



Western

Australia

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

Ref No: 10/14

I, Rosalinda Vincenza Clorinda FOGLIANI, State Coroner, having investigated the suspected death of William Maddison FRENCH, with an Inquest held at Court 51, Central Law Courts, 501 Hay Street, Perth on 14 March 2014 find that the death has been established beyond all reasonable doubt, that the identity of the deceased person was William Maddison FRENCH, and that death occurred between 17 December 1997 and 10 November 1998 at a place unknown from unknown causes in the following circumstances -

Counsel Appearing :

Sergeant Lyle Housiaux assisting the State Coroner

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
THE DECEASED	4
EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE DECEASED'S DISAPPEARANCE	6
INVESTIGATIONS FOLLOWING MISSING PERSONS REPORT TO POLICE	9
(a) CHRONOLOGY OF MR DRAGOVICH'S MOVEMENTS	10
(b) LEGAL PROCEEDINGS AGAINST MR DRAGOVICH	16
FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS AS TO THE DECEASED'S WHEREABOUTS	20
CONCLUSION AS TO WHETHER THE DEATH HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED	23
CONCLUSION AS TO HOW THE DEATH OCCURRED	24
CONCLUSION AS TO CAUSE OF DEATH	25



INTRODUCTION

1. William Maddison French (the deceased) was a 24 year old male in a satisfactory state of health who disappeared in December 1997 whilst travelling around Australia.
2. Extensive investigations have failed to locate the deceased. There have been no confirmed sightings of the deceased since 17 December 1997 despite significant reporting in the media.
3. The deceased's mother, Mrs Margaret Buchanan Stuart French last saw the deceased in November 1997.
4. The deceased's then girlfriend, Ms Clare Humphries last heard from him during a reverse charges telephone call to her from the deceased when he was in Carnarvon on 17 December 1997. The deceased told her he was going to travel around Australia with a friend, "Marco". That was a reference to Mr Miro Petrovich Dragovich. Mr Dragovich died on 19 June 2003 without ever providing any information to the police relating to the deceased's disappearance.
5. The last known sighting of the deceased, also on 17 December 1997 was when he attended the offices of the Friends of Citizens Under Stress (FOCUS) in Carnarvon to obtain a food voucher to be used at the local Woolworths store.
6. Part of the police investigations into the deceased's disappearance focused on the question of whether



Mr Dragovich had any knowledge and/or role in connection with the deceased's disappearance. Police concluded that the involvement of Mr Dragovich could not be established with any certainty.¹

7. The deceased has not had any contact with family or friends since 17 December 1997 and this is out of character for him. Since that date the deceased has not had any contact with health or police authorities either. In fact after 17 December 1997 there have been no confirmed sightings of the deceased nor any contact made with him.
8. On 17 March 2011 the State Coroner received a letter from Mrs French advising that her son, the deceased, aged 24 years had gone missing in 1997 while travelling with a person she believed to be Marco Dragovich.
9. Mrs French stated that her son's disappearance had been extensively investigated nationally and internationally and she requested an inquest into his disappearance.
10. As a result of Mrs French's letter, on 25 March 2011 the State Coroner wrote to the Commissioner of Police and directed under section 23(1) of the *Coroners Act 1996* that the deceased's suspected death be investigated by police.
11. Under section 23(2) of the *Coroners Act 1996*, where the State Coroner has given such a direction, a Coroner must hold an inquest into the circumstances of the

¹T.5



suspected death of a person, and if the Coroner finds that the death of the person has been proved beyond a reasonable doubt, into how the death occurred and the cause of the death.

12. I held an inquest on 14 March 2014 as required. The documentary evidence adduced at the inquest was the report of Senior Constable Clarkson and the police brief of evidence, comprising two volumes of materials.

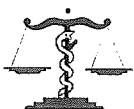
THE DECEASED

13. The deceased was born on 13 March 1973 in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa to Margaret and William Berry French and his first twelve years were spent in Pumula, South Africa².
14. On 21 January 1986 the deceased and his family immigrated to Perth Western Australia and settled in Bassendean. The deceased and his family became Australian citizens on 12 July 1998³.
15. When the deceased was 18 years old he had a relationship with a woman which resulted in him travelling to Malaysia on occasion. They married in Malaysia and had a child. The relationship between the deceased and his wife deteriorated shortly thereafter, they divorced and the deceased returned to Australia⁴.
16. After his return the deceased moved back into the family home in Perth. He began drinking heavily and he

² Ex 1 Tab 7 & 9

³ T.9

⁴ Ex 1 Tab 7



suffered from depression. He had trouble holding down a job and he engaged in some gambling. He stopped going to university. On two occasions over this troubled period the deceased attempted suicide⁵ and he was hospitalised on both occasions.

17. In August 1996 the deceased underwent a formal psychological assessment which indicated his tendency for angry and aggressive behaviour, poor judgment, and substance abuse but found no evidence of major mood disorder or attention deficit disorder.⁶
18. Between 1996 and 1997 the deceased commenced a relationship with Ms Humphries, who was a social worker. In the early stages of this new relationship the deceased sought assistance for his drinking and gambling problems⁷. However, after a while the deceased's relationship with Ms Humphries deteriorated and it developed an on again off again quality with some toxic elements⁸. As the deceased's circumstances deteriorated, he engaged in some drug taking⁹. Undoubtedly, the deceased's personality problems as indicated by his formal psychological assessment were a factor contributing to the breakdown of successive relationships and to his alcohol abuse and experimentation with drug use.

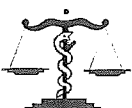
⁵ Ex 1 Tab 7 p.11

⁶ Ex 1 Tab 11

⁷ Ex 1 Tab 7 & 8

⁸ Ex 1 Tab 7 & 9

⁹ Ex 1 Tab 9



19. At a point during their relationship, the deceased had moved in to live with Ms Humphries for a short period, then he began to live in backpackers' lodges and hostels.
20. The deceased had a relatively limited criminal history and none of his offences have any bearing on the consideration of the circumstances of his disappearance, save that they reflect behaviour consistent with his formal psychological assessment referred to above.
21. After his disappearance, the deceased's parents, Mr and Mrs French, made exhaustive but ultimately fruitless attempts to locate their son, including travelling to New South Wales in an endeavour to find information about their son's whereabouts.

EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE DECEASED'S DISAPPEARANCE

22. The events leading up to the deceased's disappearance are inextricably connected with his association with Mr Dragovich, but the extent and relevance of that association only became apparent after the deceased disappeared.
23. The first known contact between the deceased and Mr Dragovich occurred in the early part of 1997.
24. Between 20 March 1997 and 7 April 1997 the deceased resided at the Salvation Army Lentara Hostel in Northbridge Western Australia. Mr Dragovich also stayed there between 4 to 11 April 1997. The deceased



and Mr Dragovich were located in rooms with doors directly opposite each other. The supervisor at the Lentara Hostel at the time recorded their admission and discharge dates and observed the deceased and Mr Dragovich socialising on several occasions¹⁰. They were there together for about four days.

25. Mrs French did not meet Mr Dragovich, but the deceased only ever mentioned one person that he met from his stays at the backpacker lodges. This person was described by the deceased to his mother as an Iranian who was unable to get a job and who was in trouble with the police for a serious (unspecified) offence. Despite Mrs French's show of concern about this association, the deceased did not provide further information.¹¹
26. Mrs French last saw her son, the deceased, in November 1997. She only saw him for 15-20 minutes at the family home. Immediately prior to that time the deceased had been staying in various short term accommodation locales but had exhausted his options in that regard. Following a discussion the deceased left the home telling his mother, in effect, that he would see her sometime in the future¹².
27. On 11 December 1997, Ms Humphries saw the deceased in Perth for the last time in person¹³. Immediately beforehand the deceased had been in

¹⁰ Ex 1 Tab 14

¹¹ Ex 1 Tab 7

¹² Ex 1 Tab 7

¹³ Ex 1 Tab 8



Kalgoorlie. He came to Perth because he had to appear in his court case the next day. At that meeting they had an argument and at some point during that day Ms Humphries dropped the deceased off in Northbridge. The relationship still had that on again off again quality and there were discussions between the two of them as to whether the relationship was going to continue.

28. On 12 December 1997 the deceased appeared in the Perth Court of Petty Sessions on a minor charge, he pleaded guilty and was fined.
29. Ms Humphries last had contact with the deceased on 17 December 1997 when the deceased telephoned her from Carnarvon¹⁴ at about 5:40pm. The deceased told Ms Humphries that he had met up with “Marco”¹⁵ from the Lentara Hostel, that Marco was in trouble with the police and that they were planning to travel around the borders of Australia. The deceased sounded despondent. Ms Humphries encouraged him to stay in touch with her, and she was concerned about his welfare.¹⁶
30. Also on 17 December 1997 the deceased attended at FOCUS in Carnarvon to obtain a food voucher to spend at the Woolworths store, in Carnarvon.

¹⁴ Ex 1 Tab 60

¹⁵ This is a reference to Mr Dragovich

¹⁶ Ex 1 Tab 8



31. The role of the officer on duty at FOCUS was to write out food vouchers for people in need that had been referred to her¹⁷.
32. On 17 December 1997 the FOCUS officer received a Client Referral form from "Department of Social Security" for assistance to the deceased¹⁸. That assistance was provided by the FOCUS officer to the deceased in the form of a food voucher for \$50 to be spent at Woolworths¹⁹.
33. The FOCUS officers' notes indicate that she had a meeting with the deceased, that he told her he was 24 years old, that he was living in a car with a "mate", and that his Disability Support Pension of \$384.50 was due on 23 December 1997. The deceased also referred to hitch hiking and sharing costs and that he said he was in treatment for manic depression.²⁰
34. The contacts with the deceased by Ms Humphries and the FOCUS officer are the last known contacts with the deceased.

INVESTIGATIONS

35. Mrs French reported the deceased as missing to the WA Police on 28 February 1998²¹. Whilst the police investigation was initially treated as a missing person inquiry, in December 1998 it was upgraded to a

¹⁷ Ex 1 Tab 17

¹⁸ Ex 1 Tab 15 the form was completed by a Centrelink Customer Services Operator and is signed by her and the deceased and dated 17 December 1997.

¹⁹ Ex 1 Tab 17-19

²⁰ Ex 1 Tab 20

²¹ Ex 1 Tab 2



suspected homicide, as a result of police becoming aware of Mr Dragovich's use of the deceased's identity²².

(a) Chronology of Mr Dragovich's movements:

36. The suspected homicide investigation focussed on Mr Dragovich's movements because it was suspected he had assumed the deceased's identity in connection with the deceased's bank account.
37. The investigation focussed on the known or possible movements of the deceased and/or Mr Dragovich after 17 December 1997.
38. The police ascertained that on 20 December 1997, Mr Dragovich booked into the Port Hedland Backpackers and there was no corresponding booking for the deceased.
39. The records held by the Port Hedland Backpackers' owner show that Mr Dragovich stayed at the hotel from Saturday 20 December 1997 to Tuesday 23 December 1997.²³
40. The Port Hedland Backpackers' records do not indicate whether he was travelling alone or with another person or what room he rented or if he had a vehicle. Despite police investigations, no further information was able to be obtained from any other person who may have

²² Ex 1 Tab 6

²³ Ex 1 Tab 21 & 22



stayed at the Port Hedland Backpackers between 20 and 23 December 1997.

41. Between dates in December 1997 to January 1998 there is evidence that tends to suggest that Mr Dragovich booked into the Desert Inn Backpackers in Kununurra, using the deceased's identification.
42. The manager of the Desert Backpackers in Kununurra had a clear recollection of a person who booked in using the name "William French" and displaying that identification and she believed it was in the week following Christmas and before New Years' Eve.²⁴.
43. The individual initially told the Desert Inn Backpackers' manager that his name was "Peter"²⁵ but for the purposes of identification, he gave her a driver's license with the name "William French", which she wrote into her register in brackets next to the name "Peter". The individual told her he was from "Greece" and she wrote the word "Greece" in the margin of her register next to the name "Peter". The individual told her he had changed his name to "French" since coming to Australia, from Greece, and he gave the deceased's family home as his address, which she also wrote in her register²⁶. The manager only allowed "Peter" to stay one night due to her concerns about his identity, as demonstrated by his behaviour. She did not see him again.

²⁴ Ex 1 Tab 23 & 24

²⁵ Ex 1 Tab 47 "Peter" is a known alias of Mr Dragovich

²⁶ Ex 1 Tab 25



44. The manager described “Peter” as being about 40-45 years old, between 165-170cm, of stocky build with olive skin and straight black hair. She said he had an accent²⁷. Whilst the description does not match the deceased, it does not entirely correspond with the known characteristics of Mr Dragovich. No formal identification procedure was undertaken.
45. It is possible to speculate that Mr Dragovich booked into the Desert Inn Backpackers utilising the deceased’s identity but the evidence is not sufficiently comprehensive for me to reach a conclusion to that effect.
46. On 7 January 1998 Mr Dragovich attended at the Centrelink Office in Kununurra. An employee at the Neighbourhood House in Kununurra searched the Neighbourhood House Emergency Relief Records and located a Department of Social Security Client Referral Form and an accompanying Emergency Relief Form in the name of “Miro Dragovich” both dated 7 January 1998 and provided them to police²⁸.
47. The Referral Form describes Mr Dragovich as being of “no fixed address” and the record indicates he is seeking assistance with food. There is a note on the Emergency Relief Form to the effect that he is on his way to Darwin²⁹.

²⁷ Ex 1 Tab 23

²⁸ Ex 1 Tab 59

²⁹ Ex 1 Tab 59



48. Banking records disclose that between 6 and 8 January 1998, the bank accounts of both the deceased and Mr Dragovich were accessed in Kununurra.³⁰
49. Save for the use of his bank account and taking into account the dubious registration details at the Desert Inn Backpackers, there is no record of the deceased being in Kununurra. The presence of Mr Dragovich in Kununurra, however, is established from the use of his own bank account and his seeking of emergency relief.
50. A connection between the deceased and Mr Dragovich is illustrated by the fact that between December 1997 and March 1998 the bank accounts of both were accessed at the same locations, from Western Australia, the Northern Territory and then in New South Wales, on similar dates.³¹
51. The transactions from both accounts on similar dates occurred in the following locations:
 - i. Carnarvon, in mid December 1997
 - ii. Port Hedland, in late December 1997
 - iii. Kununurra, in early January 1998
 - iv. Darwin, in mid January 1998
 - v. Coogee, in late February 1998 and early March 1998.
52. Between 6 and 18 March 1998, neither account was accessed.

³⁰ Ex 1 Tab 50 & 51

³¹ Ex 1 Tabs 50 & 51



53. On 19 March 1998, Mr Dragovich left Australia³² and on this date, both accounts were accessed from Randwick in New South Wales.
54. Mr Dragovich returned to Australia on 3 November 1998,³³ and the deceased's account was next accessed between 6 and 9 November 1998, from Coogee, where Mr Dragovich was residing.
55. There is no record of the deceased leaving Australia over the relevant periods.³⁴
56. Over the relevant period the access to the deceased's own account occurs from locations in Western Australia, Northern Territory, Victoria and New South Wales, between December 1997 and November 1998.³⁵
57. The transactions on the deceased's account show a pattern of escalating withdrawals with the only relevant deposit being of his pension.
58. Between 6 and 9 November 1998 a total of \$2,400 is withdrawn from the deceased's account, which was practically all of the money in that account. The last access to the deceased's account was on 9 November 1998.
59. The transactions on Mr Dragovich's account on the other hand reflect both withdrawals and deposits with no particular pattern, save for the deposit of his pension.

³² Ex 1, Tab 52

³³ Ex 1, Tab 52

³⁴ Ex 1 Tab 52

³⁵ Ex 1 Tab 50



60. Of particular relevance is the absence of access to the deceased's bank account whilst Mr Dragovich was out of the country with no corresponding departure of the deceased from the country³⁶ and the commencement of access to the deceased's account shortly after Mr Dragovich returned to the country.
61. A hypothesis is that by late December 1997, Mr Dragovich had assumed the deceased's identity and he was the one who accessed the deceased's bank account from Western Australia to the Northern Territory, to Victoria, through to New South Wales from that time until 9 November 1998.
62. However, the evidence of the access to both bank accounts, even taken together with the other surrounding circumstances outlined above, is not capable of supporting any definitive conclusion as to whether or not the deceased and Mr Dragovich were with each other along this trajectory of travel around Australia. It is not sufficient to establish whether or not each, individually, accessed their respective bank accounts. Nor is it capable of supporting a conclusion that Mr Dragovich assumed the deceased's identity from late December 1997.



³⁶ Ex 1 Tab 51

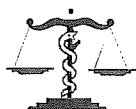
(b) Legal Proceedings Against Mr Dragovich

63. Whilst Mr Dragovich was overseas, in June 1998, Centrelink cancelled the deceased's payments at the request of the WA Police³⁷.
64. The deceased and Mr Dragovich had been in receipt of fortnightly Centrelink benefits. The deceased received a fortnightly Disability Support Pension paid to his Bankwest account between 11 December 1997 and 11 June 1998. Mr Dragovich had received a fortnightly Newstart Allowance since 1994, and a Disability Support Pension from 5 February 1998³⁸.
65. One week after Mr Dragovich returned to Australia, namely, on 10 November 1998, he became a person of interest in relation to the disappearance of the deceased by reason of his attendance at the Maroubra Centrelink office in New South Wales purporting to be the deceased³⁹.
66. On that date Mr Dragovich attended the Centrelink office, claiming he had not received his pension for some months. He was attended to by the Centrelink Administrative Service Officer. Mr Dragovich told the officer that his name was "William French" and he provided the deceased's date of birth. Centrelink's computer records showed that the deceased's pension had been suspended and in light of further developments the police were called.

³⁷ Ex 1 Police Report and Tab 53

³⁸ Ex 1 Tab 53

³⁹ Ex 1 Tab 27



67. Senior Constable Laverton of the New South Wales Missing Persons Unit attended at the Maroubra Centrelink Office on 10 November 1998 and together with a senior constable assisting he interviewed Mr Dragovich who gave his name as “William French” and provided Senior Constable Lamerton with a Bankwest card which was in the name of “William M French”⁴⁰.
68. Upon further questioning he gave the name “Miro Dragovich” to Senior Constable Lamerton and said he had bought the Bankwest card in Kings Cross for \$50 but refused to further participate in an interview.
69. Mr Dragovich was arrested on 10 November 1998 and later charged with offences concerning his possession of the Bankwest card and his attempt to obtain a financial benefit by deception. He was bailed to appear in Court on 11 December 1998, with reporting conditions⁴¹.
70. On 26 November 1998 Mr Dragovich changed his name by Deed Poll to “Peter Morgan”⁴² and then he left Australia on 1 December 1998 using a passport in the name of Morgan⁴³.
71. He failed to appear at Court on 11 December 1998 and a Warrant in the First Instance was issued for him⁴⁴.
72. On 3 December 1998 the police commenced an investigation into the deceased’s suspected homicide. It

⁴⁰ Ex 1 Tab 28 & 29

⁴¹ Ex 1 Tab 36

⁴² Ex 1 Tab 38

⁴³ Ex 1 Tab 38

⁴⁴ Ex 1 Tab 37



included an analysis of the evidence of Mr Dragovich's movements and the deceased's whereabouts⁴⁵.

73. On 15 February 2000 Mr Dragovich arrived at the Melbourne Airport from New Zealand using an Australian passport in the name of "Peter Morgan". Within his luggage officials found details of bank accounts in various names for accounts held in a number of countries, an EFTPOS terminal (which appeared to be a skimming device) and a book titled "How to Create a New Identity"⁴⁶.
74. One day after his arrival in Australia, on 16 February 2000, Mr Dragovich again changed his name by Deed Poll from "Morgan" to "Marco Dawson" and left Australia using an Australian passport in the name of "Dawson" on 8 March 2000⁴⁷.
75. Mr Dragovich was subsequently tried and convicted in New Zealand in relation to offences which he committed using various alias names and he was sentenced to a custodial term in New Zealand⁴⁸.
76. Attempts by Western Australian Police to interview Mr Dragovich in prison in New Zealand were unsuccessful.⁴⁹
77. Mr Dragovich was released from prison in New Zealand on 17 January 2002 and was immediately extradited to New South Wales to face Commonwealth charges in

⁴⁵ T.8

⁴⁶ Ex 1 Tab 39 and T.19

⁴⁷ T.20

⁴⁸ Ex 1 Tab 40 and T.20

⁴⁹ T.20



relation to his access of the deceased's bank account, the use of the deceased's identity and the making of a false statement to obtain a passport.⁵⁰

78. On 21 May 2002 Mr Dragovich was found guilty of a number of offences and sentenced to a term of imprisonment in Australia⁵¹.
79. On 2 April 2003 Mr Dragovich was released from prison in Australia. At that time there were outstanding legal proceedings against him concerning the proposed revocation of his Australian Citizenship.⁵²
80. Mr Dragovich died on 19 June 2003⁵³. At that time he bore the name "Marco Dawson" and he was 30 years old. The circumstances of his death do not have any bearing on the deceased's disappearance.
81. The assumption by Mr Dragovich of the deceased's identity when he attended at the Maroubra Centrelink Office on 10 November 1998, and his assertion to police that he had purchased the deceased's Bankwest card in Kings Cross for \$50 supports my conclusion that, in light of the other surrounding circumstances by that stage Mr Dragovich knew the deceased was dead.
82. However there is insufficient evidence for me to conclude that the deceased died as a result of any act or omission on the part of Mr Dragovich. Nor do I conclude that Mr Dragovich necessarily had knowledge

⁵⁰ T.21

⁵¹ T.21

⁵² T.21

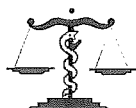
⁵³ Ex 1 Tab 46



of all of the circumstances attending the deceased's death.

FURTHER INVESTIGATION

83. In addition to their own investigation of the deceased's association with Mr Dragovich, Western Australia Police collaborated with New South Wales and Queensland Missing Persons Units informing them of the likelihood that the deceased was in the company of a male known as "Marco"⁵⁴. They also provided potential addresses they had identified through Centrelink documentation.
84. Police made extensive inquiries along the potential route that the deceased had taken based upon the transactions from his bank account.
85. Police conducted interviews with persons at numerous locations in regional Western Australia, such as road house operators, local community representatives, car hire businesses, caravan parks, emergency accommodation facilities, service providers and welfare groups in an effort to establish the movements of both the deceased and Mr Dragovich.
86. Police checks with the Health Insurance Commission indicated that the deceased had not received any medical treatment in Australia since November 1996.
87. Save for the automated Disability Support Pension deposits referred to above, there were no significant



⁵⁴ Ex 1 Tab 3 & 4

funds accumulated in the deceased's bank account up until November 1998.

88. There is no evidence from any witness as to whether the deceased left the Carnarvon area after he was last seen there on 17 December 1997.
89. As described above, when Mr Dragovich was arrested on 10 November 1998, he was in possession of a Bankwest card in the name of "William M French". However, a search of Mr Dragovich's listed address after he was arrested failed to locate any other property belonging to the deceased.
90. No other person was investigated in relation to the possible homicide of the deceased or any person who may have had knowledge of his disappearance. No witnesses as to the deceased's death have been identified.
91. There is no physical material which directly indicates that the deceased died at a particular location. A check of unidentified human remains was conducted by police and none were identified that could potentially be the deceased.⁵⁵
92. Police conducted a number of public awareness strategies in an effort to have members of the public come forward with information relating to the disappearance of the deceased. These included media reports in 1998, national coverage on Australia's Most Wanted program, radio and newspaper reports in Perth



⁵⁵ T.31

and regional Western Australia and in the Eastern States, the circulation of the Missing Persons Poster in New South Wales and the analysis of information received from Crime Stoppers. Outcomes were consistent with no established sightings of the deceased after Carnarvon on 17 December 1997.⁵⁶

93. Once Mr Dragovich was identified as a suspect further media reports including information and photographs of Mr Dragovich were released to the public on 19 August 2000 and this resulted in further information being obtained, which was analysed but to no avail⁵⁷.
94. On 28 March 2003 the Western Australian State Government offered a reward of \$100,000 for information into the disappearance of the deceased. The media release stated that “the Government may be prepared to consider recommending a pardon for any informant who was an accomplice to the person principally responsible for the deceased’s disappearance”⁵⁸. This was also to no avail.
95. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs has no records of the deceased leaving Australia since 1995⁵⁹.

⁵⁶ T.30

⁵⁷ Ex 1 Tab 62 and T.30

⁵⁸ Ex 1 Tab 61 and T.30

⁵⁹ Ex 1 Tab 52



CONCLUSION AS TO WHETHER THE DEATH HAS BEEN
ESTABLISHED

96. The evidence establishes beyond all reasonable doubt that the deceased died at a point between 17 December 1997 and 10 November 1998 whilst travelling around Australia. This conclusion is based on the following –
- a. There have been no confirmed sightings of the deceased since 17 December 1997;
 - b. The deceased has not opened an account with any major Australian bank and his original account remains inactive;
 - c. The deceased has not had any contact with family or friends since 17 December 1997, which is out of character for him;
 - d. The deceased has not accessed any medical facilities nor having had any police contact since December 1997;
 - e. The Immigration Department has no records of the deceased leaving Australia since 1995;
 - f. There is no record of the deceased contacting Centrelink since his payments were suspended in 1998;
 - g. The last access to the deceased's account was on 9 November 1998; and
 - h. The only reasonable inference to be drawn from the circumstances surrounding Mr Dragovich's attendance at the Maroubra Centrelink Office on 10 November 1998 to claim the deceased's pension are that Mr Dragovich knew the deceased was dead.



CONCLUSION AS TO HOW THE DEATH OCCURRED

97. The deceased, when last heard from, was in a satisfactory state of health, though he appeared to suffer from some emotional problems and exhibited depressive tendencies. Other than his own description to the FOCUS officer, there is no evidence that he was in treatment for manic depression. His previous suicide attempts had occurred some years prior to his disappearance.
98. I take into account the deceased's social and medical history, his drug taking, gambling, reckless behaviour, and statements last made to his mother and to his former partner, but find that there is no clear and cogent evidence from which I may conclude that the deceased by his own actions killed himself intentionally.
99. There is insufficient evidence to establish that the deceased died from the actions or omissions of another person, whether that person was Mr Dragovich or another.
100. The deceased's body has never been located and taking into account the vastness, remoteness and harshness of the terrain over which he may have travelled, it is not possible to conclude how he died. In these circumstances I cannot exclude death by natural causes or an accident.
101. I make an Open Finding as to how the death occurred.



CONCLUSION AS TO CAUSE OF DEATH

102. It follows from the Open Finding that I cannot be satisfied as to what caused the deceased's death.

103. Accordingly I make no finding as to cause of death.



**R V C FOGLIANI
STATE CORONER**

16 June 2014

