



CORONERS COURT OF QUEENSLAND

FINDINGS OF INVESTIGATION

CITATION:	Non-inquest findings into the death of Jayden Joseph Penno-Tompsett
TITLE OF COURT:	Coroners Court
JURISDICTION:	Mackay
DATE:	21 August 2026
FILE NO:	2018/527
FINDINGS OF:	Wayne Pennell Mining and Resources Coroner and Northern Coroner
CATCHWORDS:	CORONERS: Jayden Joseph Penno-Tompsett reported missing at Breddan, Charters Towers in January 2018 – extensive search of a rural area and police investigation – inquest held in 2021 – missing person not located when the inquest was held – coronial findings that missing person died of exposure to the elements at Breddan on an unknown date between 31 December 2017 and 3 January 2018 – police investigation into missing person remained open – skeletal remains located within a close proximity of original search area – DNA testing confirmed the skeletal remains belonged to Jayden Joseph Penno-Tompsett – State Coroner directed the coronial investigation be reopened – representations received from family who did not agree with aspects of the 2021 coronial findings – representations did not identify any fresh, compelling, or previously unavailable evidence capable of undermining or materially contradicting coronial findings – autopsy findings by forensic pathologist were not inconsistent with coronial findings of cause of death by exposure to elements – insufficient justification to alter any original coronial finding concerning the facts, circumstances, or events, including the finding as to the cause of death – coronial investigation now closed.

Background

- [1] An inquest into the disappearance of Jayden Joseph Penno-Tompsett (Jayden) was conducted over three hearing days in February, April, and May 2021 before Coroner Wilson (as her Honour then was). Findings were delivered on 7 May 2021.
- [2] I have carefully reviewed those findings. They comprehensively set out the circumstances surrounding Jayden's disappearance, the subsequent police investigation, and the evidence adduced during the inquest.
- [3] As outlined in the findings, several days before New Year's Eve 2017, Jayden and Lucas Tattersall (Lucas) departed Newcastle in Lucas's red Nissan Pulsar sedan, intending to travel to Cairns. They planned to take the inland route, a journey of almost 2,000 kilometres, and arrive in time for New Year's Eve celebrations with a group of approximately 15 to 16 friends who had travelled from Newcastle.
- [4] Prior to departing Newcastle, Jayden and Lucas were in possession of a quantity of illicit substances, including methamphetamine, MDMA and ice. Lucas gave evidence that during the journey Jayden consumed a significant quantity of ice, which he estimated at approximately 3.6 grams. Lucas further stated that Jayden had not slept for about four days and became increasingly erratic and unpredictable after the pair stopped for fuel in Charters Towers. According to Lucas, this change in behaviour coincided with Jayden's belief that he had lost his supply of drugs.
- [5] Jayden and Lucas arrived in Charters Towers at approximately 3:00am on 31 December 2017. CCTV footage obtained from the Puma Service Station on the outskirts of Charters Towers captured both men exiting their vehicle before subsequently driving away. Coroner Wilson observed that, from that point onward, the only direct account of the circumstances preceding Jayden's disappearance was that provided by Lucas.
- [6] Lucas told the inquest that Jayden drove around Charters Towers and its surrounding areas for approximately five to six hours before stopping on the side of a dirt road. During the initial police investigation, that location was identified as being near the intersection of Acacia Vale Road and Stockroute Road at Breddan, approximately 11 kilometres from Charters Towers. The location is remote and well removed from the principal routes that would ordinarily be taken to travel from Charters Towers to Cairns.
- [7] Upon arriving at that location, Jayden walked away from the vehicle, damaging his mobile telephone in the process. Lucas initially followed him and attempted to persuade him to calm down and continue their journey to Cairns. Lucas recalled that Jayden responded by saying, "leave me the fuck alone", and indicated that he needed time to sit and think. Lucas then returned to the vehicle.
- [8] Coroner Wilson found it open on the evidence to infer that, at the commencement of the journey, Jayden was mentally vulnerable and experiencing a period of instability. Her Honour accepted that, when viewed against the background of his drug use and his

belief that he had lost his drugs, Jayden had become emotionally unsettled and prone to outbursts immediately before his disappearance.¹

- [9] Lucas also gave evidence that Jayden was particularly distressed at the prospect of arriving in Cairns without the missing drugs. According to Lucas, Jayden stated, "you don't know what those people are capable of", explaining that the drugs had been purchased on credit and that he owed money to others.
- [10] Lucas was aware that when Jayden left the vehicle, he was carrying his wallet and a quantity of MDMA. Lucas last observed Jayden walking towards a fenced paddock. Jayden did not return and, despite Lucas conducting a search of the surrounding area for several hours, he was unable to locate him. The weather conditions that day were extremely hot, with official records recording a maximum temperature of approximately 40 degrees Celsius.
- [11] After exhausting his supply of water, Lucas attended a nearby property at 684 Stockroute Road owned by Lionel Murphy (Mr Murphy). Mr Murphy's property is approximately twelve kilometres from Charters Towers. He told the inquest that, on 31 December 2017, he encountered a young man, aged about 20 years, carrying a water bottle, and driving a red Nissan Pulsar. Mr Murphy's description clearly matched Lucas. When asked where he was heading, Lucas stated that he was looking for either his sister or his sister's friend, although Mr Murphy could not recall which. After providing Lucas with water, Mr Murphy directed him either back to the Flinders Highway or towards Charters Towers.
- [12] Lucas stated that he continued searching the surrounding area for Jayden without success. He became increasingly concerned and called out Jayden's name repeatedly. However, after several hours of searching, his vehicle was running low on fuel and he returned to Charters Towers to refuel.
- [13] Lucas then resumed his journey towards Cairns, travelling as far as Calcium, where he spoke by telephone with Tim Westcott (Mr Westcott), one of the friends waiting in Cairns. Calcium is located on the Flinders Highway on the way to Townsville, approximately 90 kilometres from Charters Towers.
- [14] At Mr Westcott's urging, Lucas returned to Charters Towers and conducted a further search for Jayden. When those efforts also proved unsuccessful, Lucas again contacted members of the group in Cairns and was encouraged to continue his journey. After further unsuccessful searches, he ultimately travelled to Cairns, arriving at approximately 9:00pm on 31 December 2017.
- [15] The police investigation subsequently confirmed Lucas's account of returning to Charters Towers through Queensland Department of Transport number plate recognition data, which recorded Lucas's vehicle at Calcium at 11:46am and at Charters Towers at 12:45pm. His vehicle was later recorded passing back through Calcium at

¹ Inquest Findings, page 6, [26].

2:47pm and then later in Cardwell at 7:04pm, consistent with his reported arrival in Cairns at about 9:00pm.

- [16] Jayden's disappearance was not reported to police until 3 January 2018, when his parents notified authorities that he was missing. A formal police investigation commenced later that afternoon.
- [17] Coroner Wilson found that Lucas's account, as provided in sworn statements, recorded interviews and his oral evidence before the inquest, remained substantially consistent in relation to the significant issues. Her Honour further found that there was no evidence that Lucas had caused harm to Jayden.²
- [18] Jayden's mother expressed a longstanding concern that his disappearance may have been linked to retaliation or retribution arising from an unpaid drug debt. However, Coroner Wilson found that there was no evidence to support that proposition. Nor was there evidence to suggest that any persons of interest had travelled to Charters Towers, or followed Jayden there, or were waiting for him in either Charters Towers or Cairns.³
- [19] In accordance with section 45 of the *Coroners Act 2003* (Qld) (the Act), Coroner Wilson ultimately found that Jayden was deceased and that, on the balance of probabilities, he died as a result of exposure to the elements at Breddan on an unknown date between 31 December 2017 and 3 January 2018. Following the delivery of those findings, the police investigation into Jayden's disappearance remained open.

New evidence – forensic pathology

- [20] On the afternoon of 20 October 2025, the owners of Springvale Station, a rural property located at 1117 Weir Road, Breddan, were mustering cattle when they discovered human remains, namely a skull, on the property. Springvale Station is situated approximately fourteen kilometres from Charters Towers and lies in close proximity to the area originally searched for Jayden in January 2018.
- [21] The discovery was reported to police, who attended the scene and observed the skull lying in open terrain amongst leaf litter and grass. Between 20 and 25 October 2025, police conducted an extensive search of both the immediate area and the surrounding locality. That search resulted in the recovery of additional human skeletal remains, together with numerous animal bones, scattered across an area of approximately 50 square metres described as an animal habitat. The human remains recovered included portions of the scapula, left tibia, left femur, right femur, ankle bone, left and right hip bones, a mandible and a single tooth.
- [22] As previously noted in these findings, Lucas was identified as having attended the property of Mr Murphy at 684 Stockroute Road on 31 December 2017. The location at which the skeletal remains were discovered is approximately 2.9 kilometres from that property.

² Inquest Findings, pages 7-8, [36].

³ Inquest Findings, pages 11-12, [61] – [63].

- [23] Notwithstanding the skeletal remains exhibited features consistent with prolonged exposure to environmental conditions, the subsequent forensic examination confirmed that the remains were human. CT imaging revealed no definitive evidence of peri-mortem injury. The post-mortem examination identified twenty human bones and bone fragments, together with thirteen teeth. Examination also revealed that the right femur was approximately 10 millimetres longer than the left and displayed anterior bowing, together with a circular defect affecting the articular surface of the lateral condyle. No discernible evidence of peri-mortem injury was identified.
- [24] Anthropological assessment indicated that the remains were consistent with those of a Caucasian male under 30 years of age, with an estimated height of between 176 and 185 centimetres. The investigation further established that Jayden had sustained a fracture to his right femur in the region of the knee when he was approximately eight or nine years old, and fractures to both arms when he was aged 15 or 16 years.
- [25] DNA comparison testing was subsequently undertaken using a known biological sample and a segment of bone recovered from the remains. That analysis strongly supported the conclusion that the remains were those of Jayden.
- [26] Reconstruction of the skeletal remains identified the presence of the cranium, mandible with a separate fragment, a partial left scapula, left humerus, left and right hemipelves, both femurs, both tibias, a left calcaneus, together with multiple additional bone fragments. The forensic pathologist considered the remains to be consistent with a single individual, noting that there was no obvious duplication of skeletal elements, although fragmentation prevented this from being definitively excluded. Upon reconstruction, the bones articulated appropriately with one another, and no congenital abnormalities were identified.
- [27] The forensic pathologist also noted a suspected acquired deformity affecting the right femur. While a number of fractures appeared to have occurred post-mortem, the possibility that some fractures may have been sustained in the peri-mortem period could not be entirely excluded.
- [28] The right femur exhibited features suggestive of a previous fracture and surgical repair, including a healed defect of the lateral condyle, a bowing deformity and a discrepancy in femoral length. Those findings were consistent with Jayden's documented medical history.
- [29] The forensic pathologist identified no injuries that would positively indicate a traumatic cause of death. However, such a cause could not be excluded due to the absence of a substantial portion of the skeleton. The forensic pathologist further explained that fatal injuries may occur without leaving detectable skeletal trauma and that natural disease processes could not be excluded because of the condition of the remains. Toxicological analysis was not possible and, accordingly, a toxicological cause of death could not be excluded.

- [30] In expressing an opinion as to the cause of death, the forensic pathologist stated that the findings were not inconsistent with Coroner Wilson’s conclusion that Jayden died as a result of exposure to the elements. However, because alternative causes of death could not be reasonably excluded on the available pathological evidence, the forensic pathologist opined that the cause of death was ultimately unascertained.

Identification confirmed

- [31] In order to expedite identification inquiries, police sought to undertake radiological examinations and compare the findings with known medical records believed to relate to Jayden.
- [32] To assist in that process, Jayden’s mother provided information to the Queensland Police Service Missing Persons Unit regarding the location of potentially relevant medical records. In addition, the State Coroner liaised with the New South Wales Coroners Court and sought assistance in locating and obtaining medical records relating to Jayden.⁴
- [33] Subsequently, police sought the coroner’s authorisation to forward samples for DNA analysis to the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine.⁵ This course was considered necessary because radiological comparisons undertaken by Queensland Forensic Scientific Services did not provide sufficient detail to permit a positive identification. Dental comparison was also unable to facilitate identification due to the condition of the remains and the limited number of teeth recovered.
- [34] As both dental identification and radiological comparison produced inconclusive results, it became necessary to obtain bone samples for DNA extraction and analysis. Fortunately, during the original police investigation into Jayden’s disappearance, a kinship reference sample had been obtained from his father. That sample provided a basis for comparative DNA testing.
- [35] The subsequent kinship comparison conducted by the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine confirmed the skeletal remains were those of the biological male child of the individual who had provided the reference sample, namely Jayden’s father.⁶ Having regard to that evidence, I am satisfied, and so find, that the remains discovered at Springvale Station, Charters Towers, between 20 October 2025 and 25 October 2025 are those of Jayden.
- [36] Following confirmation of the identification, Jayden’s father conveyed his appreciation to officers of the Queensland Police Service and Western Australia Police Force for the professionalism, dedication and compassion demonstrated throughout the investigation into Jayden’s disappearance and the subsequent efforts that led to Jayden’s remains being located and identified.⁷

⁴ On 29 October 2025.

⁵ On 5 December 2025.

⁶ On 27 January 2026.

⁷ Police spoke with Jayden’s father on 28 January 2026.

- [37] When Jayden's mother was advised of the positive identification of his remains,⁸ she was equally appreciative of the efforts to locate Jayden but indicated that she did not agree with aspects of Coroner Wilson's findings and said that she would provide further representations explaining her concerns.
- [38] On 6 April 2026, the Coroners Court received an email from Jayden's mother in which she set out several matters arising from the earlier inquest and findings with which she disagreed. However, while those concerns were carefully considered, her correspondence did not identify any fresh, compelling, or previously unavailable evidence capable of undermining or materially contradicting Coroner Wilson's findings.

Reopening of investigation

- [39] On 19 May 2026, the State Coroner directed that the coronial investigation be reopened on the basis that the circumstances of Jayden's death warranted further investigation following the discovery of his skeletal remains.
- [40] The Act permits a non-inquest investigation to be reopened by the State Coroner, the investigating coroner, or by the investigating coroner at the direction of the State Coroner where the circumstances of the death warrant further investigation or where new evidence has emerged that casts doubt upon the findings previously made. The Act also empowers the State Coroner to reopen an investigation, or to direct another coroner to do so, where it is considered that the findings of the investigating coroner could not reasonably be supported by the available evidence.⁹
- [41] The State Coroner's Guidelines provide that, in practice, the reopening of an investigation is generally considered where the coroner or the State Coroner is called upon to assess representations made by family members who are dissatisfied with the findings, or where new evidence emerges after the findings have been delivered.
- [42] In responding to a request to reopen an investigation, a coroner should provide clear reasons for any decision not to reopen the investigation, or for any decision to confine a reopening to particular issues. Where an investigation is reopened, or further inquiries are undertaken, the coroner must consider whether the original findings require amendment and, if so, issue amended findings accordingly.
- [43] Having given careful consideration to Coroner Wilson's findings, it is apparent that, in making the determinations required by the Act,¹⁰ the evidence before the inquest established that Jayden was deceased and that, on the balance of probabilities, his death resulted from exposure to the elements at Breddan on an unknown date between 31 December 2017 and 3 January 2018.

⁸ On 28 January 2026.

⁹ *Coroners Act 2003* (Qld), s 50B.

¹⁰ *Coroners Act 2003* (Qld), s 45(2).

- [44] Since Coroner Wilson delivered those findings, human remains were discovered on 20 October 2025 in the general vicinity of the location where Lucas last saw Jayden. Those remains have since been conclusively identified as those of Jayden and confirm that he is deceased.
- [45] The question that arises is whether the discovery of Jayden's remains provides a basis to revisit Coroner Wilson's finding as to the cause of his death. The resolution of that issue necessarily depends upon the forensic evidence obtained from the examination of Jayden's remains and whether that evidence is capable of contributing to, or assisting with, a determination of the cause of his death.
- [46] As noted at paragraphs [29] and [30] above, the forensic pathologist concluded that, although a traumatic cause of death could not be excluded, there were no pathological features identified on examination to suggest that Jayden died as a result of trauma. The forensic pathologist further opined that Coroner Wilson's finding that Jayden's death was caused by exposure to the elements was not inconsistent with the autopsy findings. However, because alternative causes of death could not be reasonably excluded, the pathologist's opinion was that his cause of death was unascertained.
- [47] Having carefully considered the earlier coronial findings, the discovery of Jayden's remains, the opinions subsequently expressed by the forensic pathologist, and the absence of any fresh, compelling, or contradictory evidence, I am satisfied that there is no proper basis upon which to amend the previous findings, or to reopen the investigation. Accordingly, I find there is insufficient justification to alter any finding concerning the facts, circumstances, or events leading to Jayden's death, including the finding as to the cause of his death.
- [48] On behalf of the Court, I offer my deepest and sincerest condolences to Jayden's mother, father, his family, and his friends, and I close my investigation.

The image shows a handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Wayne Pennell', next to the official seal of the Coroners Court of Queensland. The seal is circular with a purple border containing the text 'CORONERS COURT' at the top and 'OF QUEENSLAND' at the bottom. In the center of the seal is a purple crown.

Wayne Pennell
Mining and Resources Coroner and Northern Coroner