



# **CORONERS COURT OF QUEENSLAND**

## **FINDINGS OF INVESTIGATION**

**CITATION:**                      **Non-inquest findings into the death of MP**

**TITLE OF COURT:**        Coroners Court

**JURISDICTION:**            BRISBANE

**DATE:**                        30 July 2025

**FILE NO(s):**                2024/3213

**FINDINGS OF:**             Christine Roney, Coroner

**CATCHWORDS:**            CORONERS: Missing person, crocodile attack.

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## **Background**

MP was a 76-year-old man who went missing on a fishing trip in the Olive River Crossing, Shelburne, Queensland on 12 November 2023.

Despite extensive searches conducted at the time of his disappearance and since he has not been found. MP's disappearance was formally reported to the Coroner by Queensland Police Service (QPS) on 2 July 2024 for investigation.

I have had the conduct of that investigation in the Coroner's office.

## **Declaration of death and facts relied upon**

### **Declaration and reasons**

1. I find that MP has deceased, notwithstanding that a body has not been found, on 12 January 2023 in the area in and around where he parked the ATV buggy which he drove to reach the location it was found in (-12.239925, 142.834798). I further find, therefore, that the presumption of life had been rebutted.
2. I formally declare MP to be a deceased person.
3. I accept the evidence of QPS obtained during the Coronial Investigation, and the theory of death, that MP has likely been killed by a crocodile /other wild animal and his remains disposed of in that episode of misadventure.
4. I find that this theory is supported by the reliable, contemporaneous evidence of Detective Sergeant Russell and witnesses about the nature and level of crocodile activity in the area.
5. In doing so I reject the evidence of the Department of Environment and Science that crocodile activity in the area in which MP disappeared, was low or non-existent.
6. I find that there is no evidence in the investigation to support any view, should it exist, that MP's disappearance results from suicide or a staged disappearance.
7. I find that no evidence consistent with his ongoing life has been detected during the investigation and that MP's disappearance is unexplained, except by death.

### **Facts relied upon**

1. MP left Bramwell station at approximately 8 am on 12 November 2023 and has not been seen since.
2. It can be reasonably inferred that he reached the location where the ATV buggy was later located as he was last seen driving the vehicle, alone, away from the station.
3. Extensive searches by various means utilizing various agencies have failed to locate MP.
4. No trace of any kind has been found of him or his effects, other than those located with the buggy.

5. Those who might reasonable have expected to hear from him, have not.
6. All reasonable enquiries of his banking, phone and computer records have not located any activity such as to denote their use.
7. No information has emerged in the investigation which is consistent with MP being alive.
8. There has been a lapse of some 20 months since his disappearance.
9. While the evidence supporting the theory of his death is circumstantial, it is based on inferences reasonably drawn. These inferences made are based upon clear and cogent evidence of the likelihood of death, resulting from an attack by a crocodile. I infer that the possibility of survival from such an attack is so low, as to be non-existent.

### **Summary of relevant event**

MP was a keen and experienced fisherman. He was very familiar with North Queensland fishing territory but not the area around Olive River.

He had longtime friends on Bramwell Homestead whom he had come to visit. Initially it was planned that he would come up and cook for the staff on the station, but a chef was hired at the last minute, so MP was free to spend his time there fishing.

He arrived at Weipa on 9 November, was met by his friends and taken back to Bramston station. He went out fishing to Olive Crossing on 10 and 11 November, leaving in the morning, driving the all-weather terrain vehicle used on the property, and returning in the late afternoon.

12 November was to be his last fishing day before travelling home to Sydney.

On that day his friends report that he left the Homestead at approximately 8am with a packed lunch and fishing rod.

MP did not arrive home by sunset as arranged. His friend drove his car out along the track to look for him, expecting to meet him as MP travelled home. He did not. His friend located the ATV buggy and no trace of MP. He commenced to search on foot and then called for assistance from authorities and assembled a search party from the homestead.

A search party arrived at the location by 9.30pm and searched until midnight. Rescue Helicopter 700 (Torres Strait Rescue) was also deployed to perform fly overs.

A search effort resumed on 13 November and continued until 19 November 2023. No trace was found of MP, articles of clothing or personal effects other than the items initially recovered in the buggy.

### **Report of search and Rescue**

#### **'Introduction**

This report is a summary of the search and rescue efforts made to locate missing person MP. The MP was initially reported missing to police by a family friend who the MP was staying with

at Bramwell Station on the 12th of November 2023. An initial search was conducted on the evening of the 12th of November 2023 at the MP's last known position (LKP). The MP's LKP, was identified as the ATV which the MP used to get to the Olive River Crossing. An extensive 7-day search was commenced utilising land and aerial assets on the 12th of November 2023.

The only item of interest located during this initial search was the ATV vehicle that the MP was using to travel to and from Bramwell Station to the Olive River Crossing. The ATV contained his spare fishing rod and Esky with his snacks and drinks still inside. The MP, his remains or any of his clothing and fishing gear have, to date, not been found.

### **Initial information**

The following information was initially made available to SAR co-ordinators: -

1. The missing person (MP) was last seen on Sunday the 12th day of November 2023 at approximately 7.00am. The MP was headed to Olive Creek Crossing to engage in recreational fishing.
2. The MP was a type 2 diabetic and was also known to be on a number of other prescription medications. His medical conditions would be likely to reduce his survivability if he ended up in a life-threatening predicament.
3. The missing person was equipped for the days outing having followed a similar routine the two days leading up to his disappearance. The Polaris ATV he was using was located at the Olive Creek Crossing. Located within the ATV was the MP's esky containing his drink bottles and food which would suggest the MP was not planning on venturing far from the ATV. The MP did not take any medication with him from the Bramwell Station Homestead where he commenced his journey.
4. A search commenced with friends and associates from Bramwell Station approximately 6.30pm when the MP failed to return to the homestead as arranged. Rescue 700 also attended on the night of the 12th to commence a search. No signs of the MP were located this night and a full-scale search was organised for the following morning.
5. The MP was visiting from Sydney and although an accomplished angler, he was not overly familiar with this area except for having visited the two days prior. The river area is inhabited with crocodiles and the surrounding scrubland inhabited by snakes, dingoes, bullock, and boars.

### **Location**

The search location was centered at the Olive River Crossing, Shelburne where the MP's ATV was located. The exact co-ordinates for this location are -12.239925, 142.834798.

The search area covered an aerial area of a five-kilometre circumference, the land search on foot covered a one-kilometre radius and approximately two kilometres both up and down river. Further land searches were covered utilising ATV's Quad bikes and RPAS capabilities.

The area can only be accessed via a dirt road which runs off an unnamed dirt road just outside of Bramwell Tourist Park. The road is dirt the entire way and once you cross the Olive River, the road leads down to the boat ramp at the mouth of the Olive River.

The search area surrounding the MP's last known position (LKP) is thick bushland along the river which becomes more scrub like the further away from the river you travel. There were areas which had been burnt by recent bushfires to the Northeast of the LKP.

The headwaters of the Olive River rise in the Richardson Range, part of the Great Dividing Range, on the Cape York Peninsula. The river initially flows south-easterly and then veers northeast and continues across the mostly uninhabited coastal plain eventually discharging into Temple Bay and the Coral Sea, north of Lockhart River. The river descends 55 metres (180 ft) over its 70-kilometre (43 mi) course.

## **Weather**

The weather between from the time the MP was last seen until the search was suspended was typical of the Cape York Peninsula leading up to the wet season. It was hot/ dry and humid with daily temperatures averaging between 21 degrees at night to 35 degrees during the day. There was no rainfall during the search for the MP.

Analysis of the Bureau of Meteorology website has been carried out to establish the weather records over the period of the search.

Analysis of the documents has identified the following key points.

- The closest operating weather station to the Olive River Crossing is Lockhart River which is located 85.5km's from MP's LKP.
- There was no recorded rainfall for this station between the 12th and 19th of November 2023. Since the MP has been missing, there has been a total of 516.2mm.
- The maximum temperature recorded during this period at this location was 31.8 degrees, however recorded temperatures at the LKP were closer to 35 degrees on two consecutive days. The temperature has consistently been rising since the MP's disappearance.

## **Time Frame for Survival**

On the 15th of November (Day 3 of the search) a request was made of Dr Luckin in his capacity as medical advisor to the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) in relation the time frame for survival (TFFS) that the MP might have had. The following information was received:

*MP was last seen at 0800 on Sunday 12 November 2023, and should have reached the Olive Creek Crossing fishing spot by about 09.00 hrs. Since he was expected to return by 18.00 hrs, as he had done on the two previous days, he would have been expected to leave the creek by 17.00 hrs.*

*He has therefore been missing for between 72 hrs maximum and 64 hrs.*

*I note that the creek water is fresh, but dirty, with debris and leaves in it. It would be possible to drink it, but very unattractive.*

*His food and drink were still in the esky, and one fishing rod and the lure/s were missing; this suggests he moved from the quad bike but did not return by morning tea / lunch time.*

*Time missing is therefore most likely 69 hours - 72 hours.*

*The likely scenarios are.*

1. *Lost, still alive, and has drunk water from the creek: survival for quite some days is possible. This scenario is possible, but he was fairly close to the waterway, and would be expected to be able to find the river and walk back along it to his starting point. The search to date would most probably have found him; during Monday and for most or all of Tuesday I would have expected him to be able to respond to searchers and assist in being found. If he has not been drinking water, his TFFS would expire by the end of today, Wednesday 15 November 2023.*
2. *Minor injury: he should have been able to return to his quad bike, consume water and possibly food, and either remain there or possibly drive home. That he has not done so suggests minor injury is unlikely.*
3. *Major injury, which rendered him immobile - TFFS is to end of today, Wednesday 15 Nov 23, due to the injury and dehydration.*
4. *Medical event: at 76 years of age, with insulin dependent diabetes, a severe medical event on any given day is not unlikely. Diabetes: Lack of his insulin would cause a rise in blood sugar. Loss of energy, but unlikely to have prevented him getting home. Cardiac event, causing collapse; very low chance alive now. No survival beyond end of today. Stroke, causing collapse or inability to return to bike: no survival beyond end of today.*
5. *In the water, already deceased.*
6. *Predation by crocodile, or pigs, alone or following injury or medical event; not alive now.*

## **Search methodology**

There were three initial scenarios that were presented to SAR personnel prior to Searching.

- MP has left vehicle and walked away from LKP to fish along the riverbanks. He has become disoriented in bushland and has sought out shade and water.
- MP has suffered a medical episode/ injury which has rendered him incapacitated. MP is within close proximity to his LKP however cannot respond to search teams.
- MP has been the victim of predation by a crocodile and is in the water.

The following standard search methodologies were considered during subsequent search planning: -

- Consideration was given to section 3.13 of the National Search and Rescue Manual (NATSAR manual). This section deals with considerations for searching in Australian rainforest environments (<https://www.amsa.gov.au/national-search-and-rescue-council/manuals-and-publications/national-search-and-rescue-manual>).
- Naismith's rule – the application of this rule is primarily of use when dealing with a mobile lost person (on foot) who has recently gone missing. The rule allows a rough search area to be quickly established but does not take consideration of terrain features.

- Subjective terrain analysis (S3.15 NATSAR manual) – a careful consideration of the area surrounding the LKP was conducted, considering roads, pig tracks, creek arms, billabongs, and other local features. This identified a much more defined search area within which evidence of the MP was likely to be found.
- Statistical Strategy (Lost Person behaviour) – this approach takes into account any potential known behaviours the MP might exhibit and takes a statistical approach to categories of missing people (e.g. lost bushwalkers). Analysis of past cases provides guidance on general behaviour for these categories. Several plausible assumptions were considered in planning the search.
- Physical search constraints – it was recognised during search planning that several physical factors would impact the searching strategy. These factors included bush density, river crossing, temperature, humidity, wildlife, and a lack of information as to direction or travel or intent on the part of the MP.

### **Search day 1 – Sunday 12th November 2023**

After the MP was reported missing on the 12th of November 2023, local Police from Weipa and Bamaga conducted preliminary inquiries, a request was made for a search to be conducted in the area surrounding the LKP for any evidence of the MP or his belongings. SARO Ed LUKIN was advised and contacted SAR Co-Ordinator's TULACZ and HILL.

#### **Search assets**

The following search assets were deployed during Search Day 1

- Rescue 700 – Deployed from THURSDAY ISLAND.
- SAR Co-Ordinator (S/Cst Jamie BURKE) – Deployed from BAMAGA
- 7 x friends/ associates of MP from BRAMWELL STATION.

#### **Search 12th November 2023 (appreciation)**

Senior Constable Casandra HILL provides the following notes:

##### **12.11.23**

*2340 – DDO Bradley – Request for SAR re MP. Availability and search assets Due to time frame, SAR recommended. Due to remote location - commence SAR on following day.*

*0027 – Rescue Helo 700 tasked from Torres Strait for flyover. Will transport medic.*

*0034 – DDO Bradley briefed.*

*0048 – Request triangulation of MP's mobile.*

*0316 – SES watch desk request completed.*

*0321 – Call from Rescue 700 – MP not located, lots of smoke and spot bushfires, poor visibility, dense trees obstructing views. Will fly to Weipa to refuel.*

*0323 – DDO updated, SES watch desk contacted to update.*

*0409 – Rescue 700 to remain in Weipa overnight. Will recommence search at first light.*

*0412 – DDO advised of search plan for the following day. SAR Co-ordinators S/Cst TULACZ and S/Cst HILL to fly from Cairns to Weipa then fly via helicopter to Bramwell Station to co-ordinate SAR. Jamie BURKE from BAMAGA to attend Bramwell Station at 10.00am to co-ordinate land SAR until TULACZ/HILL arrive. 0713 – SARO's Sgt Andy IBELL and Ed LUKIN advised. Dave WOODS from Parks and Wildlife and James GEGG from SES advised.*



## **Search Day 2 – Monday 13th of November 2023**

### **Search assets**

The following search assets were deployed during Search Day 2

- Rescue 700 – Deployed from WEIPA.
- SAR Co-Ordinators (TULACZ/HILL) – Deployed from CAIRNS
- SAR Co-Ordinator (BURKE) Deployed from BAMAGA
- 5 x Friends/ associates of MP from BRAMWELL STATION.
- Narelle NEIL and Steve FITZPATRICK – Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve
- Suzie McDonald and Talina O'BRIEN – Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve
- R44 – Pilot Bevan DUKE from WEIPA
- 4 x SES – WEIPA
- 1 x Local Parks and Wildlife Officer – WEIPA
- 4 x Parks and Wildlife (Crocodile Management Team)
- 2 x QPS – Cooktown Traffic branch - Deployed from COEN

### **Search 13th November 2023 (appreciation)**

Senior Constable Casandra HILL provides the following notes:

#### **13.11.23**

*0700 Commence co-ordination and logistics for search assets to be deployed to BRAMWELL Station for briefing. Media Release organised, local Rangers and Aboriginal corporation contacted to advise of search and request assistance. Local assets from adjoining property (Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve) contacted and arranged to attend to assist search. 3 x ex QPS officers.*

*1000 – Briefing held by SAR Co-ordinator Jamie BURKE at Bramwell Station with SES/ Parks and Wildlife and Family and friends. SES truck operated by James BARBER led convoy to set up Search Headquarters at MP's LKP. Initial search conducted and led by BURKE.*

*1220 – SAR Co-Ordinators TULACZ/HILL arrive WEIPA. Flown by Heartland Helicopter Pilot Bevan DUKE in an R44 to Bramwell Station.*

*1245 – SAR Jamie BURKE leading search at MP's LKP.*

*1400 – TULACZ/HILL landed at Bramwell Station. Continued co-ordination of search assets. Obtained further briefing, observed MP's living area, photographs taken and relevant information to assist with search ascertained.*

*1500 - HILL picked up by vehicle and transported by road to Search HQ. TULACZ deployed as spotter in R44 to conduct aerial searches of MP's LKP and along river line.*

*1600 – HILL briefed by BURKE in relation to search areas completed. 4 teams have covered the riverbank on both sides East and West from MP's LKP for a distance of 650 metres. Nil items of interest located.*

*1640 – SES crews stood down for the day to return to Bramwell Station. 2 x QPS, 1 x Local Parks and Wildlife Officer and 2 x friends of MP continued to search a further area behind Search HQ.*

*1700 – 4 x Parks and Wildlife (Crocodile Management Team) arrived on scene. Commenced foot patrols of riverbanks from MP's LKP. One fishing lure located snagged on a fallen tree approximately 20 metres West of MP's LKP. (later identified as not belonging to MP).*

*1800 – Remaining search teams stood down except for Crocodile Management Team, James BARBER (SES) and SAR Co-ordinators TULACZ/HILL who remained on scene.*

*1930 – Crocodile initially estimated to be approximately 3 metres in length sighted 15 metres from MP's LKP in a Westerly direction. Smaller crocodile estimated to be approximately 1.5 metres in length sighted 40 metres from MP's LKP in an Easterly direction. No other substantial animals sighted.*

2100 – All search teams stood down to return to Bramwell Station. 0700 briefing on scene planned for following day.

### **Search Day 3 – Tuesday 14th of November 2023**

#### **Search assets**

The following search assets were deployed during Search Day 3

- SAR Co-Ordinators (TULACZ/HILL)
- 5 x Friends/ associates of MP from BRAMWELL STATION.
- Narelle NEIL and Steve FITZPATRICK – Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve
- Suzie McDonald and Talina O'BRIEN – Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve
- R44 – Pilot Bevan DUKE from WEIPA
- 10 x SES – WEIPA/ BAMAGA/CAIRNS
- 1 x Local Parks and Wildlife Officer – WEIPA
- 4 x Parks and Wildlife (Crocodile Management Team)
- 2 x QPS – Cooktown Traffic branch

#### **Search 14th November 2023 (appreciation)**

Senior Constable Casandra HILL provides the following notes:

##### **14.11.23**

0710 – Arrived on scene at Search HQ. Commence co-ordination and logistics for search assets to be deployed. Teams tasked to ascertain a suitable area and clear a helipad for R44 to have a landing area close to Search HQ to allow for on scene refuel and spotter changes. 2 x Quad bikes on scene and tasked for patrols of bush tracks and roads. Search teams

0815 – Further briefing of teams at completion of initial task with search areas allocated.

0840 – TULACZ/HILL photographed ATV, ascertained fuel level at ½ tank and vehicle was functioning. Identified that MP's spare fishing rod and Esky containing his food and drinks were still within ATV.

0925 – R44 on scene. Tasked to complete aerial grid search covering a five nautical mile radius of MP's LKP.

1000 – Large crocodile slide observed 100 metres East of MP's LKP. Animal not sighted in the area. Further taskings for teams to search this area. initially estimated to be approximately 3 metres in length sighted 15 metres from MP's LKP in a Westerly direction. Smaller crocodile estimated to be approximately 1.5 metres in length sighted 40 metres from MP's LKP in an Easterly direction. No other substantial animals sighted.

1000 – 1650 – Search teams allocated areas throughout the day. ATV's tasked for roving patrols of roads, pig tracks, bush trails. RPAS deployed to assist with aerial searching. R44 tasked to complete 5 nautical mile search grid. Nil items of interest located. Nil signs of the MP or any of the MP's possessions. Police Dive Squad contacted and appraised of situation. Divers to monitor at this stage.

1650 – 4 x search assets from Steve Irwin Reserve stood down and returning to their properties. Parks and Wildlife (crocodile management teams arrive on scene).

1900 – Friends of MP, QPS from Cooktown and SES stood down to return to Bramwell Station. TULACZ/HILL and Crocodile Management team remained on scene for further night searches to be carried out. Further croc slides identified to the West of MP's LKP. No animals sighted. Previously sighted crocodile sighted on causeway, now estimated to be approx. 2.5 metres in length.

2100 – All search teams stood down to return to Bramwell Station. 0700 briefing on scene planned for following day. Nil items of interest located, no signs of MP or any of MP's personal possessions.

## **Search Day 4 – Wednesday 15th of November 2023**

### **Search assets**

The following search assets were deployed during Search Day 4

- SAR Co-Ordinator's (TULACZ/HILL) HILL to return to Mossman today.
- 5 x Friends/ associates of MP from BRAMWELL STATION.
- R44 – Pilot Bevan DUKE from WEIPA
- 10 x SES – WEIPA/ BAMAGA/CAIRNS – Including RPAS team.
- 1 x Local Parks and Wildlife Officer – WEIPA
- 4 x Parks and Wildlife (Crocodile Management Team)
- 2 x QPS – Cooktown Traffic branch

### **Search 15th November 2023 (appreciation)**

Senior Constable Sarah TULACZ provides the following notes:

**15.11.23**

*0710 – Arrived on scene at Search HQ. Commence co-ordination and logistics for search assets to be deployed. All teams briefed on tasks and search areas.*

*0725 - 1000 – RPAS flights conducted. Teams allocated search areas. All teams deployed to search areas. Nil items of interest located during searches. TULACZ contacted Dr Ed LUCKIN (to ascertain MP's survivability) Email sent to Dr LUCKIN.*

*1000 – Parks and Wildlife (crocodile management team) arrived on scene to conduct water searches within the LKP of MP using grappling hooks and poles.*

*1000-1300 – Teams allocated search areas, RPAS mapping search areas, Crocodile management team conducting water searches.*

*1300 – Crocodile management team left scene to return to Bramwell Station. Brother of MP attended scene requesting briefing from SAR Co-Ordinator).*

*TULACZ liaised with brother of MP and conducted a walkthrough of the area. TULACZ to maintain Liaison with family.*

*1300 – 1400 Fatigue management of searches. New search teams allocated and new taskings given.*

*1400 – HILL (QPS SAR), BARBER (SES- Team Leader) leaving search area to return home. QPS – Svenja CROMBACH to replace HILL. SES - James GEGG to replace BARBER.*

*1600 – Discussion with SARO S/Sgt LUKIN around other search options including Dive Squad, further aerial assets and Dog Squad. Search teams return to Search HQ.*

*1630 – SES teams stood down to return to Bramwell Station. Nil items of interest located. All GPS tracks downloaded to Caltopo.*

*1800 – Parks and Wildlife (Crocodile Management Team) arrive on scene to commence their search.*

*1830 – Friends of MP completed search area and downloaded GPS tracks to Caltopo. Returning to Bramwell Station. TULACZ (QPS) GEGG (SES) and Crocodile Management Team remain on scene.*

*21:00 – TULACZ/GEGG and Parks and Wildlife completed searches and returned to Bramwell Station. All GPS's downloaded for mapping on SARTOPO. 0700 briefing on scene planned for following day. Nil items of interest located and nil signs of the MP or his possessions.*

### **GPS tracks**

Each coloured track equates to a GPS unit carried by a searcher. Searching was completed using standard line search protocols. Search teams consisted of trained SES personnel as well as available QPS officers, Parks and Wildlife officers, local Rangers, and friends of the

MP. Line search spacing was determined by terrain difficulty at the discretion of each team leader.

### **Search Day 5 – Thursday 16th of November 2023**

#### **Search assets**

The following search assets were deployed during Search Day 4

- SAR Co-Ordinators (TULACZ/CROMBACH).
- 5 x Friends/ associates of MP from BRAMWELL STATION.
- 10 x SES – WEIPA/ BAMAGA/CAIRNS – Including RPAS team.
- 1 x Local Parks and Wildlife Officer – WEIPA
- 4 x Parks and Wildlife (Crocodile Management Team)
- 2 x QPS – Cooktown Traffic branch

#### **Search 16th November 2023 (appreciation)**

Senior Constable Sarah TULACZ provides the following notes:

*0715 – Arrived on scene at Search HQ. Commence co-ordination and logistics for search assets to be deployed. All teams briefed on tasks and search areas.*

*0730 - 1020 – ATV, Foot Search Teams and RPAS team tasked to various areas for planned searches. All teams deployed to search areas. Nil items of interest located during searches. Contact Sean BAXENDALL (Brisbane Dog Squad) and Dave RAYMOND (Cairns Dog Squad) re: dog capability options.*

*Ascertained that due to Search location and size of search area, it would be unsuitable for either tracking dog or cadaver dog deployment.*

*1020-1115 – Contact made with Cooktown CIB, Tablelands CIB and Stock Squad to ascertain availability to assist with search. Due to current search at Coen and Stock Squad deployed to Kowanyama, no staff are available to assist. Luke RUSSELL (OIC Weipa CIB) contacted and will attend scene. Fatigue management of QPS officers from Cooktown Highway Patrol taken into consideration. Crew deployed to Weipa to pick up SAR Co-Ordinator CROMBACH and necessary supplies for Bramwell Station to continue to provide food and water to searching teams.*

*1115 - Parks and Wildlife (crocodile management team) arrived on scene to conduct water searches within the LKP of MP using grappling hooks and poles via boat.*

*1115 -1200 – All search teams returned to base for fatigue management/meal break.*

*1200 – 1345 – All search teams deployed for further searches of areas identified from mapping as requiring further coverage. TULACZ contacted Kieren*

*1630 – SES teams stood down to return to Bramwell Station. Nil items of interest located. All GPS tracks downloaded to Caltopo.*

*1730 – Parks and Wildlife (Crocodile Management Team) arrive on scene to commence their search. Nil items or animals of interest identified.*

*1830 – All teams stood down to return to Bramwell Station.*

### **Search Day 6 – Friday 17th of November 2023**

#### **Search assets**

The following search assets were deployed during Search Day 4

- SAR Co-Ordinators (TULACZ/CROMBACH).
- 5 x Friends/ associates of MP from BRAMWELL STATION.
- 5 x SES – CAIRNS – Including RPAS team.
- 1 x Local Parks and Wildlife Officer – WEIPA
- 4 x Parks and Wildlife (Crocodile Management Team)
- 2 x QPS – Cooktown Traffic branch

## **Search 17th November 2023 (appreciation)**

Senior Constable Sarah TULACZ provides the following notes:

### **17.11.23**

0510 – SAR CHROMBACH, 2 x QPS and 3 x Civilians left Bramwell Station to commence cutting track to area identified on map as Top Lagoon. Track required to allow for access to previously unable to be searched areas.

0615 – 5 SES left Bramwell Station to return to Weipa and Bamaga. Replacement SES coming from Coen and Bamaga.

0720 – Arrive at Search HQ with D/Sgt RUSSELL Arrived on scene at Search HQ. Commence co-ordination and logistics for search assets to be deployed. All teams briefed on tasks and search areas.

0720-1000 – Teams out clearing tracks to top lagoon and riverbank foot searches. TULACZ co-ordinating assets for weekend searching. TULACZ contact JOSS (Major Theo HADGIS) to commence DACC request for 51 battalion Weipa's availability. Several local civilian assets organised for weekend searching. Email sent to Joss for ADF assistance.

1000-1400 – Search teams commencing area at cleared track to top lagoon, RPAS transported for aerial flyover. Discussions with SARO S/Sgt LUKIN re: use of AMSA Jet. Information received is that AMSA jet not suitable for the type of search required.

1400-1500 – RPAS and Search teams continuing search of area cleared for ATV access West of MP's LKP. Parks and Wildlife arrived and commenced boat patrols of river from MP's LKP upriver as far as the boat could traverse. Pole and grapple search techniques utilised from Parks and Wildlife vessel. One orange and black lure located near MP's LKP retrieved from the water. From condition of lure it was apparent it had been in the water for a considerable period of time. Lure shown to family friend who stated that he did not believe the lure was MP's.

1500 – 1600 – Organise logistics and travel for SES and QPS leaving and arriving for continued searching. Parks and Wildlife returned from boat patrol with no other significant finds. Parks returned to Bramwell Station.

1600 – SES volunteers stood down to return to base at Bramwell Station.

1615 – QPS teams stood down and returned to base at Bramwell Station. TULACZ and SES volunteers Darryl JONES and James GEGG remained at Search HQ awaiting civilian volunteers to return to Search HQ.

1700 – Parks and Wildlife Crocodile Management Team return for night search. Croc team to traverse from MP's LKP to top lagoon.

1800 – Civilian search teams returned to Search HQ and stood down for the day Civilian assets and JONES (SES) returned to Bramwell Station. No significant finds located during the days searching.

1800 – 2100 – TULACZ/GEGG travel via ATV to top lagoon to wait for Parks Teams to arrive from their night patrols.

2100 – TULACZ/GEGG and Parks Team stood down to return to Bramwell Station. No significant finds located during night search. Briefing set for 0700 hours the next morning at search HQ.

## **Search Day 7 – Saturday 18th of November 2023**

### **Search assets**

The following search assets were deployed during Search Day 4

- SAR Co-Ordinator's (TULACZ/CROMBACH).
- 5 x Friends/ associates of MP from BRAMWELL STATION.
- 9 x SES – CAIRNS/ BAMAGA/ WEIPA – Including RPAS team.
- 1 x Local Parks and Wildlife Officer – WEIPA
- 2 x Parks and Wildlife – Crocodile Management Team

- 2 x QPS – Cooktown Traffic branch
- 10 civilian volunteers with ATV's and Quads from WEIPA who know the area and regularly hunt and fish in the location.

### **Search 18th November 2023 (appreciation)**

Senior Constable Sarah TULACZ provides the following notes:

*0700 – Daily briefing at Search HQ. SES teams deployed to commence foot patrols of riverbanks from MP's LKP East and West.*

*0800 – 7 SES and 2 QPS transported to "Top Camp" area cleared on Day 6 to commence extensive search in that area.*

*0830 - All civilian assets briefed and split into teams with GPS tracking within each team. Civilian assets having knowledge of the area with quads and ATV's suitable for the terrain, were tasked to cover as much area as they could access from the MP's LKP.*

*0830-1320 – Search teams out deployed, civilian assets returning from search areas and re-tasked once GPS tracks downloaded. Meals/ Logistics and fatigue management attended to for search teams in the field. Parks and Wildlife arrive and commence foot searching from MP's LKP West.*

*1320 – Civilian asset team comprising of Witness A and Witness B returned to search HQ. Identified to SARMC that they had recovered a trail cam (motion activated) from Top Lagoon that they use when pig hunting. Camera downloaded at Search HQ. Nothing of significance observed on footage.*

*1320 – Civilian search crew in ATV tasked to conduct vehicle patrols from MP's LKP to Olive River Boat Ramp which is approximately 20 kilometres East.*

*1400 – Parks returned to base and advised that they would be standing down from search pending any significant finds. Parks returned to Bramwell Station.*

*1400-1615 – Search teams still deployed in the field conducting searches on both foot and in ATV/Quads. Search teams regularly returning to HQ to manage fatigue and download GPS's.*

*1615 – SES/ Civilian teams in private ATV's and QPS stood down for the day and returning to Bramwell Station. TULACZ and friend's family remained on scene to finish a section of search area.*

*1800 – TULACZ and friend's family returned to Bramwell station. Nothing of significance located during search.*

*1800 – SAR Co-Ordinator TULACZ held discussion with friend's family and brother of MP and advised that the last search day would most likely be tomorrow (Sunday 19th November) pending any significant finds.*

### **Search Day 8 – Sunday 19th of November 2023**

#### **Search assets**

The following search assets were deployed during Search Day 4

- SAR Co-Ordinators (TULACZ/CROMBACH).
- 9 x SES – CAIRNS/ BAMAGA/ WEIPA – Including RPAS team.
- 1 x Local Parks and Wildlife Officer – WEIPA
- 2 x QPS – Cooktown Traffic branch
- 10 civilian volunteers with ATV's and Quads from WEIPA who know the area and regularly hunt and fish in the location.
- R44 – Pilot Bevan DUKE and Spotter MP's friend.

## **Search 19th November 2023 (appreciation)**

Senior Constable Sarah TULACZ provides the following notes:

*0700 – Daily briefing at Search HQ. SES teams deployed to commence foot patrols of riverbanks from MP's LKP East and West.*

*0800 – 7 SES and 2 QPS tasked to traverse Northern riverbank in an Easterly direction from MP's LKP to "Top Camp".*

*0815 - All civilian assets briefed and split into teams with GPS tracking within each team. Civilian assets having knowledge of the area with quads and ATV's suitable for the terrain, were tasked to continue to cover as much area as they could access from the MP's LKP which wasn't covered the previous day including Thompson's lagoon and Southern Apex.*

*0830- 0900 – SAR Co-Ordinator TULACZ had discussions with SARO WEISS and Inspector RUTHERFORD in relation to termination of search.*

*0900-1100 – Search teams out deployed, civilian assets returning from search areas and re-tasked once GPS tracks downloaded.*

*1100 - TULACZ contacted Dr LUCKIN to conduct discussions around suspension of search. (Dr LUCKIN Medical Advisor to Australian Maritime Safety Authority – advised that any chance of survivability has expired and the chance of finding the MP's body given the extensive search conducted, the weather conditions, the terrain and presence of animals, both land and water based, that would have consumed any remains. Concurs with the decision to cease current SAR operations). Decision made to suspend search at midday. TULACZ contacted MP's brother to advise of decision, pending any significant find.*

*1200 – All search teams (SES, QPS and Civilians) returned to search HQ. SES given a field de-brief prior to returning to Bramwell Station. All civilian assets de-briefed and GPS tracks downloaded prior to leaving search HQ.*

*1230 – Search HQ packed down, all assets returned to Bramwell Station and SAR suspended.*

*Please Note:*

- All GPS data has been collated using SARTOPO mapping and can be provided in greater detail.*
- The mapping shows the extensive foot searching that was initially concentrated on the area surrounding the MP's LKP utilising natural boundaries and areas defined by the MP's most likely movements. The initial approach to the search area covered was taken as there was no indications of the MP's direction of travel, and no items of the MP's discovered that would suggest an alternative.*
- Further data is available upon request in the form of extensive drone photogrammetry completed by SES RPAS operators. An aerial photo mosaic is available which covers the entire search area in detail. This has not been included with this document due to the very large file sizes involved.*
- Feedback received during the search from SES and QPS members searching, indicate that the search was also constrained by the difficulties in traversing the sometimes-dense bushland and steep riverbanks.*

## **Search Conclusion:**

The search was conducted in hot, dry, and humid conditions and was primarily focused on ground/foot searching due to the thick bush terrain. Many targeted areas were searched several times by multiple teams, resulting in good coverage and probability of detection (POD) for this search.

The search had extensive aerial coverage from both R44 helicopter and RPAS units, however due to the dense bush coverage it was often difficult to see through the tree canopy.

As can be seen from the above map the search of the LKP was extensively covered with tracks, creeks and roadways forming natural boundaries. This assumed that if the MP had reached a road or creek line then he would be likely to follow it.

The search teams consisted of trained SES land searchers interspersed with police and other civilian personnel with local knowledge of the area. Each team (except for the civilian teams on personal ATV's and Quads) had at least one police officer embedded within it. All teams had and a minimum of 2 GPS handheld units which were used to track the search.

Of note in relation to foot searching in this terrain there had been bushfires in the area which had cleared a significant amount of bushland to the East of the LKP of the MP. A close examination of the GPS data for this search will show the area to the East which appears to have no coverage.

During the 8-day search, no items of interest or clues to the MP's whereabouts were discovered other than those located in the MP's ATV on day one of the search.

An extensive search was carried out over an eight-day period. The searches have been comprehensive and thorough and incorporated all available assets including QPS, SES, Parks and Wildlife, RPAS, Aerial assets and locals who frequent the area. The following points are noted: -

- The probability of detection (POD) in the search area that was covered would be high given the timeframe from MP being reported missing and the assets that were utilised during the search. The limitations of search personnel were primarily the river due to the presence of crocodiles and the varying levels of depth/ lack of visibility into the water.
- Widening the search area is unlikely to significantly increase POD, unless such searching can be confined to a specific, manageable area. This might occur through the location of new items of interest, or through new information about the MP.
- If the MP has entered the water, the POD would have significantly decreased due to predation by crocodiles.
- It is highly unlikely that the MP left the search area by unknown means.

On the 22nd of November 2023, a request for Defence Assistance to the Civil Community (DACC) request was submitted by SAR Co-Ordinator TULACZ for consideration of a further search with the assistance of the Australian Defence Force. On the 1st of December 2023 the following reply was received by Major SWEENEY of the ADF.

*Defence acknowledges the request from the Queensland Police Service (QPS) to provide a 30-person search team (and support teams to sustain operations in the field) to assist with the further search of a person missing near Olive River, QLD since 12 November 2023.*

*The expansion of the search area, along with the remote location and difficult terrain would require the deployment of a substantial Defence contingent over an extended duration in order to achieve a successful non-emergency search. Defence also thoroughly appreciated the discussions and engagement of potential alternative search dates. Unfortunately, following much consideration, given broader ADF commitments and our heightened readiness during the high-risk weather season, the provision of limited Defence resources to support the proposed extended non-emergency search effort is not able to be supported.*



Considering all the above information, it is submitted that all avenues for searching have been exhausted. It is therefore the recommendation of the Reporting Officer that no further searches are warranted in this area unless further information, or items of interest, come to hand.'

### **Police investigation (Queensland Police Service Missing Person's Report)**

QPS was the lead agency in the search for MP. This report was submitted to the Coroner under the Coroner's Act.

'The Missing Person (MP) is a 76-year-old male.

The MP is approximately 5'7" in height, Caucasian and of average build. The MP wears prescription glasses and is reasonably fit and healthy for his age, however, does suffer from type 2 Diabetes, requiring insulin daily (the MP did not take any insulin with him on this trip).

At approximately 7:00am on Sunday the 12th of November 2023, the MP has left Bramwell Station Homestead on an ATV buggy to travel to the Olive River Crossing at Shelburne. The Olive River Crossing is approximately 25km Southeast of the Bramwell Station Homestead, the journey to which takes approximately 1 hour. The MP was travelling by himself and had provisions in the forms of food and drinks in an Esky on the back of the buggy. The MP intended to fish the river.

The MP was visiting from Sydney and although an accomplished angler, he was not at all familiar with this area except for having visited the area the two days prior. The Olive River where the MP disappeared is inhabited with large Saltwater Crocodiles and the surrounding scrubland inhabited by venomous snakes, dingoes, wild cattle, and feral pigs.

The MP was staying at the Bramwell Station Homestead whilst visiting his close family friend. This is the informant for the MP having gone missing. Prior to leaving for the Olive River Crossing, the MP told the Informant that he would be back later on in the afternoon, before Sunset. Unfortunately, the MP did not return to Bramwell Station Homestead by Sunset as planned.

Concerned for the MP's welfare the Informant has then driven his vehicle out to the Olive River Crossing to attempt to locate the MP.

Upon arriving at the Olive River Crossing Informant has located the ATV buggy that the MP had driven to the location parked on the other side of the crossing just off the track, Informant searched around but the MP was nowhere to be seen.

Informant has then walked approximately 500metres up stream of the Olive River Crossing yelling out to the MP, failing to get a response or locate him.

Informant has become extremely concerned for the MP and has then returned to his vehicle and has immediately called his Wife on the Satellite phone who has then contacted Triple Zero to report the MP missing.

Informant has then contacted one of his employees back at Bramwell Station and told him to gather as many people as possible and to attend the location and help search for the MP.

At approximately 9:30pm approximately 8 workers / visitors from Bramwell Station have arrived at the Olive River Crossing to assist with the Search of the MP. Those searching for the MP were walking up and down the Riverbanks with torches and calling out to the MP.

Rescue Helicopter 700 (Torres Strait Rescue Helicopter) has also attended and has conducted a flyover of the area however failed to locate any sign of the MP.

The persons in attendance have continued searching for the MP until Midnight, by which time the search conditions became unsafe, forcing the search efforts to conclude for the night.

The search recommenced the next morning and then continued until the 19th of November 2023.

The MP flew into Weipa Airport in the afternoon of Thursday the 9th of November 2023 on Qantas flight QF2478. Witnesses travelled from Bramwell Station to Weipa and have picked the MP and one of their employees up from the airport.

The MP drove the ATV from Bramwell Station to the Olive River Crossing on the 10th and 11th of November 2023 to fish and would return late in the afternoon.

On the 11th of November 2023, being the day prior to his going missing, the MP had returned to the Bramwell Station Homestead quite late, arriving at about 6pm.

On the 12th of November 2023, prior to going missing the MP had advised Informant that he didn't have much success with the fishing the previous two days, and that he intended to return to the Olive River Crossing to do some more fishing. The MP advised Informant that he might be back a little bit later because he wanted to make the most of his last day fishing before returning home. The MP advised Informant at this time that he would be back before sunset.

The Informant advised Police that the MP was aware of the presence of Saltwater Crocodiles in that area.

The Informant advised that when he located the ATV, he located the MP's esky which contained his drinks and morning tea. The MP's spare fishing rod and reel were also located in the ATV.

The MP did not have a mobile telephone, GPS, or any other electronic device with him.

## **Circumstances of disappearance**

### **Clothing worn by missing person when last seen:**

The informant, who was the last person to see the MP, could not recall the exact type of shirt the MP was wearing when he went missing. Based on what the MP was wearing the previous two days when he went fishing, Informant believes the MP was wearing a basic long sleeve button up fishing shirt possibly beige in colour which had no big symbols or motifs on it.

Informant states he knows the MP was wearing long blue pants because the MP was going to wear shorts, and that Informant's wife told the MP about snakes in the area, resulting in the MP deciding to wear long pants.

Informant states the MP wore blue-coloured joggers which he thought were a blue / light blue / navy blue with a greyish sole. Informant states the MP wore a cap rather than a big wide brimmed hat.

Informant states that rather than carry a backpack, the MP carried his lures and other fishing equipment (pliers, fishing line etc) in a beach fishing style bait bucket which attached to his waist like a belt.

**Physical description of missing person when last seen:**

The MP is approximately 5'7" in height (170cm), Caucasian with a tanned complexion and is of an average build.

The MP has brown-coloured eyes and a beard.

The MP wears prescription glasses and is reasonably fit and healthy for his age.

The MP does suffer from type 2 Diabetes, requiring insulin daily. The MP did not take any insulin with him on this trip.

**Mental state:**

Witnesses say that the MP was a happy go lucky type of bloke and was happiest when he was fishing.

On the day of the MP's disappearance witnesses have stated that there were no concerns regarding the mental state of the MP, he was just going fishing as he had done the previous two days.

The MP's Brother who knows him best states that the MP has never mentioned Suicide or self-harm to me in the past, and that the MP was a very optimistic person and loves life.

**Description of clothing/toiletries taken or missing:**

Nil clothing or toiletries belonging to the MP were missing from the room he was staying in at the Bramwell Station Homestead.

**Mode of transport:**

The MP was driving an All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) 4x4 Buggy which belonged to Bramwell Station.

**History of disappearance:**

There are no previous QPRIME or Interstate Police records of the MP going missing.

The MP's son mentions in his Statement that his mother told him a story of a time before he was born. The MP and Mother were visiting family in the Blue Mountains. The MP left at 6am to hike upstream to go trout fishing. Mother states that she became worried when the MP hadn't arrived back after lunch, until finally the MP turned up at 4pm with four small trout.

**Probable destination:**

The MP had arrived at his intended destination, being the Olive River Crossing for the purpose of fishing. He had also visited this same location the previous two days to go fishing.

**Antecedents****Life and habits:**

The MP is approximately 5'7" in height, Caucasian and of average build. The MP wears prescription glasses and is reasonably fit and healthy for his age. The MP does suffer from type 2 Diabetes, requiring insulin daily (he did not take any insulin with him on this trip).

Enquiries conducted by the Missing Person Unit reveal that the MP was also supplied medication for Hypertension, High Cholesterol & Type 2 Diabetes. Family and friends of MP confirm that the MP does in fact suffer from Type 2 Diabetes and requires daily insulin injections to manage.

Approximately 7:00am on Sunday the 12th of November 2023, the (MP) has left Bramwell Station Homestead on an ATV buggy to travel approximately 25km (about 1 hour) Southeast to the Olive River Crossing at Shelburne. The MP was travelling by himself and had also done so the two days prior to the day of his disappearance.

The MP who is an avid and experienced fisherman was travelling to this location with the intention to fish for the day.

The type of fishing the MP was doing involved him walking the banks of the Olive River and casting lures as close as possible to large snags (trees that have fallen). This type of Fishing would involve the MP having to get quite close to the water's edge, traversing the fallen trees and other terrain. The banks of the Olive River where the MP would have been fishing can become extremely steep and there are sections of the river that are quite deep.

Due to the thick terrain and steep banks this could be considered extremely hazardous to any person. Due to the MP's age and health, the remote location and the presence of large Saltwater crocodiles, such hazards become exacerbated.

**Background, domestic situation, family history:**

It is advised that he lives alone in a village for older people where he has been for the past 4 years.

The only family the MP has in Australia is his Biological Brother and his grandchildren, he has a cousin and her two children, and the MP's Biological Son who he was somewhat estranged from, however had recently started to reconnect with again.

The MP plays tennis a couple times a week and fishes nearly every day near where he lives in Sydney.

The MP previously hosted a radio show on 2GB which was all about fishing.

The MP has coffee and socialised with his brother and a group of mutual friends most Wednesdays.

According to the MP's Brother there had been an apparent, albeit it a little, decline with the MP's mental health in the months leading up to his disappearance. Although never properly diagnosed, the MP's Brother states that last year the MP started to show some small signs of dementia. The MP's Brother states the MP would be forgetful and unsure about plans that he had agreed to in the next week or so & having to repeat things to him.

**Work history, friends and associates:**

The MP is retired however was trained as a Chemical Engineer. The MP previously hosted a Radio fishing show on 2GB in Sydney. The MP and his brother are extremely close and see one another weekly and have a network of close friends.

**Drug use/substance/alcohol consumption:**

The MP was not a user of Drugs or other substances and would only have the occasional beer.

**Police records, criminal history:**

The MP has no Criminal History within any State or Territory Jurisdiction.

## Findings

There is no evidence or information to suggest the MP has met with foul play or had any grievances with anyone at Bramwell Station at the time of his disappearance, and there is no information to suggest he was suicidal. The MP stayed with close family friends being Informant and wife and their children in their house and had limited contact with any of the employees of Bramwell Station.

The weather at the time of the MP's disappearance was extremely hot and humid and is known locally as the build up to the wet season.

The maximum temperature recorded during this period at this location was 31.8 degrees, however recorded temperatures at the MP's last known position were closer to 35 degrees on two consecutive days. The temperature was consistently rising every day since the MP's disappearance.

Although the MP was an accomplished and avid angler down in New South Wales, he was not familiar with the area known as the Olive River Crossing except for having visited the two days prior. The river area is inhabited with large Saltwater crocodiles and the surrounding scrubland is inhabited by venomous snakes, dingoes, wild cattle, and feral pigs.

The type of fishing the MP was doing involved him walking the steep banks of the Olive River and casting lures as close as possible to large snags (trees that have fallen). This type of Fishing would involve the MP having to get quite close to the water's edge, traversing the fallen trees and other terrain. The banks of the Olive River where the MP would have been fishing can become extremely steep and there are sections of the river that are quite deep. The water is a dark tannin-stained colour, with limited visibility, which would make it easy for a Saltwater crocodile to remain unseen and unnoticed while stalking the MP.

Police engaged the Dept of Environment and Science to conduct crocodile surveying in the area the MP went missing. During these surveys two crocodiles were observed in the immediate area where the MP was supposed to be fishing. One of these crocodiles was estimated to be 2.5 – 3 metres in length and was sighted approximately 15 metres from the MP's last known position while the second crocodile was estimated to be approximately 1.5metres in length and was located approximately 40metres from the MP's last known position.

Throughout the search, searchers found numerous crocodile slides including evidence of a large crocodile in the form of a large slide approximately 100 metres East of the MP's last known position.

Witness A who is contracted to control the population of pigs and other feral animals on Bramwell Station provided a Statement to Police.

Witness A states that in his 9 years of hunting the property he has seen plenty of large crocodiles in the area directly where the MP's buggy was located. Witness A showed Police a video he filmed a couple of years ago of a large crocodile he estimated to be 3.8metres in length not far from where the MP went missing. Witness A further stated that he regularly sees this same crocodile and can confirm it has gotten a lot bigger. He also states that over the years he has seen hundreds of Brown snakes and Taipans and has seen plenty of big crocodile slides along the riverbank in the area where the MP went missing.

Witness B who is also contracted to control the population of pigs and other feral animals on Bramwell Station provided a Statement to Police. Witness B states that he has seen many Crocodiles in the Olive River around where the MP's buggy was found.

States there are a couple of big water holes upstream from where the buggy was found where crocs live. States in the 10 years he has been hunting the property, he has seen probably 10 crocodiles in the creek where the MP's buggy was found, some of them big enough that he wouldn't mess with them. Witness B states that Witness A showed him footage of a 4m crocodile in Thompsons lagoon which isn't far from the MP last know position. Witness B also states that he remembers Witness A telling him how he saw a slide where the big crocodile in Thompsons Lagoon slides back and forth across land into the Olive River and back into the lagoon not far from the MP's last know location. Witness B states about 5 years ago, he hunted downstream from MP last known position, and he could hear the crocodiles entering the water from the high banks.

On the 25th of November 2023 14 days after the MP went missing Detective Sergeant Luke RUSSELL of Weipa Criminal Investigation Branch attended the Olive River to see if the water level had dropped and to see if anything belonging to the MP may have surfaced / become visible since his disappearance. Approximately 800metres downstream from the area where the MP's buggy was located Detective Sergeant RUSSELL observed a large crocodile estimated to be 3 - 3.5metres in length. On this same day Detective Sergeant RUSSELL observed a mob of approximately 20-30 feral pigs approximately 100metres downstream from where the MP's buggy was located.

The fact that no sign of the MP was located during the extensive and thorough search leads me to suspect the MP has entered the water and has been consumed by a crocodile.

Whilst the Dept of Environment and Science were unable to locate any crocodiles displaying signs of taking a human, it is still highly probable given the fact that there are large crocodiles which inhabit that section of water. It is also highly probable given the type of fishing the MP was doing which involved him getting close to the water's edge and traversing snags in the form of fallen trees and steep banks and flicking small lures as close to these snags as possible.

I firmly believe the MP has entered the water while fishing the banks of the Olive River.

I wholly believe there are three scenarios which could cause the MP to enter the water:

1. The MP has been dragged into the water after being attacked by a Saltwater crocodile.
2. The MP has lost his balance while fishing and traversing snags.
3. The MP has suffered some type of medical episode associated with his age, type 2 Diabetes, Hypertension, High Cholesterol, and the extreme temperatures experienced in the area at the time.

Once in the water I believe the MP has been taken and killed, and likely consumed, by a large Saltwater crocodile inhabiting the upper reaches of the Olive River.

It is my recommendation that consideration be given to the fact that the MP is now deceased, as a result of Saltwater crocodile attack.'

## **Autopsy**

MP's body not recovered.

## **Report of Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation**

The expert opinion of the Department was sought in relation to crocodile activity in the area and the police theory that MP had been likely taken by a crocodile.

The report of the Department stated,

### **'Department's Response to Sightings**

The department responded to all sightings in the Cape York area (including the subject Region) in accordance with its SOP, the Crocodile Management Plan and the Nature Conservation (estuarine Crocodile) Conservation Plan.

There were no crocodile sightings reported to the department in the Region in the 12 months before or after MP's disappearance. Moreover, all sightings reported to the department in the broader Cape York area in the year prior to the disappearance were categorised at Priority 3 reports.

### **Opinion regarding Cause of Death**

#### **Search and Rescue Operations**

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) is the lead agency for search and rescue (SAR) operations and missing persons investigations.

From time to time, QPS requests QPWS&P assistance with SAR investigations due to the expertise of QPWS&P wildlife rangers.

The State Emergency Services (SES) are also routinely called upon to assist with SAR operations.

#### **Search and Rescue Operation for MP**

On Monday 13 November 2023, QPS notified QPWS&P's Northern Wildlife Operations Teams of a missing person (MP) at the Region and requested assistance with the SAR operation.

Between 13 November and 18 November 2023, QPWS&P wildlife rangers assisted with the SAR operation led by QPS. SES also assisted QPS.

As the lead agency, QPS will hold any records pertaining to the SAR operation.

#### **Search Methods used by QPWS&P Wildlife Rangers**

Between 13 and 18 November 2023, teams of wildlife rangers undertook extensive searches of the upper reaches of the Olive River during the day and night. These searches covered both upstream and downstream of the crossing where MP had left an all-terrain vehicle and his belongings and traversed the river and along the banks.

QPWS&P wildlife rangers were looking for any evidence of an estuarine crocodile being involved in MP's disappearance. This included searching for:

- a) Any crocodiles present in the Region at the time;
- b) Any signs of recent crocodile activity in the Region, including slide marks, track marks or other markings on the river bed;
- c) An 'attack' site; or
- d) Other evidence relating to MP or his belongings.

QPWS&P wildlife rangers largely conducted the search on foot, rather than by boat, due to the environmental conditions in the Region at the time. Where possible, sections of the Olive River were further assessed by means of a small vessel and the riverbed was dragged with a grappling hook.

The SAR operation took place at the tail end of the dry season and the very beginning of the wet season. The upper reaches of the Olive River were quite narrow at the time, averaging between two to six metres in width. There were many fallen branches and trees across the river and/or submerged in the waterbody. The pools in the river were translucent and shallow, with some smaller sections being two to three metres deep.

QPS and/or SES also used drones to assist with the SAR operation by providing an aerial shot of the Region.

### **Findings from the Search**

The SAR operation did not locate any evidence of human remains, belongings or clothing (other than the belongings left with the all-terrain vehicle).

The environmental conditions in the Olive River at the time of the SAR operation made it highly unlikely that, if a crocodile large enough to kill a human was involved in MP's appearance, it would have been able to avoid detection during QPWS&P wildlife ranger's search. These conditions also meant that any signs of an attack or a struggle by a person would have been clearly evident to the QPWS&P wildlife rangers undertaking the searches.

Over the six day search, only two estuarine crocodiles were sighted – one estimated to be around 1.5 metres in length and the other around one metre in length. There was no evidence to support that either of these crocodiles were recently involved in an attack on a person. That conclusion was reached on the basis that:

- a) QPWS&P wildlife rangers are trained to recognise the behavioural traits of an estuarine crocodile after a successful attack on prey has occurred. Those behavioural traits include retreating to isolated areas away from the 'attack site' and from other crocodiles/wildlife, basking on river/creek beds, and bold aggressive or territorial behaviours towards people or wildlife approaching the crocodile.
- b) A crocodile's stomach will also be visibly larger after it has eaten prey.
- c) The QPWS&P wildlife rangers assessed that the two estuarine crocodiles sighted were not displaying those typical traits.
- d) The two estuarine crocodiles sighted were small in size and it is highly unlikely that animals of such a small size would predate on an adult person.

### **Statement Expressing the Department's Opinion to the Suspected Death of MP**

Despite the extensive SAR operation, no evidence was identified by QPWS&P as to the possible cause of MP's disappearance or suspected death.

As recorded above, there were no crocodile sightings to the department in the Region in the 12 months before or after MP's disappearance.

For those reasons, the department's opinion is that the suspected death of MP is unable to be determined by the department having regard to the evidence presently available to it.'



The Department was provided with the QPS Report of 10 June 2025 for comment but responded in further correspondence to this office in July 2025, that it had no further remarks to make about MP's disappearance.

### **Coroners Conclusions**

There is a competing view expressed between the Department of Environment and Detective Inspector Russell of QPS about the likely involvement of crocodile activity in the disappearance and presumed death of MP.

The Department, through its division, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services is responsible for the management and conservation of wildlife including crocodiles. To assist it in the discharge of this function, it relies upon the public submitting information through an App, Website, telephone call or a direct report to a ranger or to the Department. On receipt of a report, a sighting receives a categorization, resulting in an action plan.

This system therefore is dependent upon the adequacy and integrity of the reports by members of the public.

The area where MP went missing is not a high traffic area for members of the public. It is technically land owned by the Queensland government which operates as a tourist park. Nonetheless it is a remote location, not easily accessible by any means.

Therefore, there would be a significantly reduced opportunity for reports of crocodile sightings to be made. Further, those who do attend the area may not be inclined to make a report for a variety of reasons.

It seems likely that the accuracy of the Department's information is impacted by the low level of human traffic so as to generate a false picture that there are no crocodiles because there have been no reports of sightings.

For this reason and because of the detailed and recent account given, I am inclined on balance to rely upon the direct evidence of experienced officer Russell, the author of the QPS supplementary report dated 10 June 2025. That evidence is consistent with and allows for the probability that MP was taken by a large crocodile while land fishing, either on the riverbank or after falling into the water.

I find that MP disappeared in and around the location of the ATV buggy he drove to that location on 12 November 2023 and has met with misadventure in the water involving a crocodile. I declare him to have deceased on that date.

### **Findings required by s.45**

<b>Identity of the deceased –</b>	MP
<b>How he died –</b>	Unknown
<b>Place of death –</b>	Bramwell Station Homestead SHELBURNE QLD 4874 AUSTRALIA
<b>Date of death–</b>	12 November 2023
<b>Cause of death –</b>	Animal Attack, likely crocodile.

I close the investigations.

Christine Roney  
Coroner