
JURISDICTION : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
ACT : CORONERS ACT 1996
CORONER : SARAH TYLER, CORONER
HEARD : 19 JUNE 2026
DELIVERED : 24 JULY 2026
FILE NO/S : CORC 775 of 2026
DECEASED : JONES, PHILLIP RICHARD

Catchwords:

Nil

Legislation:

Coroners Act 1996 (WA)

Counsel Appearing:

Senior Constable Robertson assisted 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 Richard JONES** with an inquest held at Perth Coroners Court, Central Law Courts, Court 85, 501 Hay Street, PERTH, on 19 June 2026 find that the death of **Phillip Richard JONES** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was **Phillip Richard JONES** and that death occurred on or shortly after **16 December 2019** at an unknown location in the following circumstances:*

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INTRODUCTION

- 1 Phillip Richard Jones (Phill¹) was 55 years old when he disappeared in 2019.
- 2 Phill was last seen alive by his twin sister at her home address in Dunsborough in the morning of 16 December 2019. After Phill had not been heard from for a few days, his family became concerned for his well-being. Their concern increased when the family found a typed note on Phill's laptop which raised the possibility that Phill had harmed himself.
- 3 As a result, a Missing Person report was made to the Western Australia Police Force on 23 December 2019. Despite an extensive investigation by the Western Australia Police Force, Phill has never been located.
- 4 Senior Constable Claire Lyons, from the Western Australia Police Force Missing Persons Team, prepared a report to the State Coroner on 4 December 2025, indicating that it is the belief of the Western Australia Police Force that Phill is deceased.
- 5 On the basis of the information gathered by the police in relation to Phill's disappearance, Acting State Coroner Linton determined pursuant to section 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA) that there was reasonable cause to suspect that Phill had died, and that his death was a reportable death. The Acting State Coroner made a direction on 22 December 2025 that a coroner hold an inquest to investigate the circumstances of Phill's suspected death.
- 6 I held an inquest into Phill's suspected death at the Perth Coroner's Court on 19 June 2026. The inquest involved the tendering of documentary evidence compiled during the police investigation into Phill's disappearance, supplemented by oral evidence delivered by Senior Constable Lyons from the Western Australia Police Force Missing Persons Team.
- 7 Members of Phill's family, including Phill's twin sister and her husband, his two daughters, and his former wife, attended the inquest, and provided a valuable contribution to the inquest process.

¹ At the request of Phill's family, I have referred to him by that name throughout this finding. No disrespect is intended by the use of this name.

BACKGROUND

- 8 Phill was born in South Australia on 9 October 1964, and had a twin sister, Annette.
- 9 Phill's parents separated when he was four years old, and Phill's mother later relocated with the children to Cowaramup in Western Australia, where Phill attended primary school.
- 10 Phill later attended high school in Margaret River. When Phill finished high school, he completed a carpentry apprenticeship.
- 11 Phill planned to move to Melbourne for work, and intended to drive across Australia. On that trip, Phill visited his father in South Australia, and stayed for a time, doing some work. While Phill was in South Australia, he met and later married his wife, Siobhan.
- 12 Phill and his wife then decided to move to Queensland to be closer to Siobhan's parents, in around 2003.
- 13 Phill had two daughters with his wife, Suhayla, who was born in 2003, and Aaliyah, who was born in 2009. The family built a new home in Queensland, which was completed in 2009, but Phill's marriage to Siobhan broke down shortly after that date, and they divorced.
- 14 Sometime after that separation, Phill commenced a new relationship, but his relationship with that partner came to an end in about 2015, in apparently acrimonious circumstances.
- 15 In March 2016, Phill was injured in his home after he suffered a fall, and was found unconscious at the base of some stairs. He was discovered after his former partner requested the Queensland Police check on his welfare.
- 16 Phill underwent an operation as a result of the injuries he suffered in the fall, and suffered significant nerve damage to his foot that impacted his ability to walk as a result.
- 17 In light of Phill's injuries, Phill moved back to Western Australia to be closer to his sister and his mother, and so that he could be assisted in his recovery. He returned to live with his sister in April 2016.
- 18 As a result of his injuries, Phill was unable to work as a carpenter for approximately twelve months.

- 19 In March 2017, Phill decided to move to Dunsborough to live with his mother, in the hope of looking for work. Phill's sister was also planning to relocate to Dunsborough around that time.
- 20 Phill was a relatively private person, who did not share much of what was occurring in his life with his family, but his family were aware that Phill's personal circumstances appeared to be improving.
- 21 Phill obtained work in Dunsborough with an old school associate, Barry Tate, in his construction company. He was also able to arrange for his two daughters to fly to Western Australia to visit him, which was a source of happiness for him.
- 22 Phill would otherwise spend his time on his photography hobby, and would go on walks with his mother up to Castle Rock and Eagle Bay, both of which are scenic coastal walks in the Dunsborough area. He would also spend a lot of time on his laptop computer in his room, keeping to himself.
- 23 Phill appeared to experience financial difficulties, and would often ask his sister and mother for money.
- 24 Phill did not pay rent to his mother, but had agreed to pay for half of the household groceries when he moved in with his mother. Phill would regularly make excuses to his mother as to why he could not pay for groceries, and made false promises to his mother that he would do so. This caused an element of strain upon Phill's relationship with his mother.
- 25 Phill owned a Toyota Landcruiser, which was his pride and joy. He had brought the car over to Western Australia from Queensland when he moved. In October 2019, Phill's sister became aware that Phill no longer had his car. Phill was evasive and dismissive of his sister's questions about this issue. Phill's sister assumed he must be getting lifts to and from work, as without his car, he had no other means of transport.
- 26 In November 2019, Phill's mother became concerned that Phill hadn't arrived home at his expected time. Phill's employer was contacted, who told Phill's family that Phill had stopped turning up to work over a month ago, and had been providing excuses for not attending.
- 27 It appears that Phill had been dressing for work each day, and leaving the house in the morning, presenting the appearance to both his mother and sister that he was continuing to work, even though that was not true. The

available evidence does not establish exactly what Phill was doing, during those days he didn't go to work.

- 28 After Phill's family discovered that Phill was no longer attending work, they asked him questions about what was going on, but Phill was again dismissive of his mother's and sister's questions.
- 29 Phill's sister later discovered that Phill's income was being garnished by the authorities to pay his debts, and that his Toyota Landcruiser had been repossessed on 6 November 2019 due to Phill's failure to pay his finance on the vehicle. Phill had not paid his finance payments on his vehicle since January 2016.
- 30 It appears that Phill's employer was advised of the requirement to garnish Phill's wages to pay other debts in August 2019, and after this notification, Phill's commitment to his job started to wane, until he stopped attending entirely on 4 October 2019.
- 31 Phill told his employer that he had a sore back, or sore shoulder, which impacted his ability to work, but there is no record of Phill being treated for injuries to his shoulder or back at this time. He also did not tell his family of any injuries at that time.
- 32 At the time of Phill's disappearance, he was under significant financial pressure, owing in excess of \$225,000 to various government agencies, banks and finance companies. Phill had sought financial counselling in 2017, and had discussed potentially filing for bankruptcy in relation to his debts, and it appears his financial situation had only worsened since then.

LAST CONFIRMED SIGHTING

- 33 On 16 December 2019, Phill's sister received a text message from Phill, asking if he could visit for a coffee.
- 34 Phill's sister thought, with the benefit of hindsight, that this was pretty unusual for Phill and that it may possibly have been Phill saying goodbye to her, but at the time she thought that Phill was just likely to ask to borrow some money from her.
- 35 Phill arrived between 8.00 am and 9.00 am at his sister's house in Dunsborough. He was wearing cargo pants and a yellow or orange polo shirt. He had a CamelBak (a water hydration pack) with him. Phill was

wearing boots or shoes, as his sister remembers him removing his shoes before coming inside.

36 Phill and his sister had a coffee, and talked about Christmas plans for a while, before Phill's sister had to leave for another engagement.

37 This is the last occasion that Phill was seen alive.

38 At 9.58 am on 16 December 2019, Phill sent a text message to his daughter Suhayla. The message was innocuous, and simply shared a comment Phill's sister appears to have made about a puppy Phill and his daughter had been discussing over the previous two days.

39 Suhayla sent a reply at 11.15 am, talking about her excitement for her upcoming holiday to Bali. That message was read at 1.39 pm on 16 December 2019.

40 This appears to be the last activity on Phill's phone attributable to him.

DISCOVERY THAT PHILL WAS MISSING

41 On about 20 December 2019, Phill's mother became concerned, as she had not seen or heard from Phill for a few days. She telephoned Phill's sister to discuss her concerns.

42 Phill's mother recalled Phill mentioning that he might go to Margaret River, as someone had offered him a place to live down there, so they were not overly concerned for his welfare at that time.

43 They felt it was possible Phill might be in Margaret River, and would come back soon.

44 Phill's mother recalled that Phill had packed up his clothes into boxes, and she had packed up a food hamper for Phill to take with him to Margaret River, but he had not taken that food with him.

45 On 23 December 2019, Phill's sister went to visit her mother. Neither of them had heard from Phill in the meantime. They went into Phill's room and found his laptop on the bed.

46 The laptop was sitting on Phill's wallet, and his phone, which was very unusual as Phill "lived on his phone"² and wouldn't generally leave the house without it. A bracelet with his daughter's names on it was also

² Exhibit 1, Tab 4, p 9.

located in Phill's bedroom. Phill's mother observed that Phill had not taken any of his belongings with him from his room.

- 47 Phill's sister opened the laptop, and discovered a typed note that had been saved as a screensaver. Laptop metadata shows that the screensaver was saved to the computer at 5.48 pm on 15 December 2019, the day before Phill was last seen alive by his sister.

- 48 The note stated³:

It's better to know than not.

The last ten years have been such a down hill spiral for me, so soul destroying, far too many wrong choices. I'm not blaming anyone else. I have truly appreciated what everyone has done for me since being back here and love you all.

I have total love for Suhayla and Aaliyah and dearly miss them, actually I do miss them more than what I show.

What I have at the moment is not a life but just an existence and don't see an end to it. I find that embarrassing and so hard to cope with, I know this will be difficult for everyone to understand, I'm off to find peace.

Love to all.

- 49 Understandably, Phill's sister was concerned that the note suggested that Phill was intending to harm himself, and Phill's sister and mother agreed that they would report Phill's disappearance to the Western Australia Police Force.
- 50 At about 1.45 pm on 23 December 2019, Phill's sister contacted the Dunsborough Police Station, and reported Phill missing.

THE SEARCH

- 51 Dunsborough Police completed an At Risk Person Assessment based upon the information provided by Phill's sister, and assessed Phill as being a "high risk"⁴ missing person, in light of the information left on his computer for his family to find.
- 52 As a result, the South West District Office of the Western Australia Police Force were advised, and provided direction as to the search.

³ Exhibit 1, Tab 9, p 1.

⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 2, p 1.

- 53 Police officers searched Phill's mother's home (which was also Phill's home), to try to find any information of relevance. The house showed no signs of any disturbance.
- 54 Police officers canvassed the area to locate any CCTV cameras that might assist the police with a direction of travel for Phill, or provide any indication of where the police could search to try to find Phill. Sadly, no relevant CCTV was identified.
- 55 A search was conducted by police of a dense bushland area, and a nearby golf course close to Phill's home shortly after Phill was reported missing, but nothing of interest was found.
- 56 Extensive enquiries were made on 23 December 2019 to establish whether any information could be obtained that might shed light on Phill's whereabouts, including [this list is not exhaustive]:
- Enquiries with hospitals
 - Enquiries in relation to any of Phill's known associates, including those based in Queensland
 - Review and download of Phill's mobile phone and laptop
 - Enquiries with banking and governmental institutions regarding any activity in connection with Phill
 - Media releases in relation to Phill's disappearance
 - Enquiries regarding any vehicle access
- 57 Those enquiries found no evidence of any friend or associate in Margaret River that knew Phill, or any evidence of an actual plan for Phill to move to Margaret River.
- 58 At 6.45 pm on 23 December 2019, the Western Australia Police Force Emergency Operations Unit discussed the available information with the officer in charge of the Dunsborough Police Station, to consider avenues of investigation that may be available to locate Phill. Given the length of time that Phill had been missing (seven days), the fact that there was no known direction of travel for Phill, and there was no known targeted area to search, the Western Australia Police Force made a critical decision not to commence a large-scale multi-agency land search at that time.
- 59 On the basis of the available information, this decision appears appropriate. There was no known location to search, and in the absence of a search location, a land search was not a reasonable possibility.

- 60 The police investigation into Phill's disappearance continued. His disappearance received widespread media attention across various platforms, but this did not generate any significant information from witnesses. A vast number of enquiries were conducted in the weeks that followed to attempt to locate Phill, and to work out what had been happening in Phill's life in the time before his disappearance.
- 61 On 27 December 2019, a report from a civilian witness suggested that Phill had been seen at a local IGA, after that witness saw a public awareness social media post regarding Phill's disappearance. Police officers obtained CCTV from that IGA, and confirmed that the male person identified was not Phill.
- 62 The Western Australia Police Force Missing Person Team provided ongoing input into the search for Phill, including identifying avenues for further enquiries on 16 January 2020, which were diligently actioned by the local Dunsborough Police and by police officers from the Missing Person Team. Sadly these enquiries did not generate any significant discoveries.
- 63 On 6 April 2020, the responsibility for the ongoing investigation into Phill's disappearance was allocated to the Missing Person Team.
- 64 In the course of the police investigation, multiple witnesses were spoken to, formal statements have been obtained, and extensive documentary evidence has been provided during the search for Phill.
- 65 In September 2024, police received a report through Crime Stoppers suggesting that Phill had been seen at a casino in Melbourne. The Crime Stoppers report suggests that the person had given a different name at the time. The report was investigated by the Western Australia Police Force and Victoria Police, and it was confirmed this person was not Phill.
- 66 Despite extensive investigations, no sign of Phill has been found, since he left his sister's home on 16 December 2019.

PROOF OF LIFE CHECKS

- 67 As part of the police investigation, enquiries were made with a number of government agencies and other institutions across Australia to see whether there was any record which would suggest that Phill is still alive.

- 68 These enquiries are known as proof of life checks, and have been repeated throughout the investigation and search for Phill.
- 69 Ongoing searches of the following databases have revealed no new records for Phill after 16 December 2019:

The Western Australia Police Force
Police in all other Australian States and Territories
The Electoral Roll
Telecommunication companies
Hospitals in Western Australia
Centrelink
Medicare
Immigration
Births, Deaths and Marriages for all states and territories

- 70 The last known mobile phone activity for Phill was on 16 December 2019. Activity was detected on a mobile phone belonging to Phill on 23 December 2019, and shortly after that date, but police inquiries confirmed that this related to members of Phill's family, and police investigators, interrogating that device to try to locate Phill.
- 71 There is no evidence of Phill accessing his banking accounts since his disappearance, or establishing new accounts. Phill's Toyota Landcruiser had been repossessed due to non-payment of finance, on 6 November 2019. However, the vehicle was sold in early 2020, with a refund attached to the sale, which Phill never claimed.
- 72 Enquiries with immigration organisations confirm that there is no evidence of Phill having left the country in December 2019, or at any time after that date.
- 73 These enquiries establish that Phill has not presented to any of the government agencies or institutions that a person would commonly interact with, in Australia in the over six years he has been missing.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA POLICE FORCE ANALYSIS

- 74 Having thoroughly investigated Phill's disappearance, and conducted extensive investigations in a bid to locate him, police investigators have ruled out the possible involvement of any criminality or suspicious circumstances associated with Phill's disappearance.

75 Given wide ranging, ongoing proof of life enquiries have revealed no trace of Phill, and in light of the fact that there have been no credible sightings of him since 16 December 2019, police investigators concluded that Phill is deceased, having died on or soon after 16 December 2019.

76 One theory put forward in the course of the coronial investigation into Phill's death by some members of Phill's family is that Phill may be alive, living 'off-grid' without contact with any family members, or government agencies or institutions, for reasons known only to him.⁵

77 In relation to that theory, the police:

Found no evidence that Phill had any specific survivalist skills or knowledge that would allow him to live effectively 'off-grid' for an extended period of time.⁶

Found no evidence of any unusual financial transactions other than compelling evidence that Phill faced mounting financial debts.⁷ For example, there was no evidence that Phill was purchasing and stockpiling water, food, or other items in the time before his disappearance that would suggest any planning for off-grid living.

Concluded that Phill had departed his home on 16 December 2019, in possession of simply a CamelBak water carrier, leaving behind his clothing⁸, valuable tools⁹, and the food hamper¹⁰ prepared by his mother in anticipation of his move to Margaret River.

Noted that Phill departed his home on foot, without any known access to any other form of transport.¹¹

Found that Phill had not been seen or heard from since 16 December 2019.¹² There has been no report to police in any Australian State or Territory linked to Phill (other than the December 2019 and September 2024 reports which were found to relate to persons other than Phill), such as a report of a person

⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 5, p 8; Telephone discussion between Senior Constable Robertson and Ms Bailey following the inquest.

⁶ Transcript, p 20.

⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 9.

⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 5, p 8.

⁹ Transcript, p 20.

¹⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 5, p 7.

¹¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 12.

¹² Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 10.

living rough, or entering townsites for food or water, that would support this theory.

- 78 Accordingly, the conclusions of the police investigators did not support the theory that Phill had simply walked away from his home and started a new life for himself away from his family and broader society, living without detection for many years.
- 79 The Western Australia Police Force report in relation to the investigation of Phill's disappearance provides the following conclusion:

[Mr] Jones was 55 years of age at the time of his disappearance, making his current age 60 years if he were alive today. Since the commencement of the investigation, there have been no confirmed sightings, no recorded contact, and no proof of life.

The investigation identified no evidence of suspicious circumstances playing a part in the disappearance of [Mr] Jones.

Several witnesses were spoken to in the months following the disappearance of [Mr] Jones. All corroborated information obtained by investigators, that [Mr] Jones had been under significant financial pressure for a number of years leading up to his disappearance. He had mounting financial debt and was unable to make payments on his accounts, resulting in many of them being closed.

He was known to have suffered a significant physical injury which affected his ability to work and pay off his debts, and he was reliant on the assistance from family both physically and financially during the period of rehabilitation.

In the lead up to his disappearance he was quiet and withdrawn, he began being evasive with his family when asked about work and personal belongings. He failed to attend work and stopped paying bills. His vehicle had been repossessed due to non-payment of finance. A note was left on the laptop used by [Mr] Jones which was interpreted [as] a suicide note, making reference to his current circumstances.

At the time of leaving his sister's address, he was believed to be carrying a Camelback water dispenser, indicating he may have been expecting to walk a significant distance.

There is no information to suggest he has taken any other form of transport, or had access to any other form of transport at the time of his disappearance or following.

Based on the available information, it is believed that [Mr] Jones is deceased, having died on or soon after 16 December 2019.

- 80 Police officers obtained a DNA sample from Phill's razor and toothbrush shortly after his disappearance, and obtained a familial DNA sample from Phill's mother and sister, so that any discovered human remains across Australia can be checked against Phill's DNA.¹³
- 81 Phill's dental records have also been obtained, to assist in any future identification, in the tragic event that human remains are located that are suspected to belong to Phill.¹⁴
- 82 A review of the current unidentified human remains register did not identify any human remains that could be linked to Phill at this time.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

- 83 Having considered the evidence on the coronial brief, listened carefully to the evidence of Senior Constable Lyons, and taken into account the input from Phill's family, including the views of some members of Phill's family, I am satisfied that Phill's death has been established beyond all reasonable doubt.
- 84 I reach that conclusion based upon the following:
- a) Phill has not been seen since 16 December 2019, almost six years. He would be turning 62 years old this year if he were alive today.
 - b) I consider that had Phill been able to make contact with his mother, twin sister, or two daughters in that time, he would have done so. This is particularly so given:
 - a. Phill appears to have communicated regularly with his daughters, including on the final day he was known to be alive, and has made no contact since. His daughters are now young women, whose distress at not knowing what happened to their father was apparent at the inquest.
 - b. Phill appears to have also communicated regularly with his mother, and his twin sister, and has made no contact with them since he was last seen alive. This

¹³ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 5.

¹⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 5.

¹⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 3, p 11.

includes having no contact with his sister on their shared 60th birthday.

- c) It does not appear that Phill had the financial means to disappear. He was under considerable financial pressure in the years before his disappearance, with mounting debts, and the police investigation found no evidence of Phill having any money that he would have been able to move out of his accounts to fund a new life.
- d) There is no evidence that Phill had the resources or contacts to enable him to start a new life under a new identity.
- e) While Phill enjoyed camping, there is no evidence that he had any survivalist skills, or any capacity to live ‘off grid’ for an extended period of time, particularly given his limited resources, and limited physical capacity following his leg injury in 2016.
- f) The evidence indicates that at the time of his disappearance, Phill was experiencing difficult personal circumstances. He had withdrawn from work, lost his car which was his pride and joy, was in significant debt, felt like his life had been on a down-hill spiral and saw no way out of his difficulties. The note left by Phill is consistent with Phill having an intention to end his own life.
- g) Phill’s poor mental state at the time is supported by the fact that some of his final searches on his electronic devices before his disappearance related to his former partner and her new partner. He had separated from that partner in 2015. Phill’s sister believes that Phill had never moved on from that relationship, and that its end was a continued source of distress to him.¹⁶
- h) There have been no confirmed sightings, recorded contact, or evidence that Phill is still alive, since his disappearance. This includes no evidence of reports of Phill seeking water, food or medical attention in the six years he has been missing, nor any of the innocuous contacts a person would otherwise be expected to have with government institutions or agencies over the years.

¹⁶ Transcript, p 17.

- i) The police investigators who investigated the circumstances of Phill's disappearance expressed the opinion that Phill is deceased, having died on or soon after 16 December 2019.

- 85 In light of the above, and particularly in light of the note located on Phill's computer which is consistent with it being a suicide note, I do suspect that Phill died by some intentional act of his own, ending his life by suicide.
- 86 However, given Phill's body has never been located, and therefore no post mortem examination could be performed, I cannot rule out the possibility that he got lost or had an accident while walking in an unknown remote location, leading to his death. The fact that Phill was carrying a CamelBak on the last occasion he was seen alive by his sister supports the possibility he planned to walk a long distance in remote terrain, for unknown reasons.
- 87 On the evidence before me, I am unable to reach a conclusion as to exactly how Phill died. The only finding I am able to reach at this stage is that Phill is deceased. His cause and manner of death must remain unascertained, and I make an open finding as to the matter of his death.
- 88 As I did at the inquest, I wish to convey to Phill's family and friends, on behalf of the Court, my sincere condolences for their loss.

S Tyler
Coroner
24 July 2026