
JURISDICTION : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
ACT : CORONERS ACT 1996
CORONER : BRENDYN DEAN NELSON, CORONER
HEARD : 15 OCTOBER 2025
DELIVERED : 27 OCTOBER 2025
FILE NO/S : CORC 1379 of 2019
DECEASED : ANGEL, STEPHEN

Catchwords:

Nil

Legislation:

Coroners Act 1996 (WA)

Counsel Appearing:

Senior Constable C Robertson assisted the Coroner

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

Nil

Coroners Act 1996
(Section 26(1))

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

*I, Brendyn Dean Nelson, Coroner, having investigated the disappearance of **Stephen ANGEL** with an inquest held at Perth Coroners Court, Central Law Courts, Court 85, 501 Hay Street, Perth, on 15 October 2025 find that the death of **Stephen ANGEL** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was **Stephen ANGEL** and that death occurred **on or about 3 April 2019 at the waters off Cape Peron, Rockingham** from **an unknown cause** in the following circumstances:*

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1. On the morning of 3 April 2019, Stephen Angel was kayaking in the ocean off Cape Peron, Rockingham. Stephen was not wearing a life jacket and was using a downriver kayak.
2. At 10.58am, the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre was notified that a personal locator beacon (**PLB**) registered to Stephen had been activated at a location approximately 1.5 nautical miles off the coast of Cape Peron.
3. An extensive inter-agency search was mounted and continued for three days but was unsuccessful in locating Stephen. Stephen's abandoned kayak, paddle and PLB were found in different areas during the search.
4. Since his disappearance, extensive enquiries have been made by officers of the Missing Person Team within the WA Police's Homicide Squad, both domestically and internationally.
5. Those investigations included exploration of the possibility that Stephen had staged his disappearance to avoid pending criminal charges. No cogent evidence in support of that hypothesis has been discovered.
6. Based on the information provided by the WA Police in relation to Stephen's disappearance, the Acting State Coroner:
 - (a) determined that pursuant to s 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA), there was reasonable cause to suspect that Stephen had died and that his death was a reportable death; and
 - (b) directed that a coroner investigate by holding an inquest into the circumstances of Stephen's suspected death.¹
7. I held an inquest on 15 October 2025.
8. In addition to the documentary evidence contained in the coronial brief tendered at the beginning of the inquest, I received oral evidence from:
 - (a) Detective Senior Constable Wold, of the Missing Person Team; and
 - (b) Senior Constable Baker of Fremantle Water Police's Dive Squad.
9. Detective Senior Constable Wold prepared a report to the State Coroner outlining the full scope of WA Police's investigation and concluding that

¹ Direction of A/State Coroner Linton dated 21 July 2025.

Stephen had likely died on 3 April 2019 whilst kayaking, and that there are no suspicious circumstances in his disappearance.²

10. Senior Constable Baker prepared a witness statement which outlined his re-creation in late April 2019 of Stephen's kayaking on the day of his disappearance, including a capsize drill.
11. Senior Constable Baker gave evidence about the likely performance of Stephen's kayak in the prevailing conditions, based on his expertise in competitive kayaking and surf ski racing.
12. At the conclusion of the inquest, I indicated that I was satisfied beyond reasonable doubt on the evidence that Stephen is deceased.
13. I set out below my summary of the evidence and findings concerning the circumstances and investigation of Stephen's disappearance, and my conclusion, based on those findings, that Stephen's death has been established beyond reasonable doubt.
14. I also explain my conclusions that the cause of Stephen's death must remain unascertained and that I am compelled to make an open finding as to the manner of his death.

Summary of the evidence

Background

15. Stephen was born in the United Kingdom and relocated to Australia with his parents and siblings in 1962.³
16. Between 1979 and 1986, Stephen worked as a fisherman on a prawn trawler. More recently, he worked as a lab analyst for Alcoa, retiring after 30 years of employment.⁴
17. Stephen married in 1986 and had two children.⁵
18. In 2009, and following his separation from his wife, Stephen commenced a relationship with his new partner, Mary.⁶ Their relationship continued

² Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 14.

³ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [16].

⁴ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [43].

⁵ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 2.

⁶ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [2].

until May 2018, when they separated, before resuming their relationship in August 2018 although they continued to live separately.⁷

19. In 2012, Stephen changed his name from Stephen Gary Boocock.⁸
20. At the date of his disappearance, Stephen was living in Meelon, a small town in the Shire of Murray, and Mary was living in Warnbro.⁹
21. Stephen was an avid kayaker and a strong swimmer.¹⁰ He was known to go kayaking two to three times a week.¹¹ He would often take his K1 kayak into ocean waters around Shoalwater, even though it was not designed for that use.¹² He would not wear a life jacket.¹³
22. According to his best friend, Stephen would not be deterred from kayaking by bad weather conditions and would revel in those conditions.¹⁴
23. On 14 March 2018, Stephen sustained a serious eye injury by an assault. He suffered a ruptured eyeball and retinal detachment in his left eye, and lost vision in that eye completely.¹⁵ His left eye was mostly closed, and Mary described his left eye as a ‘black eyeball [with] no pupil’.¹⁶
24. On 11 December 2018, Stephen was charged with four child sex offences of a historical nature.¹⁷
25. On 13 December 2018, Stephen attended the Emergency Department of Rockingham General Hospital suffering symptoms of depression and experiencing suicidal ideations. He was assessed by a clinician, and prescribed medication with a plan for follow up care.¹⁸ During his assessment, Stephen disclosed that he attempted suicide on multiple occasions in April 2018.¹⁹

⁷ Exhibit 1, tab 4, pars [9]-[14].

⁸ Exhibit 1, tab 38.

⁹ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [13].

¹⁰ Exhibit 1, tab 6, para [9].

¹¹ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [61].

¹² Exhibit 1, tab 5, par [28].

¹³ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [66].

¹⁴ Exhibit 1, tab 6, par [10].

¹⁵ Exhibit 1, tab 34; Exhibit 1, tab 35.

¹⁶ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [22].

¹⁷ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 9.

¹⁸ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 2.

¹⁹ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 3; Exhibit 1, tab 33.

26. On 17 December 2018, Stephen spoke with staff at RGH, declining further follow up from their service and advising that he intended to access care through his general practitioner.²⁰
27. On 2 January 2019, Stephen received a substantial payment from an insurer in relation to his left eye injury.²¹
28. On 3 January 2019, almost the entirety of that payment was transferred by Stephen from his transaction account to his home loan account. Examination of the records of the home loan account indicate that those funds have not been redrawn.²²
29. At the date of his disappearance, Stephen was not the registered owner of any marine vessels.²³ Stephen had sold the last marine vessel registered in his name in February 2019.²⁴
30. On 19 March 2019, Stephen appeared in Court in relation to the four pending charges. The matters was adjourned to 30 April 2019.²⁵
31. On 24 March 2019, Stephen had lunch with his son, his best friend, and Mary. According to his son, Stephen appeared his usual self and nothing seemed out of the ordinary.²⁶
32. Prior to his disappearance, Stephen had also made a claim for a total and permanent disability benefit through his superannuation fund. That claim was allowed, and a letter was sent to Stephen on 25 March 2019 providing details of his account and how to obtain the benefit. The superannuation fund has confirmed, including in further correspondence following the inquest, that neither Stephen nor anyone on his behalf has made any attempt to access or withdraw those substantial funds either before or after Stephen's disappearance.²⁷
33. Stephen and his son corresponded by text message on 2 April 2019. They discussed Stephen looking after his son's dog when he was on an upcoming planned holiday later that month.²⁸

²⁰ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 3; Exhibit 1, tab 33.

²¹ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 9.

²² Exhibit 1, tab 3 p 10.

²³ Exhibit 1, tab 14, p 4.

²⁴ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 11.

²⁵ Exhibit 1, tab 3 p 9.

²⁶ Exhibit 1, tab 5, pars [9]-[10].

²⁷ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 10.

²⁸ Exhibit 1, tab 5, par [12]-[13].

Events on 3 April 2019

Prior to kayaking

34. Stephen stayed overnight with Mary at her home in Warnbro on 2 April 2019, and she left for work at about 7.30am on 3 April 2019.²⁹
35. Before she left, Stephen told Mary that he planned to go for a bike ride or kayaking that day.³⁰
36. He also said he planned to visit someone he would regularly read to on Wednesdays at an aged care facility in Port Kennedy.³¹ He had the book at Mary's home that he was planning to take to the aged care facility to read to his friend.³²
37. Mary did not observe anything unusual about Stephen that day.³³

Kayaking off Cape Peron

38. At about 10.15am, two friends were kayaking near Cape Peron. They described the weather conditions as being very windy, with winds blowing at about 26km/hr from the east-northeast.³⁴
39. They observed a man, from about 2.5 metres away, paddling out to sea in a kayak, alone.³⁵
40. Based on their detailed description,³⁶ and the fact that both kayakers saw a news item later in the day and independently identified Stephen's kayak as the one they had seen earlier that day,³⁷ I am satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the person they observed was Stephen.
41. If there were any residual doubt, one of the kayakers was shown a photo of Stephen by police on 4 April 2019 and he confirmed that Stephen was the person he had seen in the red kayak the previous day.³⁸
42. Therefore, I find that Stephen went kayaking on the morning of 3 April 2017 in his downriver kayak off the coast of Cape Peron.

²⁹ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [70].

³⁰ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [72].

³¹ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [73]; Exhibit 1, tab 4.1, par [21].

³² Exhibit 1, tab 4.1, par [23].

³³ Exhibit 1, tab 4.1, par [20].

³⁴ Exhibit 1, tab 7, par [6].

³⁵ Exhibit 1, tab 7, pars [8], [17].

³⁶ Exhibit 1, tab 7, pars [10]-[11].

³⁷ Exhibit 1, tab 7, par [24]; Exhibit 1, tab 8, par [32].

³⁸ Exhibit 1, tab 7, par [27].

43. Both kayakers that observed Stephen were experienced paddlers. They considered Stephen's behaviour to be odd insofar as he was not wearing a lifejacket and was in a kayak that was not suitable for ocean use.³⁹ One of the kayakers said that Stephen was obviously a good paddler, and that he appeared to be 'on a mission'.⁴⁰
44. The same kayaker stated that despite his experience he would never have gone out to sea on his own on that day, because of the wind, the choppiness of the waters, and the erratic swell.⁴¹
45. The other kayaker said that the swell and waves were such that he had to wait on occasion to time the waves correctly whilst paddling to avoid getting tipped over,⁴² and that his water bottle was knocked out of his kayak at one stage and the wind was so strong that it was swept out to sea quickly and unable to be retrieved.⁴³
46. The kayakers lost sight of Stephen when he was approximately 400m off shore, roughly south of Bird Island, and still heading out to sea in a westerly direction.⁴⁴
47. There is no evidence of anyone sighting Stephen after that time.
48. Based on the evidence, I find that Stephen was kayaking alone out into the open ocean, without wearing a life vest, in poor conditions.

Activation of the PLB

49. At 11.08am, about 45 minutes after Stephen was seen by the other kayakers, WA Police received a report from the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) of the PLB registered to Stephen⁴⁵ being activated, with the activation occurring approximately 1.5 nautical miles off the coast of Cape Peron and lasting for three minutes.⁴⁶

Search

50. The three-day marine search and rescue operation involved local police units, the Emergency Operations Unit, divers from Water Police, WA

³⁹ Exhibit 1, tab 7, par [13]; Exhibit 1, tab 8, pars [21]-[22].

⁴⁰ Exhibit 1, tab 7, par [15].

⁴¹ Exhibit 1, tab 7, par [18].

⁴² Exhibit 1, tab 8, par [8].

⁴³ Exhibit 1, tab 8, pars [9]-[10].

⁴⁴ Exhibit 1, tab 7, pars [21], [28] and the attached marked map.

⁴⁵ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 3.

⁴⁶ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 3; exhibit 1, tab 22.

Police Airwing, Mounted Police, JRCC air units, Volunteer Marine Rescue vessels and the Challenger Search and Rescue jet.⁴⁷

51. The sea and weather conditions deteriorated during the search.⁴⁸
52. At 12.04pm on 3 April 2019, JRCC reported locating an abandoned kayak within the location of the PLB.⁴⁹
53. At 1.23pm, Stephen's utility was located parked at a shack in Peron owned by Stephens's best friend.⁵⁰ According to his best friend, Stephen would store his kayak under the shack such that Stephen could come and go as he pleased.⁵¹
54. On that basis, I find that Stephen drove his utility to his best friend's shack in Cape Peron on the morning of 3 April 2019 and retrieved his kayak from beneath the shack as he ordinarily would.
55. At about 1.30pm, a kayak paddle was located washed up on the shore in Shoalwater.⁵²
56. At about 7.39pm, JRCC received notice of a second activation of Stephen's PLB. Vessels attended the area at 9.38pm and located the PLB floating on the water's surface about half a nautical mile from the site the PLB had been activated originally.⁵³
57. A dive conducted at the location of the PLB during the search was 18 metres in depth,⁵⁴ giving some indication of the ocean depth in the area of Stephen's disappearance.
58. When Mary returned home on 4 April 2019 after work, Stephen's wallet and phone were on the ledge near the front door at her home, where Stephen had put them in the morning.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 3; Exhibit 1, tab 21.

⁴⁸ Exhibit 1, tab 21.

⁴⁹ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 3; exhibit 1, tab 22.

⁵⁰ Exhibit 1, tab 14, p 3; Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [62].

⁵¹ Exhibit 1, tab 6, par [23].

⁵² Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 3; exhibit 1, tab 3, p 24.

⁵³ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 3; exhibit 1, tab 21.

⁵⁴ Ts 18.

⁵⁵ Exhibit 1, tab 4.1, pars [23]-[24]

Investigation

59. On 4 April 2019, Mary attended the Rockingham Police Station and formally reported Stephen as missing.⁵⁶
60. Stephen's home address was searched on 9 April 2019. Both his current passport (in the name of Stephen Angel) and one expired passport (in his former name) were located and seized,⁵⁷ and his phone, iPad, laptop and hard drive were seized, with their contents downloaded and reviewed.⁵⁸
61. On 12 April 2019, the missing person investigation was allocated to the Missing Person Team in the WA Police Homicide Squad.⁵⁹
62. Police have performed various proof of life checks over time, none of which have produced any evidence suggesting that Stephen is alive.⁶⁰
63. In April 2019, police obtained records for bank accounts known to be operated by Stephen. Records were obtained again in October 2019 and most recently in February 2025. The records provide no evidence of Stephen having accessed the accounts since his disappearance.⁶¹
64. The records also indicate that Stephen was not transferring or withdrawing large sums of money prior to his disappearance.⁶²
65. Investigating police liaised with AUSTRAC and confirmed that there is no evidence that Stephen has been transferred funds.⁶³
66. Examination of mobile phone records and social media accounts did not provide any evidence of any activity by Stephen after his disappearance.⁶⁴
67. Inquiries were conducted with each State and territory, and the Australian Border Force confirmed that their records indicated that Stephen remained within Australian borders.⁶⁵

⁵⁶ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 3.

⁵⁷ Exhibit 1, tab 18.

⁵⁸ Exhibit 1, tab 14, p 4.

⁵⁹ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 4.

⁶⁰ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 11; ts 23-24.

⁶¹ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 9; Exhibit 1, tab 31.

⁶² Exhibit 1, tab 3 p 10; Exhibit 1, tab 32.

⁶³ Exhibit 1, tab 3 p 10; exhibit 1, tab 17, p 1.

⁶⁴ Exhibit 1, tab 3, pp 10-11.

⁶⁵ Exhibit 1, tab 14, p 3; Exhibit 1, tab 39.

How could the PLB have been activated and de-activated?

68. The PLB used by Stephen and retrieved during the search is depicted in the evidence contained in the brief. It has a red button marked 'Activate'.⁶⁶
69. According to its instruction manual, the PLB can only be activated after sliding a protective cover downwards to access the red button.⁶⁷
70. According to the manufacturer, the protective cover exists including to guard against inadvertent activation.⁶⁸
71. The protective cover is not depicted in the photographs of the PLB after its retrieval.⁶⁹
72. There is no evidence of whether the protective cover was on the PLB when Stephen went kayaking on 3 April.
73. In the absence of any evidence of Stephen having activated the PLB before, I infer that the protective cover was on the PLB on 3 April. On that basis I infer that someone, almost certainly Stephen, removed the guard before activating the PLB on 3 April 2019.
74. The PLB, once activated, causes the transmission of very short, digitally coded signals to any nearby satellites to indicate distress.⁷⁰
75. The PLB continues to transmit the last known valid GPS location for up to 4 hours, after which the position data is omitted from transmissions.⁷¹
76. To reach the satellites, the PLB required a relatively unobstructed view of the sky. A submerged PLB, or one with an antenna which is blocked in some way, is unlikely to have been received by satellites.⁷²
77. This is because the PLB emits radio signals at frequencies which are attenuated (effectively, blocked) by water and immersion of even part of the antenna at the same time as any part of the body of the PLB.⁷³

⁶⁶ Exhibit 1, tab 27.

⁶⁷ Exhibit 1, tab 28.

⁶⁸ Exhibit 1, tab 30.

⁶⁹ Exhibit 1, tab 27; Exhibit 1, tab 29.

⁷⁰ Exhibit 1, tab 26.

⁷¹ Exhibit 1, tab 30.

⁷² Exhibit 1, tab 26.

⁷³ Exhibit 1, tab 30.

78. The initial activation lasted for 3 minutes. It is clear on the evidence that the activate button does not need to remain depressed to continue remaining activated.⁷⁴
79. On that basis, I find that after the protective cover was removed and the activated button was pressed, the PLB must have remained above the surface of the water for at least 3 minutes.
80. The evidence demonstrates that the PLB could be deactivated by pressing the blue button marked 'Test'.⁷⁵ However, as identified above, any signal may also have been interrupted after 3 minutes if the PLB became submerged or was floating on the water surface but with the antenna partially submerged, causing the signal to become attenuated.
81. There is also a possibility that the PLB could be deactivated if it was submerged in the ocean below 5 metres.⁷⁶
82. Given the fact that the initial activation lasted 3 minutes, and the PLB activated again later in the day, I find it improbable that any person, including Stephen, manually deactivated the PLB, or that the PLB deactivated as the result of deep submersion before potentially reactivating due to water pressure.
83. I am satisfied, based on the evidence, that:
 - (a) Stephen activated the PLB on 3 April 2019 at 11.08am;
 - (b) that the PLB remained active for 3 minutes before the signal was interrupted by the PLB becoming submerged or the antenna becoming partially submerged; and
 - (c) that the further detections that followed were the result of the antenna of the PLB being above the water level at the precise moment during the transmission cycle.
84. These findings are consistent with the information provided by the manufacturer of the PLB to investigating police.

Reported sightings

85. Stephen's disappearance has been the subject of significant media attention, including detailed newspaper articles in August and

⁷⁴ Exhibit 1, tab 28.

⁷⁵ Exhibit 1, tab 28.

⁷⁶ Exhibit 1, tab 29.

September 2019.⁷⁷ He has been featured in WA Police media releases and has been included in missing person registers.⁷⁸

86. All reported sightings of Stephen were investigated by police and were negated, determined to be highly unlikely to be Stephen, or undetermined due to a lack of information or lines of further enquiry.⁷⁹
87. One possible sighting of Stephen requires detailed consideration in the context of the theory that he may have fled overseas, including because WA Police's attempts to pursue further lines of inquiry to either confirm or negate the sighting were unsuccessful.
88. On 23 January 2023, a member of the public provided information to Crimestoppers online, stating that on 31 December 2022 they had been approached by a male who looked like Stephen at a bar in Sanur on the island of Bali, Indonesia. He was described as a thin, clean shaven, man with short mousy coloured hair, in his mid to late sixties. According to the person making the report, the male said that he used to live in Rockingham about 5 years ago, and that he was living on a nearby island.⁸⁰
89. When contacted by investigating police, the person making the report said that the man that they had encountered approached her and husband at about 11pm outside the front of a bar in Sanur and started to talk to them. She described the man as being Caucasian with an Australian accent. She described him as, amongst others, having a medium build and seeming introverted. She said he was not wearing any glasses and 'may have had a wobbly eye'. She said that the area was well lit, and she was sitting about half a metre away from the man.⁸¹
90. Investigating police sought to confirm or negate the potential sighting, including by making inquiries with the owners of the venue in question.
91. There was no CCTV footage available from the venue or in the vicinity, and staff of the venue confirmed to members of the Federal Police based in Indonesia that there were no media or public relations staff taking photos on the night of the potential sighting that could be examined.⁸²
92. Based on the evidence and information provided, I find that the person encountered by the person making the report to Crimestoppers was not

⁷⁷ Exhibit 1, tabs 43-44.

⁷⁸ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 12.

⁷⁹ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 11.

⁸⁰ Exhibit 1, tab 23, p 28 of 92.

⁸¹ Exhibit 1, tab 23, p 25 of 92.

⁸² Exhibit 1, tab 18.

Stephen. My finding is based on the following (in addition to the evidence that I have already summarised above, which supports the conclusion that Stephen died at the time of his disappearance on 3 April 2019):

- (a) the physical features of the man, as described by the person making the report, are not particularly peculiar or distinguishing;
- (b) Stephen did not live in or near Rockingham in 2018 or 2019;
- (c) the person making the report stated that the person ‘may have had a wobbly eye’,⁸³ in circumstances where the evidence indicates that the appearance of Stephen’s left eye was remarkable at the time of his disappearance and would have been readily noticeable by a person encountering him in proximity in a well-lit area; and
- (d) it is inherently unlikely that had Stephen fled Australia, he would voluntarily approach strangers in an area like Bali – known to be well populated by Australian tourists – and refer to his having lived in the region from which he had disappeared.

93. Having excluded the potential sighting on 31 December 2022, I find that there has been no actual, confirmed sighting of Stephen by any person since his disappearance on 3 April 2019.

Re-creation on 25 April 2019

94. As identified above, Senior Constable Baker of the Fremantle Water Police conducted a recreation of Stephen’s kayaking on 3 April to assist in determining the cause of Stephen’s disappearance.
95. I am satisfied based on his written and oral evidence that Senior Constable Baker has the requisite expertise and experience in kayaking, including at a competitive level,⁸⁴ to give opinion evidence on matters including the seaworthiness of Stephen’s kayak and the risks of kayaking in the prevailing weather conditions.

⁸³ I also infer, based on the contents of the incident report and without any criticism intended, that this information was given in response to a question by the officer, rather than being volunteered. I infer that had the person making the report noticed something unusual or remarkable about the man’s eye, it would have featured in their initial report to Crimestoppers.

⁸⁴ Ts 7.

96. Senior Constable Baker examined Stephen's kayak,⁸⁵ and confirmed that it is a downriver kayak designed for flat water,⁸⁶ in reasonable condition.⁸⁷
97. According to Senior Constable Baker, the kayak is not suitable for paddling in the ocean,⁸⁸ including because the lack of bow flare means that the kayak would dive into waves, and the low sides of the cockpit would cause water to spill into the kayak with no ability to drain it out.⁸⁹
98. Senior Constable Baker conducted the recreation at the site of the first activation of the PLB.⁹⁰ At the inquest Senior Constable Baker agreed that the conditions were likely worse on the morning of 3 April 2019.⁹¹
99. The kayak was unstable and required a high degree of concentration to balance at rest during the recreation.⁹² During the capsize drill, the kayak quickly filled with water, and the water could not be removed once the kayak was righted. Senior Constable Baker found it very difficult to climb back on top of the righted kayak, which was one third full of water and very unstable.⁹³ He performed his capsize drill after only 5 minutes of paddling, in circumstances where Stephen may have been paddling for close to an hour before the PLB was activated.⁹⁴
100. Senior Constable Baker's evidence was that because of the design of the kayak and the lack of stability, a person paddling the kayak would be exerting a lot more energy and fatiguing at a faster rate.⁹⁵
101. In addition, Senior Constable Baker opined that if someone lost their paddle in the conditions on 3 April 2019, and therefore their ability to brace themselves, they would almost inevitably capsize.⁹⁶ Due to the design of the kayak, there was no ability for Stephen to attach himself to the kayak, or to attach his paddle to the kayak.⁹⁷

⁸⁵ Ts 17.

⁸⁶ Ts 11.

⁸⁷ Exhibit 1, tab 11, pars [5]-[6]; ts 17.

⁸⁸ Exhibit 1, tab 11, par [8].

⁸⁹ Exhibit 1, tab 11, par [9]; ts 10-11.

⁹⁰ Exhibit 1, tab 11, pars [12]-[13].

⁹¹ Ts 9-10.

⁹² Exhibit 1, tab 11, par [17].

⁹³ Exhibit 1, tab 11, pars [21]-[22].

⁹⁴ Ts 15.

⁹⁵ Ts 13.

⁹⁶ Ts 13-14.

⁹⁷ Ts 14.

Has Stephen's death been established beyond all reasonable doubt?

102. At the inquest, Senior Constable Wold expressed her belief that Stephen was deceased.⁹⁸ I am, of course, not bound by the view of the investigating police and must form my own opinion as to whether Stephen's death has been established to the requisite standard, being the highest known to law.
103. Although his body has not been found, I am satisfied beyond all reasonable doubt that Mr Angel died sometime shortly after the activation of his PLB at about 11am on 3 April 2019. Put another way, I do not consider that there is any reasonable hypothesis other than that Stephen is deceased, including where no evidence identified during the police investigation indicates his disappearance was staged.⁹⁹
104. I am satisfied, including from the incident summary,¹⁰⁰ that the marine search was extensive and offered the best chance of locating Stephen had he still been on the water's surface after the PLB was activated.¹⁰¹
105. I am satisfied, including based on the thorough documented plan,¹⁰² that the investigation into Stephen's disappearance – including the prospect of him staging his own disappearance – was well-reasoned and exhaustive.
106. I am satisfied that although there was an obvious motive for Stephen to stage his own disappearance to avoid possible criminal conviction, there is no evidence to suggest that Stephen planned or executed such a strategy, or that he had the resources to be able to do so. It is also evident that Stephen intended to defend the charges against him.¹⁰³
107. Searches of the devices seized from Stephen's home showed no signs of any searches or planning to attempt to flee Australia, but rather the performance of ordinary day-to-day tasks.¹⁰⁴ I also accept Detective Senior Constable Wold's evidence that any attempt to stage a disappearance to fake one's own death and flee overseas would require resources and access to a highly specialised and likely criminal network, and that no such connections have been identified.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Ts 32.

⁹⁹ Ts 34.

¹⁰⁰ Exhibit 1, tab 24.

¹⁰¹ Exhibit 1, tab 3 p 12.

¹⁰² Exhibit 1, tab 14.

¹⁰³ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [36]-[37].

¹⁰⁴ Ts 23.

¹⁰⁵ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 13; ts 22.

108. I also find it entirely improbable that anyone wishing to evade authorities and flee internationally by sea, and remain overseas undetected would:
- (a) activate a PLB before doing so, given the real prospect of an immediate and urgent response to a precise location;¹⁰⁶ or
 - (b) expend almost the entirety of a significant monetary payment they had received shortly beforehand on their mortgage,¹⁰⁷ and forgo the possibility of access to another significant payment soon.¹⁰⁸
109. Since his disappearance, there have been no confirmed sightings of Stephen, no known instances of his having contacted anyone including any of his loved ones, and no proof of life.¹⁰⁹
110. The evidence demonstrates that WA Police have carefully considered and excluded every possible reported sighting.¹¹⁰ Further, Detective Senior Constable Wold confirmed that there was no pattern or commonality between any of the possible sightings that could provide corroboration.¹¹¹ Having examined the results of the investigation, I share that view.
111. I also find it inherently unlikely that Stephen would seek to flee the country if the result were the cessation of contact with Mary, his children or his father who he was aware had recently been diagnosed with stomach cancer¹¹² and who he was desperate to visit.¹¹³
112. I accept that it would have been out of character for Stephen not to attempt to contact his family or his best friend, including had he staged his own disappearance.¹¹⁴ All of those people were aware of the charges against him, and most were assisting him in his defence of those charges. It is inherently unlikely that he would cut all contact with those loved ones.
113. Conversely, it may be readily found, and I do find, based on the evidence of the people who observed Stephen kayaking on 3 April 2019 and the evidence of Senior Constable Baker, that for unknown reasons Stephen kayaked into open ocean waters in a kayak that was not suitable for that purpose, and in entirely unfavourable conditions.

¹⁰⁶ Ts 21-22.

¹⁰⁷ Ts 24.

¹⁰⁸ Ts 25.

¹⁰⁹ Exhibit 1, tab 3, p 12.

¹¹⁰ Exhibit 1, tab 25.

¹¹¹ Ts 26.

¹¹² Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [19].

¹¹³ Exhibit 1, tab 6, par [33].

¹¹⁴ Exhibit 1, tab 6, par [31].

114. I am satisfied that at some point in time an incident has occurred which has prompted Stephen to activate the PLB, after which he has succumbed and died, and that his body has submerged in deep ocean waters and was not able to be located during the marine search. The fact that his body has not been discovered since does not exclude this outcome.¹¹⁵

How did Stephen's death occur?

115. Having found beyond reasonable doubt that Stephen has died, I am required to determine, if possible, the cause and manner of his death.
116. Where Stephen's body has never been found, the cause of his death must remain unascertained.
117. I am also compelled to make an open finding as to the manner of his death.
118. There is no evidence that Stephen's kayak was damaged,¹¹⁶ or that there was any other person kayaking with Stephen. On that basis, I am prepared to exclude the involvement of any third party in his death.
119. I also exclude the possibility that Stephen's death was the result of an attack by any marine life, given he was able to remove the protective guard and activate the PLB. It is improbable he would have been able to do this had he been the victim of a sudden attack by a shark, for example.
120. I cannot exclude the possibility that Stephen died from natural causes, such as a sudden heart attack. In that scenario, it is possible that Stephen may have been able to activate the PLB, before falling from the vessel.
121. I also cannot exclude the possibility that Stephen died after an accidental capsizing of his kayak. I accept the evidence that Stephen is a strong swimmer, but I cannot exclude the possibility that he suffered an accidental capsizing, and his energy was depleted by attempts to right the kayak which I consider, based on Senior Constable Baker's evidence, would have been extremely difficult even in superior conditions.
122. I also cannot exclude the possibility that Stephen deliberately sought to place himself in a dangerous position by kayaking in unsafe conditions in a vessel that was unsuitable, before eventually capsizing.

¹¹⁵ Ts 20.

¹¹⁶ Exhibit 1, tab 41.

123. His reasons for doing so are unknown, but it be inferred from the evidence that Stephen may have done so simply because he revelled in kayaking in dangerous conditions.
124. I also cannot exclude, given Stephen had experienced depression and suicidal ideations and attempted to self-harm on multiple occasions earlier in 2019, that he deliberately sought to place himself in a dangerous position with a fixed intention to end his own life. An act of self-harm appears less likely given the evidence of Stephen's positivity prior to his disappearance,¹¹⁷ future planning,¹¹⁸ and the fact that Stephen activated the PLB which would be unlikely had he formed a fixed intention to die. However, it is well known that suicide is extremely unpredictable, and suicidality can fluctuate, sometimes within relatively small-time frames.
125. Where I cannot exclude any of the verdicts of natural causes, accident, misadventure or suicide, I must make an open finding as to the manner of Stephen's death.
126. I express my condolences to Stephen's loved ones, and hope that these findings assist them, as far as they reasonably can, to understand the events leading to Stephen's death.

BD Nelson

Coroner

21 October 2025

¹¹⁷ Exhibit 1, tab 4, par [28]; Exhibit 1, tab 5, par [25].

¹¹⁸ Exhibit 1, tab 4, pars [28]-[29].