

# CORONERS COURT OF QUEENSLAND

CITATION: *Non-inquest into the death of Francis Robert Falappi*

FILE NO: 2025/2116

TITLE OF COURT: Coroners Court

PROCEEDING: Coronial Investigation

JURISDICTION: Cairns

DELIVERED ON: 19 May 2025

DELIVERED AT: Cairns

CORONER: S. Williams

FINDINGS: **Identity of the deceased:** Francis Robert Falappi

**How he died:** Francis Falappi died while attempting to navigate a drop on a double black diamond singletrack while mountain bike riding.

**Place of death:** Worlds Downhill Track,  
Smithfield Mountain Bike Park,  
SMITHFIELD, QUEENSLAND  
AUSTRALIA 4878

**Date of death:** 9 May 2025

**Cause of death:** Head and neck injuries due to mountain bike collision (rider).

CATCHWORDS: CORONERS –NON-INQUEST FINDINGS – mountain bike riding – Smithfield Mountain Bike Park – Macalister Range – Far North Queensland - Worlds Downhill – singletrack – double black diamond - drop – invert – hardpacked - Trail Difficulty Rating System - Australian Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that these findings contain the name of a deceased person. Readers are warned that there may be words and descriptions that may be culturally distressing.*

- [1] Francis (“Frank”) Robert Falappi died on 9 May 2025. At the time of his death Frank was a serving member of the Queensland Police Service.
- [2] Frank was a mountain bike enthusiast. He had ridden mountain bikes for over 25 years. Frank’s mountain biking experience included recreational riding, competition riding, and volunteer work for Cairns Mountain Bike Club & Tableland Cycle Sports Inc.
- [3] These findings address the circumstances of Frank’s death and what caused it.

### **Why a coronial investigation?**

- [4] The coronial jurisdiction was enlivened because Frank’s death was reportable under the *Coroner’s Act 2003* (Queensland).

### **What is the role of the coroner?**

- [5] A coroner must determine who died, when and where that occurred and what caused the person to die.
- [6] The role of a coroner is not to apportion blame for a death. A coroner must not include in findings any statement that a person is, or may be –
- a. guilty of an offence; or
  - b. civilly liable for something.

### **What happened to Frank?**

- [7] On 9 May 2025, Frank went to the Smithfield Mountain Bike Park, at the foothills of the Macalister Range, north of Cairns. Smithfield Mountain Bike Park consists of 30 to 40 kilometres of cross-country trails and a world cup level downhill mountain bike course.
- [8] Frank and two friends arrived at the park at 9am. Shortly after, they left the trailhead and commenced riding Worlds Downhill (“Worlds DH”) Track.

#### *Worlds Downhill Track, Smithfield Mountain Bike Park*

- [9] Worlds DH Track is a singletrack downhill trail. The trail has been graded, according to its relative technical difficulty, using the Trail Difficulty Rating System (TDRS). Worlds DH is graded a double black diamond mountain bike trail.
- [10] The Australian Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines describe a double black diamond trail as an extremely difficult trail incorporating very steep gradients, highly variable surface, and unavoidable, severe obstacles. All sections in a double black diamond graded mountain

bike trail are extremely challenging and the trails involve extreme levels of risk and exposure.

- [11] The Australian Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines describe double black diamond trails as suitable for highly experienced mountain bikers who are used to physically demanding routes.

#### *Frank's riding experience*

- [12] Frank was an experienced mountain biker. He had national and international accreditations in mountain bike coaching. Frank had been the shuttle uplift manager for local, national & international events that included World Cups, World Championships & Crankworx. He had also performed the role of course manager for several Croc Trophy mountain biking events and the Reef to Reef stage race.

- [13] Frank had competed in all mountain biking disciplines including downhill, cross country, enduro and endurance riding. Frank's competition experience included the 2007 World Police and Fire Games, Trans NZ Enduro Race, and Simpson Desert Race. In 2019, Frank achieved the title of Enduro State Masters Champion.

- [14] Frank had ridden Worlds DH, and other trails at the Smithfield Mountain Bike Park, many times. On this day, Frank was on Worlds DH track to prepare for the upcoming UCI Masters Mountain Bike World Championships, in which he was competing.

#### *Attempting to navigate Mick's Drop*

- [15] While riding Worlds DH track, Frank and his friends came to a feature known as 'Mick's Drop', between 'Cyclone' and 'Whoops' sections of the trail. Having previously had difficulty navigating the drop, Frank was guided through it by those riding with him.

- [16] As Frank attempted the feature, he became airborne. While airborne, Frank sat low and behind the seat of his mountain bike. On landing, the bike bounced, became airborne again and inverted. Frank let go of his bike and fell, landing upside down.

- [17] Frank's friends immediately went to his assistance. They saw that he was unresponsive. Although they could not find a pulse or any signs that Frank was breathing, they began cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and called emergency services. Paramedics arrived a short time later. They confirmed that Frank was deceased.

### *Investigations*

- [18] Queensland Police officers, including Forensic Crash Unit investigators, investigated Frank's death. Frank was identified by a colleague and friend who was with him at Smithfield Mountain Bike Park.
- [19] Investigations revealed Frank was wearing a '7iDP Project 23' full face mountain bike helmet at the time of the fall. The helmet was compliant with Australian Standards. An inspection after the fall showed the helmet had significant damage to front and top. The shell was split twice through the top forehead area, as well as the top right side.
- [20] Frank was riding a 2024 GT Fury Carbon Pro mountain bike. The bicycle was specifically designed for downhill riding with full frame suspension and carbon frame. It had been ridden on several trails prior to the accident and was ridden from 'Mick's Drop' afterwards. I accept that the bicycle was in excellent working order.
- [21] The trail section at 'Mick's Drop' is described as very steep and surrounded by dense rainforest on both sides. On 9 May 2025, the trail was hardpacked (that is, the surface consisted of compacted dirt). Investigators reported there was minimal dust, and the track was dry. The trail appeared in good condition with no obvious defects or unintended hazards.
- [22] Police officers determined there were no suspicious circumstances surrounding Frank's death.
- [23] I accept that neither the condition of the trail nor Frank's equipment (including protective gear) contributed to, or caused, his death. Likewise, I accept that Frank was riding on a mountain bike trail that he was sufficiently experienced to ride.

### **What was the cause of Frank's death?**

- [24] A forensic pathologist examined Frank and considered relevant information to determine the cause of his death.
- [25] An external examination of Frank showed multiple blunt force injuries. The post-mortem computed tomography (CT) scan showed cervical spinal fracture with associated epidural and subarachnoid haemorrhage. The forensic pathologist reported that Frank had suffered catastrophic head and neck injuries.
- [26] In the opinion of the forensic pathologist, the cause of Frank's death was head and neck injuries due to mountain bike collision (rider). I accept that opinion.

## **Conclusion**

[27] Frank was a long-term and dedicated member of the Far North Queensland mountain biking community. His commitment to the sport was evident in his involvement in the Cairns Mountain Bike Club, of which he was past president. Frank was a highly experienced mountain bike rider and competitor.

[28] Frank was described as a man with a passion for mountain biking, a generosity of spirit, whose longstanding support for the mountain biking community left a lasting impact on the sport in Far North Queensland. Frank's death was widely reported as a significant loss to the mountain bike community.

[29] I extend my condolences to Frank's family and friends for their loss.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that the Findings pursuant to section 45 of the *Coroners Act 2003* (Queensland) appear below. They contain words that may be culturally distressing.**

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

<b>Identity of the deceased:</b>	Francis Robert Falappi
<b>How he died:</b>	Francis Falappi died while attempting to navigate a drop on a double black diamond singletrack while mountain bike riding.
<b>Place of death:</b>	Worlds Downhill Track, Smithfield Mountain Bike Park, SMITHFIELD, QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA 4878
<b>Date of death:</b>	9 May 2025
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