointment scheduled with Northam Hospital on 16 June 2025 regarding a gastroenterology operation.

³ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 2.

⁴ Exhibit 2, Tab 30, p 5.

⁵ Exhibit 2, Tab 34, p 22.

⁶ Exhibit 2, Tab 34, p 17.

⁷ Exhibit 2, Tab 31, p 8.

⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 26.1.

⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 9, p 1.

23. Barry did not attend this appointment. By the time that appointment would have occurred, he had been missing for over 6 months.

BARRY'S DISAPPEARANCE

24. On Wednesday, 27 November 2024¹⁰, Barry travelled to Perth to visit his ex-wife and his daughters. He stayed at the house shared by his ex-wife Linda and his daughter Jacqueline.
25. On Friday, 29 November 2024, Barry and Linda also visited their daughter Lauren in the suburb in which she lived for a few hours. During that visit, Barry talked about where he was going prospecting next, and showed his family a rough area on Google Earth depicting where he was going out next.
26. Barry told his daughter that there was a quartz line he wanted to investigate in that area, and it appears that some prospectors have success locating gold in quartz vein geological formations.¹¹
27. Jacqueline recalls that Barry left earlier than he normally would from that weekend visit to Perth, and she later discovered that he left because he was experiencing some bleeding associated with his prostate cancer. Barry was private about his health, and tried not to worry his daughters, and so he went home early from that visit.¹²
28. Barry spoke to Lauren on the phone on Monday, 2 December 2024, at which time it appears Barry was back at home in Beacon. Lauren remembers nothing unusual about that conversation, which was just small talk.¹³
29. Barry spoke with Jacqueline on the phone on Wednesday, 4 December 2024, as they usually would. At that time, Jacqueline knew that Barry was going to go out prospecting for a day trip. As explained above, Barry would generally give Jacqueline coordinates for where he would be when he went on extended trips, and would tell his family when he was due home. Jacqueline understood Barry was just going for the day this time and in those cases, he wouldn't normally tell his family exactly where he was going.
30. There was nothing unusual that Jacqueline noticed about that conversation, but sadly, it was the last time that Jacqueline ever spoke with her father.

¹⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 9, p 1.

¹¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 9, p 2.

¹² Exhibit 1, Tab 8, p 2.

¹³ Exhibit 1, Tab 9, p 2.

31. Later on Wednesday, 4 December 2024, Barry went to visit an old friend of his, Michael Lewis, at his home in Beacon. Barry took some drinks with him, and they spent the day together at Michael's house, drinking and talking. Barry told Michael he was planning on heading up to the Karroun Hill Nature Reserve to look around, and do some prospecting.¹⁴
32. Barry told his friend that he was going to head off for a couple of days, but didn't tell Michael when he was going to go. Michael knew that Barry would generally go prospecting alone, and it seems there was nothing unusual about Barry's plans on this occasion.
33. Barry and Michael continued drinking throughout the day, and talked about other topics, including Barry's daughters, and Barry's ongoing health issues. Given the amount of alcohol they had been drinking, Barry decided to sleep in his car for a few hours so that he didn't drive home drunk. Barry and Michael spoke over the phone in the morning the following day, Thursday, 5 December 2024, and Barry said he went home at about midnight.
34. That was the last conversation Michael had with Barry.
35. On Thursday, 5 December 2024, Lauren received a text message from her father saying "*Lauren dear gal, I'm going out for the day tomorrow. So if you want, you can call me on the way home today.*"
36. Lauren called Barry back later that day, at 10:56 am, and spoke with him for about 15 minutes.¹⁵ Barry told Lauren that he was heading out for the day on Friday, 6 December 2024, to have a look with his metal detector at an area that he thought might have gold. Barry didn't say where he would be going. Barry told Lauren that he would be back at home on Friday afternoon, and that she was welcome to give him a call that afternoon. Barry also told Lauren that if he found anything while prospecting, he would let her know.¹⁶
37. That conversation was the last known conversation Barry had with anyone prior to his disappearance.
38. Barry had a four-wheel drive vehicle, a Mercedes wagon that had been painted in a camouflage pattern, that he drove when he would go out prospecting.
39. In the early hours of Friday, 6 December 2024, Barry left his home in Beacon to go out prospecting for the day in his camouflage painted vehicle. He never returned.

¹⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 5, p 2.

¹⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 14.

¹⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 9, p 2-3.

MISSING PERSON REPORT

40. On Saturday, 7 December 2024, Jacqueline tried to call Barry as she normally would. Her phone call would not go through. At that time, Jacqueline was a bit worried about Barry, but she also knew that there had been power issues in Beacon, and she called the power company who confirmed there was a power outage in the area, which eased her mind.
41. On Monday, 9 December 2024, Lauren tried to call Barry and also couldn't get through, as Barry's phone was unavailable. Lauren sent a text message to him, and didn't get a reply, which was unusual as he would generally reply very quickly to messages from his daughters. Lauren tried to call again later that day, without success.
42. Lauren then spoke with her sister Jacqueline, and her mother Linda, and they discussed their difficulties contacting Barry. Jacqueline told Lauren that she had tried to call him, and his phone was unavailable, but they were both aware of the power issues in Beacon impacting phone coverage. As a result, while Barry would usually speak to his daughters on a Monday, and they were worried about him, their worries were somewhat eased by learning of the power issues in the Beacon area.
43. On Wednesday, 11 December 2024, Jacqueline tried to call her father again, and couldn't get through. By this time, Barry's family were very worried about him, and Jacqueline called a friend of Barry's who lived in Beacon, Jenni Bunce, to see if she could go to Barry's house to check if he was there.
44. Barry's friend checked the house that day and told Jacqueline that Barry wasn't home and neither was his four-wheel drive vehicle.
45. By this time, Barry's family and friends were seriously concerned for his welfare, and as a result, Barry's daughter Lauren attended the Gosnells Police Station and reported her father as a missing person.

THE SEARCH FOR BARRY

46. Western Australia Police Force records show that at 10.24 am on Wednesday, 11 December 2024, Lauren reported to police that Barry had left his home to go prospecting at Karroun Hill on Tuesday, 3 December 2024, travelling in his four-wheel drive, and that he had not returned home since. It was recorded that Barry was elderly, and there were concerns for his welfare. It was also recorded

that while Barry had gone prospecting at Karroun, the specific location he had travelled to was not known.¹⁷

47. We know now that the correct date of Barry's departure was actually Friday, 6 December 2024, and Lauren is quite certain that she provided the police with the correct date when she reported her father missing. There is no suggestion that the mistake in the date recorded had an impact upon the search for Barry, other than perhaps importing an even greater sense of urgency, given it was believed that Barry had been missing for an even greater length of time than the five days we now know had elapsed.
48. The Karroun Hill Nature Reserve alone is a 3,097 square kilometre nature reserve.¹⁸ Without any further information to narrow down Barry's whereabouts, the area in which Barry could have gone prospecting and therefore the possible search area was immense.
49. The Officer in Charge of the Bencubbin Police Station was swiftly notified that Barry had been reported as a missing person, as this station is the Police Station closest to Barry's home.¹⁹
50. The Emergency Operations Unit within the Western Australia Police Force were also quickly notified, and commenced a review of actions that may be taken to search for Barry. The Emergency Operations Unit specialise in search and rescue functions within the Western Australia Police Force.²⁰ At the conclusion of their preliminary review, the Emergency Operations Unit determined that the circumstances reported in relation to Barry's disappearance did not meet the criteria for a Land Search and Rescue (LandSAR) at that time, given there was no specific last known position, and there was insufficient information available to try to narrow down Barry's whereabouts.
51. The Emergency Operations Unit made the following recommendations to assist in trying to locate Barry:

Commence a Missing Person Incident Report

Obtain a recent photograph of Barry and obtain consent to disseminate that image via social media

Commence a phone triangulation to try to narrow down a search area

¹⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 10, p 1.

¹⁸ See for example: [Local Places Of Interest](#)

¹⁹ Transcript, p 8.

²⁰ Transcript, p 9.

Arrange for local police to speak with Barry's next of kin, to try to develop a Missing Person Profile Report, and obtain further information about Barry's likely whereabouts and activities

Send a Spot Locator Message for GPS location

Review police systems to identify any associates or family, and speak with those individuals about any plans Barry may have mentioned to them

Liaise with what is now known as the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety (LGIRS) to see whether Barry held a mining lease and if so, the location of that lease

Search the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system to see whether Barry's vehicle had been detected²¹

52. The Emergency Operations Unit confirmed that they were available for advice and search strategy recommendations once those enquiries were undertaken, should it be confirmed Barry was missing and a search area was identified.
53. These investigative steps were actioned very quickly, and it is apparent that the Western Australia Police Force appreciated that urgent efforts were required to try to locate Barry.
54. Police officers were deployed to Barry's address in Beacon, which was confirmed to be empty, and to conduct inquiries at the local store in Beacon to see if Barry's whereabouts were known by anyone in the small town. Staff at the local store told police that Barry's friend, Michael Lewis, might be able to help them.²²
55. Attempts to call Barry's mobile phone by police went unanswered, and checks of the ANPR system did not show Barry's vehicle, and therefore didn't help in narrowing down Barry's possible whereabouts. A Spot Locator Message was sent to Barry's phone, but police were unable to confirm whether it had been delivered, and the map was simply to be monitored to see if Barry activated that link, which would then share his GPS coordinates with the police.²³
56. Police Officers from the State Operations Command Centre (SOCC) spoke to Lauren on the phone to try to gather more information, who told them that Barry left home on Friday, 6 December 2024, and was only supposed to be gone for a day, but he hadn't returned. Lauren explained that Barry hadn't told anyone where he was going, but had mentioned Karroun to a person in town as a possible location. Barry had told Lauren that the area could be leased to someone else under a mining tenement, and so he would be "*covering his*

²¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 10, p 2.

²² Exhibit 1, Tab 10, p 3.

²³ Exhibit 1, Tab 15, p 2.

*tracks*²⁴ as he went out prospecting, which would inevitably further impede any search efforts.

57. Lauren explained that Barry would usually take his trailer if he was going out gold prospecting, but he left it at home this time. She told police that she was seriously concerned, and that Barry suffered from high blood pressure and something with his heart, but he doesn't take medication for those conditions. She said that he would generally take gallons of water, and would take food, but she wasn't sure how much he would have with him this time, given he was only supposed to be gone for a day.
58. It appears that Lauren also told police that Barry's four-wheel drive vehicle had been painted camouflage colours, and police were aware that this would likely make it hard to locate the vehicle in bushland.
59. By 12.03 pm, following these investigations, the Inspector at the SOCC was satisfied that there was a serious threat to the life or health of Barry, and as a result, approved the triangulation of Barry's mobile phone. Triangulation was attempted as soon as approval was given, but the phone did not initially return a map location, which was thought to be because the phone was out of battery.
60. Triangulation revealed that Barry's phone hadn't been active since 7.57 am Friday, 6 December 2024, and a polygon area provided by Telstra based upon the last connection between Barry's phone to the Tampu cell tower identified an area between Barry's home address in Beacon, and an area towards Karroun Hill.²⁵ Given the scale of the area identified, which consisted of about 161 square kilometres, police enquiries continued to try to identify a defined search area. However, this triangulation data was the first set of information that police were able to use to try to narrow down a search area for Barry.
61. The Police Air Wing were consulted, and they were monitoring the search until a defined search area could be identified.²⁶ In the meantime, police were attempting to identify a Google account so that Google may be approached to provide any network location data that might be available, other police officers based in the Wheatbelt were deployed to the Karroun Hill Nature Reserve to patrol obvious tracks and roads to try to locate Barry's vehicle, and separate police officers were speaking with Michael Lewis to try to further narrow down a search area.
62. Shortly before 2.00 pm, police officers had spoken with Michael, who had described the route that Barry would likely take if he was going to the Karroun

²⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 10, p 3.

²⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 11; Exhibit 1, Tab 15, p 3.

²⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 15, p 3.

Hill Nature Reserve. Michael also told police that Barry's vehicle was painted like a military vehicle, and would likely be very hard to spot in the bush. As the search location suggested by Michael was consistent with the area identified by the triangulation data, although more specific, Police Air Wing determined at that time that an air search was appropriate.²⁷

63. The closest Police Air Wing vehicle was identified, and was taken off a task in Perth to refuel and travel to the search area. Taking into account travel time, and local light, it was thought that Police Air Wing would have about two hours of visibility to search on 11 December 2024.²⁸
64. In the meantime, enquiries with Google returned no results, and the police obtained a photograph of Barry to commence a social media Missing Person campaign. Initial checks were made with Centrelink, Medicare, and various banking institutions to see whether there was any evidence Barry had travelled away from the Karroun Hill Nature Reserve area, which revealed no helpful information.²⁹
65. Police Air Wing arrived, and commenced a search of the area identified by the phone triangulation, and Michael's information about Barry's likely route. The Air Wing remained in radio contact with ground police units, who had continued their efforts patrolling the roads and tracks along the route it was suspected Barry had travelled.³⁰
66. As ground police units travelled along the Emu Proof Fence Road, they became aware of cameras along the fence line, monitored by the Department for Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD). Police made phone enquiries with a staff member from DPIRD who had remote access to some of those cameras, and confirmed that no vehicle movements along the gates and grid were captured in the past few weeks. However, other fixed cameras were not accessible remotely, and police were given permission to retrieve the SD card from those cameras to assist in their search.³¹
67. At about 8.33 pm on 11 December 2024 night had fallen, and ground and air searches stopped overnight. Police searches had focused their initial search on an area of land north of the Emu Proof Fence Road in Karroun Hill, which comprised an area approximately 161 square kilometres, based on phone triangulation data, and intelligence about Barry's likely route of travel.³² A

²⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 15, p 4.

²⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 16, p 4.

²⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 16, p 5.

³⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 16, p 6.

³¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 16, p 6.

³² Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 4.

debriefing occurred between all staff involved in the search that night, and a plan for the following day was made to continue the search.

68. At just after midnight on Thursday, 12 December 2024, Barry's phone reconnected to the Tampu cell tower, providing the same polygon search area as the earlier result. This confirmed the appropriateness of the area the police were searching.
69. There are a few possibilities as to why Barry's phone may have initiated a random and short connection with a cell tower at this time. These include that Barry's phone had overheated in his vehicle, and cooled down overnight to allow a temporary connection, before the battery died. Alternatively, Barry's phone could have connected while running an automated background process, without requiring user input. Fluctuations in network coverage, and SIM or network issues, may also explain this connection. As a result, the connection simply confirmed for investigators that the area they were searching remained the best estimated last known location for Barry, in light of the triangulation range provided by Telstra for his phone.
70. Police officers met at Bencubbin Police Station in the morning of Thursday, 12 December 2024, and arranged to continue searching tracks in the Karroun Hill Nature Reserve, while also collecting other DPIRD cameras, and arranging a thorough search of Barry's home to try to locate any maps or information that would narrow down the search area.³³
71. In the morning of 12 December 2024, another friend of Barry's, Bruce Sutherland, contacted police to share information about the location he had gone prospecting with Barry in September or October 2024, including an area along the vermin proof fence, and along specific roads. The police ensured that the route was driven and thoroughly searched, without success.³⁴
72. The Police Air Wing returned and continued their search efforts from the air, remaining in touch with police officers patrolling on the ground.³⁵ The DPIRD cameras were reviewed, and did not detect Barry's vehicle in the area. Police officers attended Barry's house, and searched the property with Lauren. Some paper maps with markings near a mining tenement were located, which were considered as part of the search, although it was believed that Barry would rely on his phone for mapping, instead of paper maps.³⁶ The area in the vicinity of the tenement³⁷ was searched, but no trace of Barry or his vehicle was found.

³³ Exhibit 1, Tab 15, p 7.

³⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 15, p 10.

³⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 15, p 10.

³⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 15, p 15.

³⁷ Tenement E 77/03014

73. By midday, the State Operations Command Centre confirmed that they were unable to approve a formal LandSAR in this case given the area was too large to search by “*boots on the ground*”, particularly because there was no last known position for Barry from which a foot search would commence, but all other suitable search options to try to locate Barry or his vehicle continued.³⁸
74. Despite extensive efforts by the Police Air Wing, and the ground patrol officers, no evidence of Barry’s whereabouts was found on 12 December 2024. In the absence of any other information that would assist the police to narrow down the search area, those involved in the search including the Wheatbelt District, the Police Air Wing, the Emergency Operations Unit, and the State Operations Command Centre, determined that no further general vehicle patrols would be conducted.
75. A review of climate data around the Karroun Kill Nature Reserve between 6 to 13 December 2024 show that daytime temperatures were in the range of mid-to-late 30 degrees Celsius, exceeding 40 degrees Celsius in some areas. Nighttime temperatures dropped to lows of 12 degrees Celsius.³⁹ At the time Police Air Wing operations ceased, thunderstorms were imminent, with inclement weather that would have prevented further air search operations from continuing notwithstanding the independent decision to cease the search.⁴⁰
76. At that time, while the search was scaled back, the police continued to gather intelligence, and assess mapping, with a plan to deploy police officers to any specific areas of interest if they were identified, continue a media awareness campaign, and investigate any public information that was received.⁴¹
77. Barry’s family and friends also undertook their own searches of the areas they believed Barry to be. On Saturday, 14 December 2024, Lauren spoke with the police and explained that she and friends of the family were actively searching, and that she was staying at Barry’s home in Beacon for the foreseeable future. Over the following days, family and friends searched diligently for Barry, without success.⁴²
78. The police continued their investigations, including by downloading the contents of an old phone located at Barry’s home to try to find any areas of interest to search, and staying in touch with Barry’s daughters as they continued their searches.

³⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 15, p 11-12.

³⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 13.

⁴⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 15, p 13.

⁴¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 15, p 15.

⁴² Exhibit 1, Tab 10, p 10.

79. Sadly, despite the best efforts of all involved, the trail in relation to Barry's whereabouts appeared to have gone cold.

DISCOVERY OF BARRY'S CAR

80. After the official police search for Barry was scaled back, a civilian tracker named Rick Heaton began researching the case. Mr Heaton monitors police social media across Australia, and Barry's case came to his attention through Western Australia Police Force social media posts.⁴³

81. Mr Heaton established a business in 2024 called Missing Persons Australia, to formalise his volunteer work helping families of long term missing persons. He has a military background, and has undertaken some tracking and search and rescue training in both the United States of America and Australia.⁴⁴

82. Mr Heaton has also worked with Mr Daniel Wood, from Working Drones Australia, who is based in Canberra. Mr Wood had already been in contact separately with members of Barry's family to assist in their search.⁴⁵

83. Mr Heaton committed a significant amount of time, and effort, to the search for Barry, on a volunteer basis. When asked what led him to his volunteer work, Mr Heaton explained that he liked being out in the bush, and that "*it's a way to help people.*"⁴⁶

84. After extensive research, Mr Heaton commenced his search by trying to reach the mining tenement site that was identified in Barry's paperwork at his home by the police, and Barry's daughter Lauren, as a location of interest to Barry for prospecting. Mr Heaton was not successful in reaching those locations, due to the terrain, and considered that if Barry was in that area, he would have encountered his vehicle at the end of the tracks.⁴⁷

85. Mr Heaton was provided information in relation to the police search efforts in December 2024, including the polygon search area from the triangulation of Barry's phone, and the police search maps. Mr Heaton was confident that if Barry was in that area, he would have been located by the police, and so he shifted his search focus, travelling east of the Emu Proof Fence.⁴⁸

⁴³ Exhibit 1, Tab 29; Transcript, p 27.

⁴⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 4, p 1.

⁴⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 4, p 1; Transcript, p 28.

⁴⁶ Transcript, p 27.

⁴⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 4, p 2.

⁴⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 4, p 3.

86. Mr Heaton searched on foot, by himself, to try to locate Barry. He investigated the habits of prospectors, and narrowed down an area where previous prospectors had found gold deposits in the area, which is where he believed Barry would have headed.⁴⁹
87. At about 10.00 am on Sunday, 25 May 2025, Mr Heaton located Barry's vehicle.
88. The vehicle was found approximately 55 kilometres east of the triangulation area searched by the police in December 2024. The camouflage painted four-wheel drive was parked behind some bushes, and was about 100 metres from the track itself. It was not visible from the track itself.
89. Mr Heaton looked into the vehicle through the windows, and did not find Barry inside. Mr Heaton then notified Lauren, and the police, of his discovery. Appropriately, Mr Heaton was careful not to open the vehicle, or otherwise compromise the scene, as he waited for the police to arrive.⁵⁰
90. The police immediately deployed four police officers to the location to assess the scene. The four-wheel drive had a punctured rear passenger tyre. Mr Heaton explained that there was a piece of dead timber in the tyre, and he could see that the driver had driven over the timber which had staked the tyre about 20 metres shy of where the vehicle was parked.⁵¹ There was no sign that anyone had tried to change the tyre, and a spare tyre was present and appeared in good condition. It is therefore not clear whether Barry knew his tyre was damaged.
91. The car was locked, and there were no signs of disturbance, or injury to any person.
92. Mr Heaton theorised that the location of Barry's vehicle likely suggests he was going to go and prospect for the day nearby, however Barry's two metal detectors were found inside his car.⁵² Police also found Barry's mobile phone, and a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB), inside the car.
93. It is not clear why Barry had purchased the PLB, which if activated could have led searchers directly to him, but not taken it with him when he left his car. This is particularly so given Barry had told Jacqueline sometime before about a prospecting trip where he had walked too far from his car without enough water, and had become lost along the Emu Proof Fence when he accidentally walked past his car and became disoriented. Jacqueline had felt that his

⁴⁹ Transcript, p 28-29.

⁵⁰ Transcript, p 33.

⁵¹ Transcript, p 31.

⁵² Exhibit 1, Tab 4, p 4.

experience had genuinely scared him, and that he wouldn't do something like that again.⁵³

94. It is possible that Barry purchased his PLB after this incident, but with the passage of time, had again grown somewhat complacent towards the dangers of remote Western Australia, and did not think to take his PLB with him when he left his vehicle for the last time.⁵⁴

FURTHER SEARCHES FOR BARRY

95. After the discovery of Barry's car, Mr Heaton commenced a foot search in the area for Barry himself. Mr Heaton searched on foot for 70 days, between 20 May 2025 and 20 September 2025.

96. Mr Heaton alerted the police to anything of significance he found, including:

- small white bones which he expected were non-human, and which were confirmed by a Forensic Anthropologist to be non-human
- a water bottle he found on 22 May 2025 which may or may not have belonged to Barry
- five rocks arranged on the ground in a manner that may have been a compass as an aid for direction
- a piece of aluminium foil which may or may not have belonged to Barry
- vehicle tracks with tyre treads matching Barry's vehicle
- boot prints in a number of locations
- "dwell" points, which represent places where a person or object becomes stationary at the point (for example, sitting down)
- a pile of quartz rocks, which may or may not have been placed by Barry as a marker for a potential mining lease

97. Despite the extensive search efforts in this case, to date, Barry has not been found.

98. Mr Heaton remains committed to resuming his foot search when the next opportunity arises.⁵⁵

99. As a result of Barry's car being located, the Western Australia Police Force had sufficient information to commit to a LandSAR operation around the area

⁵³ Exhibit 1, Tab 8, p 3.

⁵⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 13.

⁵⁵ Transcript, p 42.

where Barry's car was found. On 26 May 2025, officers from the Wheatbelt District, the Emergency Operations Unit, the Police Air Wing, and the Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) Unit travelled to the Wheatbelt to prepare for the search.

100. On 27 May 2025, these officers conducted an extensive land search of the area around Barry's car, between 8.00 am and 5.00 pm. The search did not locate any sign of Barry.⁵⁶
101. In early July 2025, information extracted from Barry's Google Earth account showed an Untitled Project last modified on 5 December 2024, the day before Barry disappeared. The document showed two pins, one being Barry's house, and the other being a specific location 1.47 kilometres west-south-west from where Barry's car was found.⁵⁷
102. Detective Senior Constable Wold and Mr Heaton discussed the location, and felt it unlikely Barry would have been able to navigate to that point without his phone or any mapping tools. However, in the interests of exhausting all avenues, Mr Heaton was happy to add the area to his next search, after some rest, if it was possible to reach the area through the difficult terrain.
103. After further discussion, on 10 July 2025 police officers from Southern Cross Police Station, Merredin Police Station and the Wheatbelt District attended the location and conducted a land search. That search did not locate any sign of Barry.⁵⁸
104. After Mr Heaton discovered some suspected boot prints, the Western Australia Police Force launched a third ground search of an area approximately 645 metres north of where Barry's car was found. This search took place on 4 September 2025, consisting of five police officers from various Wheatbelt District police stations. The search of the area did not locate Barry, or any evidence linking the footprints to him.⁵⁹
105. Despite comprehensive⁶⁰ search efforts by many highly experienced and dedicated officers from the Western Australia Police Force, the significant efforts of Mr Heaton as a civilian searcher, and the committed efforts of members of Barry's family, and his friends, Barry has not been found.

⁵⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 4.

⁵⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 4; Exhibit 1, Tab 11, p 15.

⁵⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 4.

⁵⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 5.

⁶⁰ Transcript, p 39.

106. Mr Heaton has indicated an intention to continue his ground search efforts in 2026, in the hope that he will be able to locate evidence of Barry's whereabouts.
107. In the meantime, Barry's disappearance remains an open and active case for the Missing Persons Team within the Western Australia Police Force. Detective Senior Constable Wold emphasised that the Western Australia Police Force will investigate any credible information that comes to light that may lead to Barry's discovery, and that all involved are committed to finding answers for Barry's family, if that can be achieved.⁶¹

MR HEATON'S RECOMMENDATIONS

108. As part of his report into his search efforts for Barry, Mr Heaton outlined a number of recommendations, based upon his own personal experiences, to the Western Australia Police Force, which he considered may assist during LandSAR operations, and in the investigation into missing persons cases in Western Australia more generally.
109. In light of those recommendations, I sought information from the Western Australia Police Force to address whether the ten matters raised by Mr Heaton are matters that have been previously considered, or would assist the Western Australia Police Force in the difficult task of undertaking large scale searches in difficult terrain.
110. Some of Mr Heaton's recommendations propose steps by the Western Australia Police Force which are already undertaken, such as recommendations that the Western Australia Police Force submit Data Access Requests when a report of a missing person is made, to allow rapid access to information that may assist the search, or recommendations that the Western Australia Police Force consider the implementation of Photogrammetry Software to incorporate into drone or air searches, which is currently being trialled.
111. Other recommendations, such as Mr Heaton's recommendation that PLB's, or their like, are made tax deductible for personal use as this may encourage more Australians to purchase these life saving devices, are not recommendations that arise on the facts of this case. This is because Barry had purchased a PLB, and for reasons unknown, simply elected not to take it with him and instead left it in his car.

⁶¹ Transcript, p 25.

112. I was assisted by a report from Sergeant Kim Mahoney, the Emergency Operations Coordinator within the Emergency Operations Unit of the Western Australia Police Force, dated 3 February 2026, in response to my request for the Western Australia Police Force views on the matters raised by Mr Heaton. In that report, Sergeant Mahoney carefully considered each of Mr Heaton's recommendations, and explained the roles and responsibilities of various government and non-government agencies, under the *State Hazard Plan for Search and Rescue*.
113. Based upon that report, I am satisfied that the Western Australia Police Force are well aware of the safety and legislative considerations that must inform the deployment of resources during a search for a missing person. It is apparent from Sergeant Mahoney's report that the Western Australia Police Force carefully consider which police resources are appropriate to deploy, such as the Tactical Response Group, the Police Air Wing, and the (RPAS) Unit, based upon the unique circumstances of each search event.
114. I am also satisfied that the Western Australia Police Force are cognisant of resources external to the Western Australia Police Force that may be called upon to assist the police in carrying out their responsibilities outlined in the *State Hazard Plan for Search and Rescue*, established under the *Emergency Management Act 2005* (WA). These resources include volunteer services such as the State Emergency Service (SES), and military services which may be called upon if all local civilian capabilities have been exhausted, and military assistance is required as a "*last resort and to preserve human life.*"⁶²
115. Sergeant Mahoney's report acknowledges that many searches include 'spontaneous volunteers', who are well meaning untrained members of the public wanting to assist in locating missing persons on an ad-hoc basis. In such cases, Sergeant Mahoney explained that "*volunteers are provided direction and are supervised by trained team leaders to mitigate risks to the search operation and the individual volunteer.*"⁶³
116. In light of the dangerous terrain that is often the location of such searches, and difficulties that would arise for emergency responders if those trying to assist similarly became lost, or were put at risk trying to help, it is apparent that there is good sense to this approach.

⁶² Exhibit 2, Tab 35, p 5.

⁶³ Exhibit 2, Tab 35, p 5.

117. I note that the *State Hazard Plan for Search and Rescue* explains that spontaneous volunteers may be considered by the Police Commander on a case by case basis, such as in remote areas where there is little alternative, or searches where the availability of recognised groups is limited, such as in Barry's case, and the *State Hazard Plan for Search and Rescue* specifically requires the Police Commander to consider the physical and mental capabilities of the volunteer, whether they have appropriate clothing and personal protective equipment, and the volunteers welfare during, and after, the response.
118. In this case, it is apparent from the evidence that Mr Heaton and the Western Australia Police Force, alongside Barry's family, worked very well together, and that Mr Heaton was assisted in his searches by shared intelligence from the Western Australia Police Force. Mr Heaton's efforts led to the discovery of Barry's vehicle, resulted in further searches, and provided some comfort to Barry's family.
119. The description of Mr Heaton as a spontaneous volunteer does not detract from his impressive skills, and his extensive and admirable efforts to try to locate Barry, nor does it detract from his own knowledge and training regarding search and rescue.
120. While Mr Heaton's recommendations were thoughtfully crafted and clearly aimed at assisting families of missing persons, I am satisfied based upon the response of Sergeant Mahoney to those proposed recommendations that there would be no utility to me adopting any of those recommendations.
121. I am satisfied that the Western Australia Police Force have carefully considered Mr Heaton's proposals, and insofar as the proposals are feasible within the bounds of safety, legislative restrictions, and resourcing considerations, the Western Australia Police Force are already in the process of trialling the steps proposed.

PROOF OF LIFE CHECKS

122. As part of the police investigation into Barry's disappearance, enquiries were made with a number of agencies and other institutions across Australia to see whether there is any record of contact with Barry after he was last known to be alive, or whether there was any record which would otherwise suggest Barry is still alive.
123. Enquiries with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Australian Passport Office confirmed that they have no new records for Barry. Barry had a passport

issued in 1998, which would have expired before his disappearance.⁶⁴ There is no record of Barry applying for a new passport, and no records to otherwise suggest that he had left the country.

124. Searches of the following databases have revealed no new records for Barry after his disappearance in December 2024:

Western Australia Police Force
Electoral Roll
Centrelink
Medicare
Immigration
Proof of life enquiries with all other states and territories
Births Deaths and Marriages for all other states and territories
Banking institutions⁶⁵

125. Further, a check of DNA profiles held in relation to currently known unidentified human remains did not identify any matches to Barry's DNA.⁶⁶
126. These enquiries establish that Barry has not had contact with any of the government agencies one would expect a person to contact in their day-to-day life, since his disappearance on 6 December 2024.

MR HEATON'S ANALYSIS

127. Mr Heaton commenced a search for Barry after the official search was suspended by the Western Australia Police Force. Mr Heaton estimated he searched a total area of 10.74 square kilometres of remote bushland over a period of 70 days of searching.
128. Mr Heaton's efforts resulted in him successfully locating Barry's missing vehicle on 20 May 2025, which is a testament to the diligent, careful and extensive search Mr Heaton undertook in a volunteer capacity.
129. Mr Heaton prepared a detailed report regarding his searches for Barry. At the conclusion of his report, he expressed the belief that Barry was undertaking reconnaissance of the geological formations in the area near to where his vehicle was located, for prospecting purposes. Mr Heaton believes that Barry became disoriented while trying to return to his vehicle in topography that had

⁶⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 12; Exhibit 1, Tab 22.

⁶⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 12; Exhibit 1, Tab 22, Exhibit 1, Tab 23, Exhibit 1, Tab 24, Exhibit 1, Tab 25, Exhibit 1, Tab 26.

⁶⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 12; Exhibit 1, Tab 27.

the potential to disorient even Mr Heaton if he had been searching without the benefit of GPS⁶⁷, and inadvertently turned in the wrong direction, continuing on in search of shelter and shade, and ultimately perishing in remote bushland.

130. Mr Heaton has identified further areas to the west where he considers a targeted search may have some success in locating Barry, and he intends to continue his search when he is next available to do so.⁶⁸

WESTERN AUSTRALIA POLICE FORCE ANALYSIS

131. Having thoroughly investigated Barry's disappearance, and conducted an extensive search in a bid to locate him, the police have ruled out the involvement of any criminality or suspicious circumstances relating to Barry going missing.
132. The Western Australia Police Force believe that Barry died on or shortly after 6 December 2024 whilst prospecting in the remote outback area between Karroun Hill Nature Reserve and Mount Jackson, Western Australia.
133. In light of the range of possible scenarios open in this case, and the fact that Barry's remains have never been located, the Western Australia Police Force were unable to offer an opinion on the cause or manner of Barry's death.

CONCLUSION

134. Having carefully considered the evidence on the coronial brief, having listened to the evidence of Detective Senior Constable Wold, and Mr Heaton at the inquest, and taking into account the views of Barry's family⁶⁹, I am satisfied that Barry's death has been established beyond all reasonable doubt.
135. Barry has now been missing for more than 14 months. Barry has not contacted any of his family or friends in that time, and that lack of contact with his daughters in particular would be significantly out of character for him, given their close and loving relationship.
136. The evidence establishes that Barry went out prospecting in an area of remote bushland between the Karroun Hill Nature Reserve and Mount Jackson, Western Australia. It seems that Barry walked away from his vehicle, without

⁶⁷ Transcript, p 41

⁶⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 4, p 10-11.

⁶⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 14.

taking his mobile phone and his Personal Locator Beacon with him, and never returned.

137. Despite the efforts of Barry's family to alert emergency services to their concerns for Barry's welfare after they realised he had not returned from his prospecting trip, and an appropriately urgent and thorough response by emergency services, and then similarly thorough efforts by Mr Heaton as a civilian searcher, Barry was, very sadly, unable to be located at the time, or in the 14 months since his disappearance.
138. In light of the circumstances of Barry's disappearance, his medical conditions, the proof of life checks conducted by the Western Australia Police Force, and the extensive investigations undertaken since Barry's disappearance, there is no evidence before me to suggest that Barry is still alive.
139. I am unable to reach a conclusion as to exactly how he died.
140. Taking into account the remote terrain, the contours of the land in the area in which Barry disappeared which were described as difficult to navigate⁷⁰, the high temperatures at the time in the areas around Karroun Hill Nature Reserve⁷¹, and Barry's significant physical health issues, it is possible that Barry simply lost his way while investigating sites for prospecting, and was unable to return to his vehicle. It is therefore possible that Barry died from exposure after he became disoriented and lost in bushland.
141. However, Barry also had significant health issues which are outlined above, and it is similarly possible that Barry suffered a medical episode, and thereby died from natural causes.
142. I cannot rule out either of these two possibilities, which appear most likely, or any other possibility, including that Barry experienced an injury in remote Western Australian bushland, such as a trip and fall, causing his accidental death.
143. Given that Barry's body has never been found, on the evidence before me I am sadly unable to reach a conclusion as to exactly when, where, or how, Barry died. The only finding I am able to reach with any certainty at this stage is that Barry is now deceased.

⁷⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 4, p 9.

⁷¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 13.

144. His cause of death must therefore remain unascertained, and I make an open finding as to the manner of death.
145. I acknowledge the efforts of the Western Australia Police Force in their search for Barry, both during the initial search, and the further searches undertaken as new information came to light. I agree with Mr Heaton's comments that these search efforts were appropriate at every stage, based upon the information available to them at the time⁷².
146. I also acknowledge the efforts of Mr Heaton in his search for Barry. It is apparent that Mr Heaton has taken care to ensure his volunteer search is being carefully conducted in a way that is within his own skill set, and mindful of his own safety. Mr Heaton told the court that he searches for long term missing persons because he wants to help people. In this case, his efforts have brought some answers and hopefully some comfort to Barry's family. I have no doubt that Mr Heaton's tireless work in searching for Barry has helped Barry's family and loved ones immeasurably, during an unthinkably difficult time for them all.
147. As I did at the close of the inquest, I wish to again convey to Barry's family and friends, on behalf of the Court, my sincere condolences for their loss.

S. Tyler
Coroner
19 FEBRUARY 2026

⁷² Transcript, p 38-39.