
JURISDICTION : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
ACT : CORONERS ACT 1996
CORONER : SARAH TYLER, CORONER
HEARD : 15 JUNE 2026
DELIVERED : 10 AUGUST 2026
FILE NO/S : CORC 4054 of 2024
DECEASED : COLOMBERA, PHILLIP DOMONIC

Catchwords:

Nil

Legislation:

Nil

Counsel Appearing:

Senior Constable C Robertson appeared to assist the coroner.

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

Nil

*Coroners Act 1996
(Section 26(1))*

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

*I, Sarah Tyler, Coroner, having investigated the disappearance of **Phillip Domonic COLOMBERA** with an inquest held at **Perth Coroner's Court, Court 85, CLC Building, 501 Hay Street, Perth**, on 15 June 2026, find that the death of **Phillip Domonic COLOMBERA** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was **Phillip Domonic COLOMBERA** and that death occurred **shortly after 29 November 1993** in the vicinity of Great Northern Highway, Newman, Western Australia, in the following circumstances:*

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INTRODUCTION

1. Phillip Domonic Colombera (Phillip) was 40 years old when he went missing on 29 November 1993. If he were alive in 2026, he would be turning 73 years old.
2. In November 1993, Phillip hired a car in Perth, apparently intending to travel on to the Pilbara region to meet an associate. On 29 November 1993 he arrived at the Capricorn Roadhouse in Newman at about 6.30 pm. He purchased some food and a torch, before continuing his journey.
3. He then continued along the Great Northern Highway, travelling a further 212 kilometres to an area just north of the Auski Roadhouse, approximately 1,400 kilometres north of Perth.
4. On 2 December 1993, a Main Roads employee located Phillip's hire car abandoned on an isolated bush track in this area. Phillip was nowhere to be found.
5. Despite an extensive multi-agency land and air search, Phillip has never been found.
6. Phillip has not made any confirmed contact with any of his family, friends, or associates from the time of his disappearance. A recent review by the Western Australia Police Force, including proof of life checks, has found no evidence that Phillip is alive.
7. On the basis of information provided by the Western Australia Police Force in relation to Phillip's disappearance, Acting State Coroner Linton determined that pursuant to section 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA), there was reasonable cause to suspect that Phillip had died, and that his death was a reportable death. The Acting State Coroner made a direction on 9 October 2025 that a coroner hold an inquest to investigate the circumstances of Phillip's suspected death.

8. I held an inquest into Phillip's suspected death in Perth on 15 June 2026. The inquest involved the tendering of the documentary evidence compiled during the Western Australia Police Force investigation into Phillip's disappearance, supplemented by oral evidence from Detective Senior Sergeant Brian Bancilhon from the Special Crime Squad, Homicide Unit within the Western Australia Police Force.

BACKGROUND

9. Phillip was born in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia on 6 July 1953.
10. He was christened Catholic, and attended church and Sunday School with his mother and his older sister every Sunday until he was a teenager.
11. He was born to his mother, Joy May Peart (formerly Joyce May Colombera), and his father Ferdinando Colombera. Phillip's father sadly died when he was 3 years old.
12. After Phillip's father passed away, his mother commenced a new relationship with a man named Evan Evans. Mr Evans was a horse trainer in Kalgoorlie, and there were always horses in the back yard of the family home.
13. Phillip and Mr Evans had a good relationship, and Phillip learned to ride horses, and assisted Mr Evans with track work for his racehorses from an early age.
14. Phillip attended the Eastern Goldfields Senior High School until Year 10, when he left school to become an apprentice jockey for a Perth trainer, John Davidson.
15. Phillip worked mostly in the racing industry as a jockey and assistant trainer from that time. He would also occasionally do work for a horse trainer, Stephen Wolfe, as a cook during shearing seasons.

16. When Phillip was about 30 years old, he was the driver of a car that was involved in a fatal collision. He had been travelling from Perth to Kalgoorlie for a racing carnival with two other passengers. His car collided head on with another vehicle in Southern Cross.
17. One of his passengers, a fellow jockey, died in the collision. Phillip sustained a broken leg, which caused some lifelong mobility issues, hindering Phillip's ability to run and walk long distances.
18. In about 1982, Phillip commenced a relationship with a woman named Vivian Hopkins. They had a son together, but the relationship ended shortly after their son's birth. Phillip raised their son for the first year of his son's life, until Ms Hopkins relocated to Melbourne with their son.
19. Phillip had commenced a new relationship after his separation from Ms Hopkins, and married in 1985, however that relationship subsequently came to an end.
20. Phillip's last known relationship was with Carol Barnett. That relationship came to an end in approximately 1990, about three years before Phillip disappeared.
21. All of the available evidence before me suggests that Phillip lived a relatively simple life. He had a loving relationship with his mother and sister, and visited them twice a year in Mandurah, where they both lived.
22. Phillip's circle of friends were mostly from the racing industry, where he was described as well liked, happy, and a joker with no enemies.
23. Phillip would drink scotch and water every day, and drink Emu Export with his friends. He reportedly smoked cannabis, but ceased use around the time of horse races due to mandatory drug testing in the racing industry. He was relatively secretive about other drug use, but his friends suspected he would use amphetamines.
24. In the time before his disappearance, Phillip had no known legitimate source of income. He seemed to live a simple life, and appeared to require little money.

25. It appeared to police investigators that Phillip's main source of income related to drug dealing, primarily in relation to cannabis. Phillip had no criminal convictions of that nature, but evidence obtained and information provided by various associates in the course of the investigation into Phillip's disappearance supported that conclusion.

EVENTS LEADING TO PHILLIP'S DISAPPEARANCE

26. On 25 November 1993, Phillip hired a yellow Holden Barina hatchback from Road Runner Car Rentals in Rivervale. The vehicle was due to be returned on 2 December 1993.
27. Phillip told Tony Hall, a worker at Road Runner Car Rentals, that he was going to head north in the hire car. Phillip's sister explained that Phillip had hired a car because his car was being repaired, and the car provided by the mechanic for Phillip's use while work was being done on his car had also broken down.
28. According to Phillip's sister, on Sunday, 28 November 1993, Phillip went to Pingrup, a small town in the Great Southern region of Western Australia, where he would go to play cricket. Phillip's sister believes that Phillip played cricket that afternoon.
29. It appears that Phillip may have then travelled out to Kalgoorlie, before driving north, travelling over 1,000 kilometres. On 29 November 1993, Phillip stopped at the Capricorn Roadhouse near Newman at about 6.30 pm, purchasing some food and a new torch, before travelling on. This is the last confirmed occasion Phillip was known to be alive.
30. Phillip appears to have also stopped at the Munjina (Auski) Roadhouse, near Wittenoom on 29 November 1993, as a key to the showers of the Auski Roadhouse was found in Phillip's car. Given Phillip would have had to travel a distance of about 200 kilometres to arrive at the Auski Roadhouse, it is likely he was there at around 8.30 pm. It therefore seems likely that Phillip stopped to use the Auski Roadhouse showers that evening, before continuing his journey.

31. Phillip had plans to stay with a friend from the racing industry, Peter Nelson, at his house approximately 300 kilometres north of the Auski Roadhouse. Phillip had called Mr Nelson in the afternoon or evening on 29 November 1993, and said he would be at Mr Nelson's house that night, but he never arrived.

MISSING PERSON REPORT

32. At 1.45 pm on 2 December 1993, Colin Taylor, who was then employed as a Road Maintenance Manager, Pilbara Region by Main Roads Western Australia, was driving along the Great Northern Highway approximately six kilometres north of the Auski Roadhouse near Wittenoom.
33. Mr Taylor saw a yellow Holden Barina parked off the road on the left hand side of the highway. Mr Taylor estimated that the Barina was parked about 60 metres off the highway.
34. Mr Taylor pulled over to see whether the driver needed any assistance, and saw that the vehicle had a sticker advertising it to be owned by the Road Runner Car Rental service.
35. Mr Taylor did not find anyone with the vehicle. Mr Taylor saw that the vehicle was unlocked, with the keys inside, along with clothing and other personal effects, which he felt was unusual.
36. He noted down the vehicle details, including the registration number, and decided he would report the vehicle to the police. Mr Taylor drove on to South Hedland, and at about 4.20 pm, he reported the abandoned vehicle to Senior Constable Ray Brigg at the South Hedland Police Station.

THE LAND SEARCH FOR PHILLIP

37. Following Mr Taylor's report of the abandoned vehicle to Senior Constable Brigg, Sergeant Sorrell of the South Hedland Police Station took carriage of the initial investigation into the abandoned vehicle.

38. Sergeant Sorrell made telephone contact with the managers of the Auski Roadhouse, William and Janice McKenzie, and asked them to drive out to the area to see if they could find Phillip's vehicle. They had some difficulty finding the car, as it was parked down a side track used for deflecting water from the Great Northern Highway, but they eventually found the car.
39. Mr McKenzie saw that the car was open, with keys in the ignition. On the roof of the car, they found a key for the shower at the Auski Roadhouse. Mr McKenzie searched around the area, but found no trace of the driver of the car.
40. Sergeant Sorrell's enquires then established that Phillip had hired a car from Road Runner Car Rentals in Rivervale on 25 November 1993. The car was due to be returned the same day Phillip was reported missing, 2 December 1993.
41. Sergeant Sorrell was advised that Phillip would be travelling with his large black and white Dalmatian dog, Shadow, which was described as an animal that would rarely leave Phillip's side.
42. Sergeant Sorrell was able to confirm that the last sighting of Phillip was at the Capricorn Roadhouse at about 6.30 pm on 29 November 1993, when he purchased a torch and some food.
43. Based upon his enquiries, Sergeant Sorrell was concerned for Phillip's welfare, believing his life was in jeopardy as he had been missing in the extremely hot and harsh weather conditions in the area at that time of year for a number of days.
44. Sergeant Sorrell initiated a coordinated search to try to locate Phillip. The search was commenced at first light on 3 December 1993. In consultation with Superintendent Sims and the coordinator of the Tom Price State Emergency Services (SES) Group, Sergeant Sorrell arranged for a Police Aide, Roger Barker, who was an experienced Aboriginal tracker, and for SES volunteers, to meet to commence a land search at first light.

45. At 4.15 am, Sergeant Willis, Senior Constable Shellam, and Police Aide Barker travelled to the Auski Roadhouse to speak to Mr and Mrs McKenzie.
46. Mr McKenzie confirmed that Phillip's car had been difficult to locate the previous evening, and that they had driven past it on three occasions trying to find it. Mr and Mrs McKenzie confirmed that they had found a key for the male showers at the Auski Roadhouse on the roof of Phillip's car, which suggested to them that he had used the shower at the roadhouse at some point and not returned the key.
47. Mrs McKenzie advised that a large black and white Dalmatian dog had wandered into the Auski Roadhouse settlement in the morning of 2 December 1993.¹ It is clear that the Dalmatian was Shadow, Phillip's dog. The police officers attempted to catch Shadow in the hope that they could use him to lead them to Phillip, but it appears they were not able to catch the dog at the time.
48. Sergeant Willis, Senior Constable Shellam, and Police Aide Barker then travelled out to the abandoned car.
49. Their search of the car found the driver's seat positioned as far forward as possible, indicating the driver was a small statured person. Phillip was a jockey, with a slight build, standing 152 cm tall.
50. The car was fully operational, with adequate fuel. The keys to the vehicle, clothing items, and other personal items belonging to Phillip were inside the car.
51. Wrapping from a new torch was found inside the car, but the torch was nowhere to be found. The torch had been purchased at Capricorn Roadhouse at about 6.30 pm on 29 November 1993.

¹ In a statement provided on 9 June 2022 as part of the coronial investigation into Phillip's suspected death, Mr McKenzie recalled that he found the dog at the abandoned car and took it back to the Auski Roadhouse. This is inconsistent with contemporaneous records from 1993, including information provided by trackers involved in the search, based upon the direction of travel of paw prints located at the time. Accordingly, I consider Mr McKenzie's recollection so many years after the event is mistaken, and that the dog made its own way to the Auski Roadhouse on 2 December 1993 after Phillip disappeared.

52. The police found footprints next to the car, consistent with both Mr Taylor and the McKenzie's checking the vehicle.
53. The police also found three large bags of cannabis concealed in the legs of some jeans in the rear of the car, which weighed about 260 grams. A toiletries bag held \$1750 in notes. The toiletries bag also held two hypodermic syringes, later thought to not be for human use, and a white crystal like substance weighing approximately 50 grams.
54. Five small empty bags containing apparent amphetamine residue were found in a shirt pocket of a shirt also found in the car.
55. As a result, the police suspected that Phillip had travelled to the Pilbara area for the purpose of drug dealing.
56. A number of red and black AO Scotch and Cola cans were also found in the rear hatch of the car. This was a favoured drink of Phillip's, and appeared to belong to him.
57. At 6.45 am, SES searchers arrived at the abandoned car to begin the land search for Phillip.
58. A comprehensive land and air search for Phillip took place between 3 December 1993 and 11 December 1993. At the height of the search, more than 50 volunteers from across the Pilbara attended the area to help in the search for Phillip.
59. The ground search for Phillip covered approximately 50 square kilometres of bushland, covered in low mulga trees and spinifex scrub. The air search for Phillip covered a further 100 square kilometres in a grid search using various aircraft.
60. A significant number of resources were directed to the search for Phillip, including:
 - a. *Skilled trackers*. Police Aide Barker, a group of skilled trackers from the Youngaleena Aboriginal Community, and a subsequent second group of skilled trackers from Yandeyarra Aboriginal

Community were all involved in the search, following footprints and paw prints in an effort to locate Phillip.

- b. *SES and other community volunteers.* Volunteers attended from Karratha, Port Hedland, Newman, Tom Price and surrounding pastoral stations and communities in high numbers, assisting with the ground search for Phillip.
 - c. *Aircraft.* Various aircraft assisted in the search, including a Cessna 180 aircraft belonging to a nearby station owner, a Police Airwing aircraft, and a helicopter belonging to a separate station owner.
 - d. *Vehicles.* Various vehicles were used to conduct vehicle line searches, but the terrain was difficult, with car tyres getting staked and requiring repair. At one point, this included the use of two Army vehicles, that contributed to the search to assist in the difficult terrain.
 - e. *Motorbikes.* A nearby station owner volunteered the use of motorbikes to search the area, in light of the difficulties experienced by the search vehicles on the terrain.
 - f. *Dogs.* There was an attempt to use Shadow to trace Phillip's scent, which is described further below. A nearby station owner also volunteered the use of his station dogs for attempts at tracking if needed.
 - g. *Friends and Family.* Two of Phillip's friends, Mr Nelson and Michael Hopkinson, became aware of Phillip's disappearance and travelled to the area to assist in the search. Two of Phillip's cousins, Merv and Brian Kennedy, also travelled to the area to assist in the search.
61. On 3 December 1993, Police Aide Barker located footprints and dog paw prints approximately 100 metres west of the abandoned car. The footprints were tracks in a shoe size consistent with Phillip's small stature. The footprints went in circles, and Police Aide Barker expressed the opinion that the tracks showed the person to be lost.

62. Additional skilled trackers followed the tracks, which continued in circles, zig zagging constantly with the person appearing to frequently be taking off their shoes. After following the tracks for about seven kilometres in various directions, the skilled trackers found an AO Scotch and Cola can in the bush. The can was found about three kilometres from the abandoned car, if a direct route was followed, although the footprints indicated that a direct path was not taken, and the person may have been walking for more than seven kilometres at that point.
63. The AO Scotch and Cola can matched the batch number of the AO Scotch and Cola cans left in Phillip's car. As a result, I am satisfied that this AO Scotch and Cola can came from Phillip's car.
64. On 4 December 1993, the search resumed at 4.55 pm, in an effort to avoid the extreme heat of the day. Temperatures in the area were extremely high, and searchers were adversely affected by the heat.
65. During the search, tracks were followed from where the AO Scotch and Cola can had been found, which led to a small makeshift shelter about 500 metres away. The skilled trackers involved in the search believed that Phillip had built the makeshift shelter to try to rest with some protection from the extreme heat.
66. Unfortunately, the tracks disappeared not far from the makeshift shelter, without leading to Phillip's discovery.
67. In the meantime, as outlined above, two of Phillip's friends, Mr Nelson, and Michael Hopkinson, had arrived in the area to join the search for Phillip. It appears that Phillip's friends were able to assist in capturing Shadow, and on 6 December 1993, Shadow was brought out to the search location to try to use him to track down Phillip. Shadow was taken to the makeshift shelter in the hope that he would follow Phillip's scent and lead the searchers to him. However, Shadow became quickly fatigued in the heat, and the attempt was unsuccessful.
68. By 7 December 1993, the search for Phillip had scaled down. The investigating police officers obtained approval for a final major media campaign to encourage a group of volunteers to return to the area on any

available motorcycles and horses on 11 December 1993, for a final search effort.

69. Following extensive media coverage, including Police Media, talkback radio, and regional ABC and GWN television coverage, the call for volunteers to undertake a final search for Phillip was answered with a resounding response.
70. At 5.00 am on 11 December 1993, 52 volunteers attended the search area from areas including Tom Price, Paraburdoo, Newman and Port Headland. Volunteers attended with motorcycles and horses to aid in the search. Two Army vehicles were also provided to assist in the search, manned by a total of six Army officers. Volunteers from the SES previously involved in the search also returned to continue the search effort.
71. Sadly, despite an extensive and well organised full day search, no further trace of Phillip was found. By 5.40 pm on 11 December 1993, the land and air search for Phillip was formally brought to an end.

THE POLICE INVESTIGATION

72. Phillip's disappearance remained an open police investigation. The initial police investigation into Phillip's disappearance was undertaken by officers from the Tom Price Police Station, the South Hedland Criminal Investigation Branch (as it was then known), and the Missing Persons Bureau (as it was then known).
73. Detective Sergeant Bourke from the South Hedland Criminal Investigation Branch conducted investigations, and concluded that Phillip had been suspected of dealing illicit drugs in the Pilbara area for approximately eight months prior to his disappearance. Detective Sergeant Bourke found that Phillip would pre-arrange a meeting point with prospective clients, generally along the Great Northern Highway, where he would arrive early and hide money and drugs in the bush to minimise the risk of the money or drugs being stolen during the transaction.
74. Detective Sergeant Bourke's investigations established that Phillip had planned to meet with two clients, at 10.30 pm on 29 November 1993, and

at 12.30 am on 30 November 1993 at a location approximately 100 kilometres south of Port Hedland, but that he never arrived.

75. On the available evidence, it appears that Detective Sergeant Bourke concluded that Phillip had become disoriented and lost in bushland in the vicinity of the Great Northern Highway, resulting in his death. Detective Sergeant Bourke theorised that the reason Phillip was out in bushland in the evening of 29 November 1993 was for the purposes of hiding money or drugs, in anticipation of a drug deal.
76. On 28 December 1993, Sergeant Willis submitted a Missing Person Report, outlining the conclusions of the investigation into Phillip's disappearance.
77. On the available evidence, Sergeant Willis was satisfied that there was no sign of a struggle or any sign of a disturbance immediately next to Phillip's hire car. Sergeant Willis explained his theory as to Phillip's disappearance as follows:

It is my supposition that [Phillip] has gone to the point 6.1 km north of the Auski Roadhouse, parked his car and stashed his money and drugs in the nearby scrub. He has transacted a drug deal, and the client has left. [Phillip] has then walked back into the bush to retrieve his money and drugs which I believe he has done with the aid of the torch and at this time he has lost his direction and walked off into the scrub. The Great Northern Highway is normally not busy this time of year on a Monday night and this has not assisted the missing person to regain his direction. The lights of the Auski Roadhouse are not easily seen from within the sometimes thick mulga scrub.

It is also likely that [Phillip] was suffering from the effects of the amphetamines and cannabis, has consumed alcohol by way of the [AO Scotch and Cola] drink can and caused the effects of amphetamines to start to wear off. I believe he has then found a shaded area and then gone into a long deep sleep and perished in the extremely hot conditions.

78. Sergeant Willis concluded that:

[Phillip] has gone missing in scrub country west of the Great Northern Highway 6km north of the Auski Roadhouse. A thorough search of the area has not located him or revealed any indication as to his whereabouts, and

thus resulting in him being considered a missing person. There is nothing to enable me to form any other opinion.

79. I note that there is no definitive evidence available to establish that Phillip had in fact transacted a drug deal with a client before his disappearance. Subsequent police investigations concluded that Phillip did not meet anyone at the location from which he disappeared, but that he was supposed to meet someone at a location further on, at a later time.²
80. At that stage, while the police investigation into Phillip's disappearance remained an open investigation, the avenues for further investigation had effectively come to an end.
81. On 4 May 1994, a further media campaign regarding Phillip's disappearance was released and a call for anyone with information about Phillip's whereabouts to come forward was made, but this did not generate any actionable leads.
82. In 2017, as part of a Cold Case Homicide Squad review of unsolved cases, Detective Senior Sergeant Craig Stephen of the Cold Case Homicide Squad reviewed the police investigation into Phillip's disappearance, to consider whether there were any further lines of enquiry that may be actioned.
83. Detective Senior Sergeant Stephen's review established that there were three theories raised during the investigation into Phillip's disappearance:
 - a. Did Phillip stage his own disappearance?
 - b. Was Phillip murdered by a person or persons unknown?
 - c. Did Phillip become lost in the remote location and die from the extreme conditions?
84. At the conclusion of Detective Senior Sergeant Stephen's review, Detective Senior Sergeant Stephen found no evidence to support the theory that Phillip staged his own disappearance. The thorough land and air search found only one set of footprints (and one set of paw prints) which indicated the person was walking west, away from the road.

² Transcript, p 9.

85. No evidence was found to suggest that any person attended the area and picked Phillip up, nor was any evidence found to suggest that Phillip had contacted any of his family members, or friends, in the years since his disappearance.
86. Detective Senior Sergeant Stephen considered suggestions made to the police that Phillip may have been murdered by associates involved in the illicit drug trade.
87. Detective Senior Sergeant Stephen found no evidence to support the theory that Phillip was murdered. There was no evidence found at the scene that suggested Phillip had met with foul play.
88. Detective Senior Sergeant Stephen concluded his review as follows:

The main reason for [Phillip's] disappearance appears to be that for some unknown purpose he left his vehicle and started walking in a westerly direction through the bushland. Due to the extreme weather at the time, temperatures reaching 47 degrees, it would appear [Phillip] has perished. Due to the remoteness of the location and lack of evident footprints in the sand [Phillip's] body has not been located.

As a result of reviewing the file there appears to be no further lines of inquiry in relation to this matter.

89. In around 2022, Detective Senior Sergeant Brian Bancilhon of the Special Crime Squad within the Homicide Squad, was allocated the investigation into the circumstances of Phillip's disappearance, and suspected death. The purpose of Detective Senior Sergeant Bancilhon's investigation was to complete a further, thorough review, and to ascertain whether there were any further lines of inquiry that warranted investigation into the circumstances of Phillip's disappearance and suspected death.
90. As part of the investigation, police officers from the Special Crime Squad interviewed multiple witnesses in 2022, including those involved in the initial search for Phillip, a number of Phillip's friends and associates, and spoke with individuals who had been reported by members of the public as having drug connections with Phillip and possibly being involved in his disappearance.

91. Having completed a further, thorough investigation into the circumstances of Phillip's disappearance and suspected death, Detective Senior Sergeant Bancilhon prepared a report to the Coroner dated 5 January 2024, outlining the conclusions of that investigation.
92. Detective Senior Sergeant Bancilhon explained that while there was no direct evidence to confirm that Phillip was deceased, such as the discovery of his body, it was the opinion of the Special Crime Squad that Phillip was deceased for the following reasons:
 - a. An extensive land search conducted between 3 December 1993 and 11 December 1993 was conducted, without locating Phillip. Phillip has not been seen or heard from since.
 - b. There have been no confirmed sightings of Phillip since his disappearance.
 - c. As part of the police investigation into Phillip's disappearance, enquiries were made with a number of agencies and other institutions across Australia to see whether there was any record of contact with Phillip after he was last known to be alive, or whether there was any record which would otherwise suggest Phillip is still alive. Those enquiries, known as 'proof of life checks', have revealed no new records for Phillip after his disappearance in 1993 with the following agencies:

Western Australia Police Force

Electoral Roll

Centrelink

Medicare

Immigration

Proof of life enquiries with all other states and territories

Births Deaths and Marriages for all other states and territories

Banking institutions

These enquiries establish that Phillip has not had contact with any of the government agencies one would expect a person to make

contact with in their day-to-day life, since his disappearance in 1993.

- d. Phillip has had no contact with his family or friends since his disappearance in 1993, which was considered by investigators to be out of character for him.
 - e. There has been no forensic evidence identified in the course of the investigation that would establish Phillip's whereabouts. This includes a check of DNA profiles held in relation to currently known unidentified human remains, which did not identify any matches to Phillip's DNA.
93. Detective Senior Sergeant Bancilhon carefully considered the range of theories regarding Phillip's disappearance in the course of his investigation.
94. Detective Senior Sergeant Bancilhon's investigation established that Phillip was "*reasonably well liked and kept to himself*."³ He explained that "*it was pretty clear during the whole investigation that no one really had an axe to grind with Phillip*".⁴
95. At the conclusion of his investigations, Detective Senior Sergeant Bancilhon found no conclusive evidence to support the theory that Phillip either staged his own disappearance, or that he was murdered by a person or persons unknown.
96. Detective Senior Sergeant Bancilhon concluded that Phillip's death occurred on or about 29 November 1993 when he walked into bushland in the vicinity of Great Northern Highway, and became lost and disoriented before perishing in the extreme weather conditions.
97. As to why Phillip walked into bushland, Detective Senior Sergeant Bancilhon identified two theories:
- a. *Chasing his dog, Shadow*: Some of Phillip's associates explained that Phillip's dog Shadow would occasionally get car sick, and

³ Transcript, p 7.

⁴ Transcript, p 7.

would need to be let out of the car for breaks during longer journeys. It is possible that Phillip stopped to take a break, and his dog ran off from the car, causing Phillip to enter bushland at night to try to find him.

- b. *Concealing drugs or money*: Alternatively, other associates explained that Phillip would conceal drugs and money in bushland before meeting associates for drug dealing purposes, to ensure he was not the victim of a robbery. It is possible Phillip walked into bushland to conceal a portion of drugs or money, or to retrieve previously concealed drugs or money, becoming lost and disoriented during the night before perishing in the extreme weather conditions.

98. Detective Senior Sergeant Bancilhon concluded his investigation by stating:

During the land search for [Phillip], experienced trackers located size six or seven footprints in company with dog footprints going in circles in the bush area for several kilometres surrounding the abandoned vehicle. A makeshift shelter possibly used by [Phillip] was also located along with an AO Scotch and Cola can with the same batch number as the ones located in the abandoned vehicle.

Temperatures at the time of the search reached 47 degrees causing the search to be suspended due to the harsh conditions.

A probable scenario is that [Phillip] walked into the bush to locate his dog or conceal drugs and money, became lost and disoriented before perishing from the extreme weather conditions.

There is no other information available to investigators to suggest the disappearance of [Phillip] was suspicious at this time.

CAUSE AND MANNER OF DEATH

99. Having considered all of the available evidence, it is my view that the most likely explanation for Phillip's death is that he died from exposure on or shortly after 29 November 1993, after walking away from his

vehicle which he parked in the vicinity of Great Northern Highway near Newman, Western Australia.

100. In canvassing the possibility that Phillip died from exposure, I am mindful of the following facts:
- a. Phillip was last seen alive on 29 November 1993. He has been missing for almost 33 years;
 - b. The evidence suggests that Phillip had consumed alcohol, and possibly illicit drugs, shortly before his disappearance;
 - c. Phillip was described by family, friends and associates as a person with no sense of direction who would get lost;
 - d. The physical evidence at the scene of Phillip's disappearance showed one set of footprints, in a shoe size consistent with the size of Phillip's feet, accompanied only by occasional paw prints consistent with those of his dog, Shadow;
 - e. The physical evidence at the scene is consistent with one person walking away from the parked vehicle, as opposed to any evidence of a struggle or third party involvement;
 - f. Those footprints at the scene were found to be travelling in circles in the bush for several kilometres, in a manner consistent with a person being lost in the bush;
 - g. The daytime temperature in the area at the time of Phillip's disappearance reached a 47 degrees, and the evidence suggests Phillip carried with him a can of AO Scotch and Cola, instead of water. A person lost in the bush in the extreme weather conditions of the time, without a ready supply of shelter and water, would be unlikely to survive;
 - h. Proof of life checks have revealed no sign of Phillip since his disappearance on 29 November 1993; and

- i. Phillip has made no contact with his mother, sister, or other family and friends since his disappearance in 1993, which is out of character for him.
- 101. While I consider it likely that Phillip died from exposure to the extreme weather conditions while lost in the bush, given that Phillip's body has not been located, I am obliged to find that his cause of death is unascertained.
- 102. I therefore make an open finding as to the manner of his death.

CONCLUSION

- 103. Having carefully considered the evidence on the coronial brief and having listened to the evidence of Detective Senior Sergeant Bancilhon at the inquest, I am satisfied that Phillip's death has been established beyond all reasonable doubt.
- 104. Phillip has now been missing for almost 33 years. He has not contacted any of his family or friends in that time, and that lack of contact would be significantly out of character for him.
- 105. I understand that Phillip's family have long been of the opinion that Phillip is deceased.
- 106. Although there were no eye-witnesses to Phillip's final moments, when considered as a whole, the available evidence leads to the conclusion that Phillip died shortly after 29 November 1993.
- 107. It appears that the most likely explanation for Phillip's death is that he died from exposure on or shortly after 29 November 1993, after walking away from his car which was parked in the vicinity of Great Northern Highway near Newman, Western Australia.
- 108. Exactly why he walked away from his car cannot be known, on the evidence presently available, but the possibility that Phillip walked into the bush to try to locate his dog, or the possibility that he walked into the bush to conceal money and drugs, are both reasonable possibilities.
- 109. Sadly, despite extensive, and appropriate search efforts on the part of many people and agencies involved in the search, and despite extensive

investigations conducted by the Western Australia Police Force, Phillip's body has never been found.

110. Accordingly, while I am satisfied beyond all reasonable doubt that Phillip is deceased, the available evidence has not allowed me to ascertain the cause of Phillip's death.
111. I must therefore make an open finding as to the manner of his death.
112. I offer Phillip's family and friends, on behalf of the Court, my sincere condolences for your loss.

S Tyler
Coroner
10 August 2026