
JURISDICTION : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
ACT : CORONERS ACT 1996
CORONER : MICHAEL ANDREW GLIDDON JENKIN
HEARD : 9 APRIL 2021
DELIVERED : 13 APRIL 2021
FILE NO/S : CORC 1414 of 2019
DECEASED : POULSON, SEBASTIAN

Catchwords:

Nil

Legislation:

Nil

Counsel Appearing:

Sergeant A Becker assisted the coroner.

Coroners Act 1996
(Section 26(1))

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

*I, Michael Andrew Gliddon Jenkin, Coroner, having investigated the suspected death of **Sebastian POULSON** with an inquest held at Perth Coroner’s Court, Court 85, CLC Building, 501 Hay Street, Perth, on 9 April 2021 find that the death of **Sebastian POULSON** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt, and the identity of the deceased person was **Sebastian POULSON** and that death occurred on or about 19 October 2014, at an unknown location, in the following circumstances:*

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INTRODUCTION

1. Mr Sebastian Poulson (Mr Poulson) and others arrived at the Wangkatjunka Community (the Community), located about 110 km southeast of Fitzroy Crossing at around sunset on 16 October 2014. Mr Poulson and his relatives and friends had come from Yuendumu in Northern Territory to play football at the Community.^{1,2}
2. Mr Poulson went missing from the Community sometime between about 2.00 am and 7.00 am on 19 October 2014. He had serious heart issues and was 38-years old. There has been no contact from him since and despite a comprehensive search and police investigation, no information about his whereabouts has been unearthed. In 2019, Detective Senior Constable Kellie Leslie (Officer Leslie) conducted a review of Mr Poulson's case and prepared a report for the State Coroner.³
3. By way of a letter dated 20 December 2019, the State Coroner advised the Commissioner of Police that, on the basis of the information in the police report,⁴ she had reasonable cause to suspect that Mr Poulson had died and that his death was a "*reportable death*".^{5,6}
4. The State Coroner directed that the suspected death of Mr Poulson be investigated, and in accordance with that direction, I held an inquest on 9 April 2021. Members of Mr Poulson's family listened to proceedings via an audio-link from Yuendumu. Unfortunately, a planned video-link failed due to technical issues.⁷
5. Officer Leslie gave evidence at the inquest and the documentary material that was tendered consisted of one volume. The inquest examined the circumstances of Mr Poulson's disappearance and the issue of whether he had died.

¹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Statement - Sen. Const. T Litherland, para 5

² Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, pp1-2

³ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, pp1-2 and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), p5

⁴ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie

⁵ Letter - State Coroner to Commissioner of Police (20.12.19)

⁶ Sections 3 & 23(1), *Coroners Act 1996* (WA)

⁷ Section 23(2), *Coroners Act 1996* (WA)

MR POULSON

Background⁸

1. Mr Poulson and his partner lived in the Yuendumu Community (Yuendumu), about 290 km north-west of Alice Springs. He had four children, one of whom was from a previous relationship. Mr Poulson is reported to have lived in Darwin for about five years before returning to Yuendumu. He was reported to occasionally use cannabis and alcohol.⁹

Medical issues^{10,11,12}

2. Mr Poulson had serious heart issues and was admitted to Alice Springs Hospital (ASH) on 12 May 2014, after presenting with a one-month history of shortness of breath and swelling of the lower limbs. It was noted that that Mr Poulson was not always compliant with taking medication and an echocardiogram found a significant deterioration in his heart function.
3. Mr Poulson was diagnosed with rheumatic heart disease (which he had contracted as a child), decompensated congestive cardiac failure (secondary to non-compliance), severe tricuspid regurgitation and rapid atrial fibrillation. He was given medication to help his body get rid of excess fluid and discharged home on 27 May 2014, for follow up by the cardiology clinic when the clinic visited Yuendumu.
4. On 21 September 2014, Mr Poulson was admitted to ASH with shortness of breath. He had been non-compliant with medication and had missed an appointment at Royal Darwin Hospital on 18 September 2014. He was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation with rapid ventricular response due to missed medication, and discharged home on 22 September 2014.¹³
5. Mr Poulson had no known mental health issues.¹⁴

⁸ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, pp1-2

⁹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 87-88

¹⁰ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, pp6-7

¹¹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 51A, Discharge summary - Alice Springs Hospital (27.05.14), pp2-3

¹² Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 45, Medical records - Yuendumu Community Health Service

¹³ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 51B, Discharge summary - Alice Springs Hospital (28.09.14), pp1-2

¹⁴ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 99-100

MR POULSON'S DISAPPEARANCE

*Visit to the Community*¹⁵

6. Mr Poulson and others travelled from Yuendumu in a bus driven by Mr Poulson's cousin, Mr Alastair Turner. The group arrived at the Community at sunset on 16 October 2014. It was Mr Poulson's first visit to the Community and over the next few days, members of the group played football, went swimming and played in a band.^{16,17}
7. On 18 October 2014, Mr Poulson, his nephew and others went into Fitzroy Crossing to do some shopping. That evening, Mr Poulson, who was an accomplished bass guitarist, played in a band with Mr Turner and Mr Turner's son. There was no animosity or fights within the group and Mr Poulson was described as being sober and in a happy mood.¹⁸
8. At about midnight, Mr Poulson and Mr Turner returned to House 12, where they were staying whilst visiting the Community. Mr Poulson went to sleep on the front verandah along with other members of the group including Mr Turner.^{19,20}
9. Sometime between 2.00 am and 3.00 am on 19 October 2014, Mr Turner woke up. He wasn't sure why he had woken up and was unclear on the time, but recalls it was dark. Mr Turner said he saw Mr Poulson asleep on the verandah "*like everyone else*", and then went back to sleep himself. At about 7.00 am, Mr Turner was woken by some younger men from the group who were asking where Mr Poulson was.²¹
10. Mr Turner saw that Mr Poulson was not on the verandah and told the young men he might be having a shower. The young men went to check and came back to say that Mr Poulson was not in the shower. Mr Turner thought that Mr Poulson may have gone for a walk and was not concerned for his welfare at that stage.²²

¹⁵ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, pp2-3

¹⁶ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 2-10

¹⁷ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Statement - Sen. Const. T Litherland, para 6

¹⁸ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 22-27

¹⁹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 30-35

²⁰ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 50, Photos of Community and surrounds, photos 3-8

²¹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 36-40

²² Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 41-43

11. At around midday, Mr Turner and others drove around the Community to see if they could find Mr Poulson. Mr Turner noticed tracks near the front gate of the Community, apparently made by a pair of thongs. The tracks led back along a fence line to the rear of House 12.^{23,24}
12. Mr Turner's thongs, which he had been wearing the previous day, were missing and Mr Poulson's shoes were still at House 12 along with a bag containing Mr Poulson's clothes. On that basis, Mr Turner concluded that the thong tracks had been made by Mr Poulson. Mr Turner and others drove to nearby waterholes but found no sign of Mr Poulson.²⁵
13. On the morning of 20 October 2014, Mr Poulson was still missing and Mr Turner and others drove into Fitzroy Crossing to continue their search. They visited nearby town camps without success and called into the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC), where they obtained copies of a photograph of Mr Poulson, which they posted around the town.^{26,27,28}

Mr Poulson is reported missing²⁹

14. Staff at the KALACC contacted the Western Australian Police Force (the Police) and Senior Constable Litherland (Officer Litherland) arrived at about 3.50 pm. Mr Turner told Officer Litherland about Mr Poulson's recent movements and that he required medication for "*numerous ailments*". As it was getting dark, it was decided that police would attend the Community the following day to check on Mr Poulson.^{30,31}
15. In the late afternoon of 20 October 2014, police advised Mr Turner they had received reports that Mr Poulson had returned to the Community. However, Mr Turner went back to the Community and after checking, contacted police to advise that the reports were false.³²

²³ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 44-48

²⁴ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 50, Photos of Community and surrounds, photos 13 & 19-20

²⁵ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 49-52

²⁶ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 18, Photo - Mr Poulson

²⁷ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 19, Missing person poster - Mr Poulson

²⁸ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 53-56 & 58

²⁹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, p3

³⁰ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 53-56

³¹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Statement - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 2-4 and 8-10

³² Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 60-64

POLICE INVESTIGATION

Overview^{33,34}

16. Over the period 21 - 25 October 2014, the Police coordinated an extensive air and land search (the Search) in an unsuccessful attempt to find Mr Poulson. Advice from a survival expert suggested that it was unlikely that Mr Poulson could survive beyond 24 October 2014, unless he was near a water source. During the Search, the following resources were deployed:³⁵

- i. *Rotary-wing aircraft*: a helicopter was deployed on Days 1, 2 and 3 of the Search and checked bushland, roads and water sources in and around the Community;
- ii. *Vehicle patrols*: the Police, family and Community members conducted extensive vehicle patrols at the Community, Fitzroy Crossing and water sources in surrounding areas; and
- iii. *Foot patrols*: the Police, family and Community members conducted extensive foot patrols at the Community (including house searches) and in surrounding bushland.

17. The Police conducted a comprehensive investigation involving checks with Mr Poulson's family and friends, his bank and State and Federal government agencies, but failed to unearth any information about his whereabouts. After reviewing the case, Officer Leslie expressed the view that Mr Poulson was deceased.³⁶

Initial enquiries^{37,38}

18. On 21 October 2014, Officer Litherland and Sergeant Bearcroft (Officer Bearcroft) patrolled Fitzroy Crossing and gave posters to the local service station, supermarket and hospital. Meanwhile, the CEO of the Community sent a text message to all residents asking them to search their houses for any sign of Mr Poulson.

³³ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, pp2-4 & 6 and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), pp6-10

³⁴ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tabs 7-12, 39-41 & 44, Police notes, Incident Reports & Running Sheets (21.10.14 - 03.10.19)

³⁵ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 65-72

³⁶ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, p7 and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), pp10-13

³⁷ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, pp4-5 and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), p7

³⁸ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 11-21

19. On the way to the Community, Officers Bearcroft and Litherland (the Officers) stopped and searched vehicles travelling between the Community and the Ngumpan Community. On arrival at the Community the Officers searched House 12 and nearby bushland and examined Mr Poulson's belongings.
20. Officer Litherland completed a "*search urgency assessment*" which provides a score against a variety of factors including medical conditions, terrain and age. The assessment gave an urgency rating of "*measured response*", but because of high temperatures at the time, Officer Litherland escalated the urgency rating to "*urgent response*".³⁹
21. During the day, the Officers conducted foot and vehicle patrols around the Community and nearby Christmas Creek Station. Meanwhile, enquiries with Greyhound Australia, confirmed that Mr Poulson had not travelled on any of their services. A "*look out to be kept for*" notice was issued to Kimberley District Support Services and to police in the Northern Territory.⁴⁰
22. Mr Poulson's family declined a request from the Police to issue a media release on 21 October 2014, on the basis that this might cause undue stress to family members when they saw or heard it. Permission was also refused on 23 October 2014 because of concerns relating to the release of Mr Poulson's image. Permission was eventually received from Mr Poulson's family on 24 October 2014, on the basis that the media release would not include Mr Poulson's photograph.⁴¹

*Aerial search*⁴²

23. At about 2.00 pm on 21 October 2014, a helicopter pilot arrived at the Community to assist with the search for Mr Poulson. The pilot told Officer Litherland that on 19 October 2014, he was mustering cattle at Christmas Creek Station. The pilot said he had been flying low and had not seen anyone walking out of the Community or along the road leading from the Community to the Great Northern Highway.^{43,44}

³⁹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 21, Search Urgency Assessment (21.10.14)

⁴⁰ ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), p7

⁴¹ ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), p11

⁴² Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, pp4-7 and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), pp6-8

⁴³ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 6, Statement - Mr P Mitchell, paras 2-7

24. On 21, 23 and 24 October 2014, the helicopter pilot conducted aerial searches to find Mr Poulson. On each occasion, the pilot was assisted by a spotter, and the searches totalled 9.5 hours as follows.^{45,46,47}
- i. 21.10.14: two flights covering bushland north and south and the road leading out of the Community; Christmas Creek Station and the creek line south of the Community. Dog tracks could be seen from the air, but no human tracks were spotted;
 - ii. 23.10.14: two flights covering bushland around the Community extending seven km north-east, three km north and one km south of the back track to Billiluna; either side of the road to Bulka Station; the river bed south of the Community; and either side of the road leading from the Community all the way to the Great Northern Highway; and
 - iii. 24.10.14: two flights covering the ranges to the west of the Community; the stock water holes within an eight km radius; grid searches of bushland to the north and north-east of the Community; the creek and river beds around the Community and a small water hole about three km on the other side of the river bed. No tracks were located.
25. The helicopter pilot briefed police after each flight and showed them the search area he had covered on aerial grid maps they provided.^{48,49} On 23 October 2014, when visibility was slightly reduced, the pilot advised police of the areas he was unable to effectively search. Officer Litherland conducted foot patrols at those areas, which included water tanks, a car dump and a nursery/greenhouse.^{50,51,52}
26. On 24 October 2014, Officer Litherland acted as on-board spotter and was satisfied that Mr Poulson would have been seen if he had been walking in the area.⁵³

⁴⁴ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 22-24

⁴⁵ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 26, Tax invoice - BB Helicopters & Fitzroy Helicopters

⁴⁶ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 6, Statement - Mr P Mitchell, paras 8-26

⁴⁷ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 25-28, 35-37, 59-60 & 63-67

⁴⁸ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tabs 23 & 24, Maps showing aerial searches conducted between 21-24 October 2014

⁴⁹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 27, 47 & 75

⁵⁰ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 6, Statement - Mr P Mitchell, paras 17-18 and 27

⁵¹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 26, Tax invoice - BB Helicopters & Fitzroy Helicopters

⁵² Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 47-48

⁵³ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 37

*Land search*⁵⁴

27. On 21 October 2014, after attending the Community the Officers visited the Ngumpan Community and showed residents Mr Poulson's photograph. The Officers also visited the Fitzroy River Lodge and the Crossing Inn.⁵⁵
28. Over the next few days, the Police, family members, State Emergency Service personnel and Community residents conducted a number of foot and vehicle patrols of the Community and surrounding roads and bushland. Police also conducted searches of the houses at the Community over several days.^{56,57}
29. During the land searches, particular attention was paid to water holes, water tanks, stock watering holes and artificial features in the surrounding area. The extensive nature of the patrols is apparent from maps showing the areas searched.⁵⁸

*Time frame for survival*⁵⁹

30. Mr Turner told the Police that Mr Poulson had "*good bush skills*" and could survive on the land by finding water and hunting goanna. He also said that Mr Poulson had committed no offence against Customary Law and had never wandered off previously.⁶⁰
31. On 23 October 2014, a police officer from the Emergency Operations Unit (EOU)⁶¹ contacted Dr Paul Luckin seeking expert advice about Mr Poulson's "*timeframe for survival*".^{62,63} Dr Luckin suggested the aerial search concentrate on an area up to 10 km from the Community on the basis that Mr Poulson had probably suffered an acute medical event and it was unlikely he had travelled more than five to six kilometres.^{64,65}

⁵⁴ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, pp4-7 and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), p6

⁵⁵ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 28-30

⁵⁶ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 27, Fitzroy Crossing Police Station Daily Patrol Sheet (27.10.14)

⁵⁷ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 39, 55-56, 58, 61-62, 68, 71-74, 77-78 & 82

⁵⁸ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tabs 23 & 24, Maps showing land searches conducted between 21-24 October 2014

⁵⁹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, pp5 &7 and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), pp7-9

⁶⁰ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 4, Person of interest information (23.10.14)

⁶¹ The Emergency Operation Unit provides specialist advice and resources to assist with searches for missing persons.

⁶² An assessment of the minimum and maximum periods a person is likely to live when lost.

⁶³ See also: [LSOM Chapter 9.pdf \(amsa.gov.au\)](#)

⁶⁴ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 51-52 & 54

⁶⁵ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 7, Incident Summary (23.10.14), pp3-4

32. Staff at Bulka Station (located approximately 27 km south east of the Community) advised the Police that by 7.00 am, temperatures were in the 30's and on 23 October 2014, it was 42°C in the shade, and about 44°C in the open. Given the terrain and prevailing temperatures, Dr Luckin's opinion was that Mr Poulson was unlikely to survive beyond 24 October 2014, unless he had located a water source and shade.^{66,67,68,69,70}
33. At about 3.00 pm on 25 October 2014, Sergeant Ripp (Officer Ripp) and Officer Litherland met with Mr Poulson's family and friends to discuss the Search. They discussed the extensive nature of the Search, Mr Poulson's medical conditions and the advice received from Dr Luckin. Officer Ripp told the family that on the basis of Dr Luckin's advice and given that extensive efforts had failed to find any trace of Mr Poulson, the Search was being suspended.⁷¹
34. Officer Ripp invited the family to contact the Police if they received any information about Mr Poulson's whereabouts or if they had any matters they wanted the Police to follow up. Officer Litherland conducted further searches at the Community on 27 October 2014 and followed up on a number potential sightings, which did not provide any useful information as to Mr Poulson's whereabouts.⁷²

Medical, official, financial and other checks⁷³

35. Mr Poulson was the holder of a "BasicsCard", a reusable card issued by Centrelink, that gives the holder access to income managed money through EFTPOS facilities at a range of businesses.⁷⁴ Mr Turner said he saw Mr Poulson give his BasicsCard to a nephew and was aware that it had not been returned. Officer Litherland subsequently determined that Mr Poulson also had possession of his partner's BasicsCard.^{75,76}

⁶⁶ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 49B, Bureau of Meteorology Climate Statistics - Fitzroy Crossing

⁶⁷ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 7B, Investigation Running Sheet (23.10.14), p4

⁶⁸ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 7C, Incident Summary (23.10.14), pp3-4 and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), p13

⁶⁹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 10, Investigation Running Sheet (24.10.14), p1

⁷⁰ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 39, Police notes - Summary of information from EOU

⁷¹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 87-90 and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), p9

⁷² Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 91, 96-105 & 108

⁷³ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 2, Report - Det. Sen. Const. K Leslie, pp4-6 and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), p7 & 11-13

⁷⁴ See: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/basicscard>

⁷⁵ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, para 24

⁷⁶ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, para 31

36. Police established that Mr Poulson's BasicsCard had been used on 17, 18, 19 & 20 October 2014 at various establishments including the Community store, the Ngiyali Roadhouse, the Fitzroy Crossing Coles Express and the IGA supermarket at Tarunda. CCTV footage was obtained from the Coles Express and the IGA for times when Mr Poulson's BasicsCard was used. Although Mr Poulson's relatives were seen in that footage, Mr Poulson was not identified.⁷⁷
37. In his statement to the Police, Mr Turner referred to a number of possible sightings of Mr Poulson. These included Mr Poulson being seen at a mine near Noonkanbah; at caves near the Mimbi Ranges; and an alleged sighting at the Bayulu Community. However, a range of "*proof of life*" checks by police failed to unearth any information about Mr Poulson's whereabouts.^{78,79}
38. Checks with Mr Poulson's bank identified that the last transaction on his progress saver account was on 22 September 2014 and that a balance enquiry had been made on his access advantage account in Yuendumu on 18 October 2014.⁸⁰
39. Police enquiries confirmed that Centrelink's last contact with Mr Poulson was in March 2014. A disclosure certificate from Medicare Australia advised that no pharmaceutical benefits had been claimed for Mr Poulson between 19 October 2014 and 2 August 2016. A bulk-billed consultation by a cardiologist was recorded on 28 October 2014, but this appears to have been an error. Checks with the Australian Border Force confirmed that Mr Poulson had not left Australia.^{81,82,83}
40. Checks with the registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages in all States and Territories confirmed that Mr Poulson had not changed his name, nor was he recorded as having died during the period 1 October 2014 to 25 January 2019.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ See also: Vol. 1, Tabs 29, 30, 31, 33 & 35, Centrelink: Certificates of Disclosure (various dates)

⁷⁸ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 3A, Statement - Mr A Turner, paras 91-95

⁷⁹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 5, Report - Sen. Const. T Litherland, paras 83, 97, 100 & 103-104

⁸⁰ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 25, Correspondence and statements from ANZ Banking Group

⁸¹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 43, Centrelink: Certificate of Disclosure (06.02.19)

⁸² Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 38A, Medicare Australia: Certificate of Disclosure (01.09.16)

⁸³ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 43, Email Australian Border Force to Det. Sen. Const. P Davey (25.01.19)

⁸⁴ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 43, Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages search (25.01.19)

41. There is no record of Mr Poulson having had any contact with the Police and there are no unidentified remains on the Police computer system that could be linked to Mr Poulson. There is also no record of Mr Poulson having been imprisoned since his disappearance and no evidence of any criminality associated with his disappearance.⁸⁵

Comments on the Police search and missing person investigation

42. During the Search, Police maintained close contact with Mr Poulson's family and friends and used the skills and knowledge of local residents. The search team liaised with the EOU on 21 October 2014, but were already employing all of the recommended techniques.⁸⁶

43. The deployment of a helicopter by the Police was timely and appropriate and the helicopter pilot was experienced in low flying. The aerial searches stretched over three days and concentrated on water sources within a 10 km radius of the Community. With the exception of one day, visibility during the aerial searches was good. On the day when visibility was slightly reduced, Officer Litherland conducted vehicle and foot patrols of the areas identified by the pilot as requiring inspection.

44. Despite an extensive search of the area around the Community, including all water sources in the vicinity, no sign of Mr Poulson was detected. Officer Leslie said she was satisfied that sufficient resources had been allocated to the Search and that all reasonable efforts had been made to locate Mr Poulson.⁸⁷ Having carefully considered the available evidence, I am satisfied that the Search was extensive and comprehensive. I am also satisfied that the decision to suspend the Search was appropriate.

45. During the missing person investigation coordinated by Police, a number of potential sightings were followed up and numerous of proof of life checks were conducted. No evidence relevant to Mr Poulson's whereabouts was unearthed. I am satisfied that the Police investigation into Mr Poulson's disappearance was timely and comprehensive.

⁸⁵ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 42, Long term missing person checklist (04.03.16) and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), p13

⁸⁶ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 7A, Investigation Running Sheet (21.10.14) and ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), pp8-9

⁸⁷ ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), pp9 & 13

HAS DEATH BEEN ESTABLISHED?

46. In my view, the evidence establishes beyond all reasonable doubt that Mr Poulson died on or about 19 October 2014. In reaching that conclusion, I have relied on the following facts:

- i. Mr Poulson disappeared in the early hours of 19 October 2014, and since that time, no eyewitnesses have come forward with any information about his whereabouts and a comprehensive aerial and land search over a number of days, failed to locate any sign of him;
- ii. Tracks (possibly made by Mr Poulson) were found at the front gate of the Community on the morning after he disappeared (20 October 2014) and led back to House 12, where Mr Poulson had been staying;
- iii. Despite the fact that Mr Poulson's partner gave birth to their daughter on 22 October 2014, his family have had no contact from him since his disappearance on 19 October 2014;
- iv. There have been no transactions on Mr Poulson's bank account since his disappearance and he has not had any contact with Centrelink since that time;
- v. Despite the fact that he had significant medical issues, Mr Poulson has not accessed pharmaceutical or medical services since his disappearance;
- vi. A comprehensive police investigation failed to unearth any information about Mr Poulson's whereabouts after 19 October 2014 and concluded that he had died;⁸⁸
- vii. Despite a public awareness campaign by the Police, no information relevant to Mr Poulson's whereabouts has come to light; and
- viii. Although Mr Poulson's body was never found, if, as seems likely, he succumbed to the elements and died in bushland in the vicinity of the Community, his body would have decomposed rapidly given the average day time temperatures at the time.

⁸⁸ ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), pp12 & 13

CAUSE AND MANNER OF DEATH

47. In circumstances where the body of Mr Poulson has not been located, I am obliged to find that the cause of Mr Poulson's death is unascertained and further, I make an open finding as to the manner of his death.
48. However, having carefully considered all of the available evidence, it is my view that the most likely explanation for Mr Poulson's death is that he died from exposure after walking off from the Community.
49. In canvassing this possibility, I am mindful of the following facts:
- i. Mr Poulson was last seen alive in the early hours of 19 October 2014 and had disappeared by 7.00 am on that day;
 - ii. Although Mr Poulson had good bush survival skills, the terrain around the Community is rugged and there are limited water sources;⁸⁹
 - iii. A survival expert (Dr Luckin), considered it likely that Mr Poulson had experienced an acute medical event;
 - iv. According to the Bureau of Meteorology, the average maximum temperature for the Fitzroy Crossing area in October is 39.4°C and on 23 October 2014, the temperature at nearby Bulka Station was 42°C in the shade;⁹⁰
 - v. At the time of his disappearance Mr Poulson did not have access to a vehicle; and
 - vi. Since his disappearance, there has been no sign of Mr Poulson and no physical evidence has been located which might account for his disappearance.

⁸⁹ Exhibit 1, Vol. 1, Tab 4, Person of interest information (23.10.14)

⁹⁰ ts 09.04.21 (Leslie), p13

CONCLUSION

50. Mr Poulson was 38 years of age when he went missing from the Community. Despite a comprehensive aerial and land search and a thorough investigation by the Police, no information about his whereabouts has come to light.
51. There are no eye-witnesses to his final moments, but in my view, when considered as a whole, the evidence in this case leads to the inescapable conclusion that Mr Poulson died on or about 19 October 2014.
52. The most likely explanation for Mr Poulson's death is that he died as a result of exposure after walking in bushland near the Community. However, on the evidence before me, I was obliged to find that the cause of Mr Poulson's death was unascertained and make an open finding as to the manner of his death.
53. I cannot begin to imagine the grief and sadness that Mr Poulson's family and friends have experienced since his disappearance. I can only hope that my finding that Mr Poulson has died may offer some sense of finality as his loved ones continue to cope with their terrible loss.

MAG Jenkin
Coroner
13 April 2021