
JURISDICTION : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ACT : CORONERS ACT 1996

CORONER : ROBYN MARY HARTLEY, CORONER

HEARD : 12 NOVEMBER 2025

DELIVERED : 8 JANUARY 2026

FILE NO/S : CORC 1053 of 2025

DECEASED : FRYLINCK, JOHN HOWITSON

Catchwords:

Nil

Legislation:

Nil

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, Robyn Mary Hartley, Coroner, having investigated the disappearance of John Howitson FRYLINCK with an inquest held at Perth Coroners Court, Central Law Courts, Court 85, 501 Hay Street, Perth, on 12 November 2025, find that the death of John Howitson FRYLINCK has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was John Howitson FRYLINCK and that death occurred on or shortly after 18 January 2024 in the bush area of Sculpture Park, Jacoby Street, Mundaring, in the following circumstances:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
BACKGROUND	3
JOHN'S HEALTH	4
JOHN'S DISAPPEARANCE	6
THE SEARCH FOR JOHN	7
'PROOF OF LIFE' CHECKS	9
WAPF ANALYSIS	9
CONCLUSION	9

INTRODUCTION

1. John Howitson Frylinck (John) was 70 years old when he went missing on 18 January 2024.
2. John had Alzheimer's disease (a type of dementia) and poorly controlled type two diabetes. He was last seen alive by his wife Diana Frylinck (Diana) as he set off on a walk at the Mundaring Sculpture Park at about 8.15 pm on 18 January 2024. Despite an extensive search by his loved ones and the Western Australia Police Force (WAPF), John has never been located.
3. Based on information gathered by the WAPF, Acting State Coroner Linton determined pursuant to section 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA) that there was reasonable cause to suspect that John had died and that his death was a reportable death. A direction was made that an inquest be held to investigate the circumstances of John's suspected death.¹
4. I held an inquest into John's suspected death at the Perth Coroner's Court on 12 November 2025. The inquest involved the tendering of documentary evidence compiled during the WAPF investigation into John's disappearance, supplemented by oral evidence delivered by Detective Senior Constable Ellie Wold from the WAPF Missing Persons Team.
5. John's wife, daughter, son and daughter in law attended the inquest and provided a valuable contribution to the process.

BACKGROUND²

6. John was born in Cape Town, South Africa on 30 January 1953. His late parents were both teachers. John's brother and sister still live in South Africa.
7. In 1974 John met his wife Diana while studying at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. He graduated with a journalism degree and

¹ Letter dated 7 August 2025 from Acting State Coroner to Commissioner of Police.

² Exhibit 1, Tab 4 Statement of Diana Rosemary Cotterell FRYLINCK dated 2 April 2025.

went on to study in Sheffield in the United Kingdom where he obtained a master's degree.

8. John and Diana were married in Durban, South Africa in 1978. They became parents in 1979 with the arrival of their son Jonathan. In 1982 their daughter Georgina was born.
9. The Frylinck family moved to Australia in 1988, with John taking up the role of deputy librarian at what is now Curtin University. They lived in Ferndale until around 2000, at which time they moved to Mundaring.
10. John retired in 2013 at the age of 60 and took advantage of the area around his home, enjoying walks with their dog and observing the local birdlife.
11. He maintained regular social contact with long-term friends and former colleagues. John was close to his siblings in South Africa, emailing them daily with news about his life.
12. John was interested in current affairs and passionate about politics.
13. In the year leading up to his disappearance John and Diana had been discussing the possibility of moving to live in a property they owned in Margaret River.

JOHN'S HEALTH³

14. John had several bouts of pancreatitis in the late 1990s and early 2000s.
15. Around 20 years before his disappearance, John was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes mellitus. He struggled with management of his diabetes.
16. From about 2018 Diana became increasingly concerned about John's neurological well-being. She pushed hard over a number of years for medical professionals to look into what she believed was a cognitive decline.
17. In November 2022 John went missing overnight when he was out driving. The police were involved in the search for John. When he was

³ Exhibit 1, Tab 4 Statement of Diana Rosemary Cotterell FRYLINCK dated 2 April 2025.

located on foot the next day John could not say where he had left the car. It was recovered two weeks later.⁴

18. Following this incident, John's General Practitioner referred him for neurological assessment due to concerns about his cognitive function.⁵
19. After specialist investigations, including a FDG PET scan and MRI, John was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in March 2023. The behavioural history detailed by the specialist who made the diagnosis included John leaving food in the oven, forgetting the names of his neighbours and their dogs, issues with toileting and less frequent attention to personal hygiene.⁶
20. John was commenced on donepezil, a medication used to treat the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.
21. Diana did her utmost to care for John as his health declined. This was made more difficult by his lack of insight into his condition.
22. John had stayed physically active throughout his life. He cycled to work in his early days in Australia and maintained a love of walking up until a few years before his disappearance.
23. However, Diana noticed that as he became unwell John lost interest in getting out and exercising. Where previously he would take their dog to Mundaring Weir for regular walks, Diana found herself initiating a walk around the Mundaring Arena oval about once a week.
24. On 17 January 2024, the day before he went missing, John underwent a colonoscopy. When it was time for him to be collected from the hospital, staff contacted Diana asking if she had picked John up already because he wasn't in the spot they had asked him to wait for her. Diana went straight there and found John wandering around in a different part of the hospital.

⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 16 WAPF Incident Reports LWP22111000763576 and LWP2211100764434.

⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 19 Referral from Dr Spurge dated 8 December 2022.

⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 19 Letters from Professor Panegyres to Dr Spurge dated 1 March and 12 July 2023.

25. Diana received the results from the colonoscopy sometime after John's disappearance and they revealed nothing of concern had been identified.
26. John had a neurologist appointment scheduled for 19 January 2024.

JOHN'S DISAPPEARANCE⁷

27. Diana took the day off work on 18 January 2024 to look after John while he recovered from the procedure the day before. She does not recall him having any ill effects from the colonoscopy or the anaesthetic.
28. Two days prior, on 16 January 2024, a massive storm caused widespread damage in Mundaring, bringing down trees and power lines. The Frylincks had been without power, internet access or mobile phone coverage since that time.
29. Unable to use air-conditioning to get relief from the heat and without television to watch, Diana and John decided to drive to Sculpture Park to take their dog Bobby for a walk. The park is about 8 kilometres from their home and Diana said they could use the opportunity to drop off a letter that had been delivered to them by mistake.
30. The Frylincks had been to the park several times before.
31. They left home at about 8.00 pm. Diana told John that they would need to be back at the car by 8.45 pm so they could get home in time to listen to the Nightlife Quiz which aired at 9.00 pm. Diana had found a windup radio that took batteries, so they had been able to keep listening to the quiz each night despite the power outage.
32. John was wearing a shirt with vertical stripes of various colours including navy, Christmas themed boxer shorts and brown sandals. He didn't take his mobile phone, wallet, glasses or anything else with him.
33. When they arrived at the park John got straight out the car and started on his walk. Diana was held up helping Bobby get out of the car. John sometimes got impatient with how slowly Bobby moved and would walk ahead of Diana and Bobby at a faster pace.

⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 4 Statement of Diana Rosemary Cotterell FRYLINCK dated 2 April 2025.

34. The last time Diana saw John was at about 8.15 pm as he headed past a Goldfields inspired sculpture featuring a giant tap on a path that leads to the railway reserves heritage walking trail.
35. On previous occasions when they had gone to the park John had walked ahead down the railway reserves trail before turning and walking back to however far along the trail Diana and Bobby had made it.
36. By about 8.30 pm Diana began to wonder why she had not come across John yet.
37. When it came to 8.45 pm Diana thought John might have started walking home from the park. He had done this once or twice before when he didn't want to wait around for Bobby, given Bobby's leisurely walking pace and love of sniffing.
38. Diana recalled that this had only ever happened during the day and that John walked from the park on the road rather than the trail.
39. Diana drove down the road to their house, expecting to come across John on the way. She ended up driving all the way home just in case he had been given a lift, but he wasn't there.
40. Diana drove straight back to the park and started calling out for John but got no response.
41. By this stage Diana was worried about John's whereabouts but wasn't sure if it constituted an emergency. She called triple zero from her mobile phone and explained that her husband had gone missing and suffered from dementia and diabetes. The call taker assured her that the incident would be given urgent attention.
42. Diana was told to go home and wait for John there. She recalls receiving at least two visits from police officers overnight.

THE SEARCH FOR JOHN⁸

43. WAPF records show that Diana called triple zero at 9.34 pm on 18 January 2024 to report the fact she couldn't find John, having last seen

⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 3 Report of Detective Senior Constable Ellie WOLD.

him at about 8.15 pm heading off for a walk at the Sculpture Park in Mundaring. The call taker recorded John's medical conditions as diabetes and dementia.⁹

44. At about 10.00 pm the WAPF Emergency Operations Unit reviewed the incident and recommended an urgent response.
45. WAPF initiated a Land Search and Rescue (LandSAR) response and deployed significant resources in an attempt to locate John.
46. The Emergency Operations Unit coordinated an extensive search for John spanning five days. Officers from surrounding police stations, local detectives, Mounted Section officers, Police Air Wing, Tactical Response Group Operators and police drones were deployed. They were assisted by members of the State Emergency Service, with as many as 120 volunteers complete with tracking dogs on the ground at the height of the search.
47. WAPF sought the opinion of survival expert Dr Luckin who advised that John was unlikely to survive beyond the end of 20 January 2024 and would not be expected to survive past daybreak on 21 January 2024.¹⁰
48. After failing to locate any sign of John, the search was ultimately terminated at about 4.00 pm on 23 January 2024.
49. John's family continued to search for him after this date with help from members of the Mundaring community and a dog search group.¹¹
50. As part of the search for John WAPF circulated internal broadcasts and issued media releases seeking assistance from the public to locate him.¹²
51. There was extensive media coverage during and after the search for John in January 2024.¹³

⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 17 WAPF Incident Report LWP24011800047819.

¹⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 6 WAPF Determination to terminate a Search and Rescue when person/s are not located.

¹¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 4 Statement of Diana Rosemary Cotterell FRYLINCK dated 2 April 2025; Exhibit 1, Tab 5 Statement of Jonathan Plymen FRYLINCK dated 30 June 2025.

¹² Exhibit 1, Tab 24 WAPF Media Release dated 19 January 2024; Exhibit 1, Tab 25 WAPF Internal 'Be On The Lookout' Broadcast.

¹³ Exhibit 1, Tabs 22 and 23 Newspaper articles dated 19, 21 and 23 January and 1 February 2024.

‘PROOF OF LIFE’ CHECKS¹⁴

52. As part of the police investigation, enquiries were made with a number of government agencies and other institutions across Australia on multiple occasions to see whether there was any record which would suggest that John is still alive.
53. Searches of the following databases have revealed no new records for John after 18 January 2024:

WAPF

Electoral Roll

Hospitals in Western Australia

Medicare

Immigration

Proof of life enquiries with all other states and territories

Births, Deaths and Marriages for all states and territories

Banking institutions¹⁵

WAPF ANALYSIS¹⁶

54. Having thoroughly investigated John’s disappearance and conducted an extensive search in a bid to locate him, police have ruled out the involvement of any criminality or suspicious circumstances relating to John going missing.
55. Given his serious health issues, most significantly his worsening dementia, WAPF believe that John became disoriented and died on or shortly after 18 January 2024 after he became lost in the area surrounding Sculpture Park in Mundaring.

CONCLUSION

56. Having considered the evidence on the coronial brief, listened to the evidence of Detective Senior Constable WOLD and taken into account the views of John’s family I am satisfied that John’s death has been established beyond all reasonable doubt.

¹⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 3 Report of Detective Senior Constable Ellie WOLD.

¹⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 20 Westpac Group Response to Missing Person Request; Exhibit 1, Tab 21 Australian Government Services Australia response to request from WAPF for information.

¹⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 3 Report of Detective Senior Constable Ellie WOLD.

57. With the history of him going missing overnight in November 2022 and the fact that his dementia symptoms were becoming progressively worse it seems extremely likely that he simply lost his way in the dark on the night of 18 January 2024.
58. Despite Diana's wise decision to involve emergency services shortly after realising John had wandered off and an appropriately urgent and thorough response by all involved, he was, very sadly, unable to be located at the time or in the nearly two years since then.
59. Taking into account the circumstances of John's disappearance, his medical conditions and the proof of life checks conducted by WAPF, there is nothing before me to suggest that John is still alive.
60. Given John's body has never been found, I am unable to reach a conclusion as to exactly how he died. While it seems most likely that he perished due to exposure, I can't rule out the possibility that John suffered a medical episode shortly after disappearing, thereby dying from natural causes.
61. The only finding I am able to reach at this stage is that John is deceased. His cause of death must remain unascertained and I make an open finding as to the manner of death.
62. I wish to convey to John's family and friends, on behalf of the Court, my sincere condolences for your loss.

R M Hartley
Coroner
8 January 2026