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1. Donald Mooka was born in Bamaga on 17 February 1975. He was a happy family man and lived at Bamaga until moving to Dauan Island in March 2019. He was 44 years of age at the time he went missing at sea. He was the holder of a recreational marine licence until it expired in March 2019. He had extensive experience operating vessels in the Torres Strait. Donald was in a relationship with Jillian Gebadi since 1994 and together they had seven (7) children. Donald had previously worked as a community Police Liaison Officer and for the local aged care home and local Council. Donald was diagnosed with diabetes in 2014/15.
2. Claude Mooka was born on 1 November 2009 on Thursday Island. Claude was raised by his mother and father in Bamaga until March 2019 when he then moved with his father to Dauan Island and continued his schooling there. He was 9 years of age when he went missing at sea. He was known to be a happy and popular child. He was the 6th child (of 7) to Donald and Jillian. His father Donald also went missing at sea in the same event.
3. Allan Maka Bigie was born on 24 February 1997. He was 22 years of age at the time he went missing at sea. Allan grew up on Dauan Island in the Torres Strait. Allan was physically fit and the holder of a current recreation marine licence. He was known to be an experienced mariner and an active hunter and fisherman.
4. Gina Laiana Precilla Dilaila Gaidan-Banu was born at Cairns on 24 September 1997. She was 21 years of age at the time she went missing at sea. Gina enjoyed being on the water and was experienced with boats although did not hold a marine licence. Gina lived between Cairns and Dauan Island most of her life and also spent time on Yam Island in 2019.
5. Telcy Patricia Elizabeth (Illyzaveth) Mooka was born on Thursday Island on 25 May 1998. She was 21 years of age when she went missing. Telcy was living on Dauan Island when she disappeared. She was a very good singer and actively involved in her local church. She was a strong swimmer and diver and very experienced on boats from her time living on the island.

## **Background**

6. On 31 July 2019, Donald, Claude, Allan, Gina and Telcy departed Seisia Jetty at approximately 1030-1100hrs, en route to Dauan Island, a 174 kilometre journey, in the vessel 'Pana Boy' The 'Pana boy' was a 7-metre fibreglass open style banana boat type, powered by a 60hp 2 stroke Yamaha motor, with tiller steering. The vessel was purchased from PNG some years ago and was identified with Torres Strait Island Registration 'SBI41917Q'. The boat was on loan to Donald for the trip.
7. An off- duty Bamaga based police liaison officer, Aaron BINAWEL assisted in delivering safety equipment, fuel drums and containers to the vessel before departure.
8. Later, at approximately 3pm on the same date, Charles Wilks ELISALA observed the vessel with the 5 people near the Badu Island jetty, approximately 50km north of Seisia Jetty. Charles had a short conversation with the persons on board the vessel and Donald MOOKA indicated they were still travelling north to Dauan Island. Charles saw the group filling up jerry cans of fuel on the vessel and he left shortly after. He was the last person to see the group alive.

9. Dauan Island is an extremely remote community, located a few kilometres south of the PNG coast line and a few kilometres to the west of Saibai Island. The community has approximately 80 persons residing in it, all of Torres Strait Islander origins. The island contains a large prominent hill known as Mount Cornwallis, and as such does not have airstrip and is only accessible by helicopter and vessel.

### **Queensland Police Search commenced**

10. On the 31st of July 2019, at approximately 2200hrs, police stationed on Thursday Island received information from Torres Strait Island Police Support Officer Wrench MAU, that the vessel 'Pana boy' and it's (5) occupants, Donald Debridge MOOKA (17/02/75), Allan Maka BIGIE (24/02/97), Gina GAIDAN (24/9/97), Telcy MOOKA (25/05/98) and Claude MOOKA (01/11/2009), were overdue after departing Seisia Wharf at around 11am on the same date, heading towards Dauan Island in the far north of the Torres Strait, approximately 174km away.
11. The voyage included stops at Thursday Island (a trip of approximately 34km from Seisia), and Badu Island (approximately 47km from Thursday Island), before travelling north towards Dauan Island (approximately 89km from Badu Island, across mostly open waters).
12. Police commenced a search and rescue operation. The coronial investigation is assisted by the comprehensive missing person reports of Detective Senior Constable Lucas, Thursday Island CIB, and I rely on that report and additional information provided by Queensland Police to formulate my ultimate findings.
13. An aerial search was tasked for the area between Badu Island and Dauan Island. At the time of the commencement, weather was very poor in the area, with low clouds, strong S/E winds and significant swell. The weather continued to deteriorate during the entirety of the search and rescue operation.
14. Police Liaison Officer Aaron BINAWEL confirmed he had seen the vessel and occupants off from Seisia Wharf at around 11000hrs. The vessel contained a 'grab bag', a large orange bag containing safety equipment, including 5 lifejackets, flares, mirrors, V-sheet, torch, a life-cell container, and an EPIRB.
15. Attempts at phone triangulation showed that the phones of Allan BIGIE and Donald MOOKA had registered to the east – south east of the Saibai Island mobile phone tower at 1954hrs on the 31/7/19, with no further information available after that time.
16. The Saibai Island Telstra tower is the only one in the northern Torres Strait and provides coverage to Boigu and Dauan Islands. Successful phone triangulation requires more than one tower, so the results could indicate a 120° arc of direction from the tower. Local knowledge indicated that this tower will provide coverage to a distance of about 20km from the tower site.
17. The search and rescue effort escalated quickly on the morning of the 1st of August 2019, with a number of fixed and rotary wing aircraft, surface vessels, and vehicles assisting in the search.

18. At approximately 1332hrs on the same date (1 August), the upturned 'Pana boy' vessel was located in the waters south west of Dauan Island. The vessel was overturned, and no occupants were found in the area. The esky and drybag from the vessel were located later that afternoon on the south eastern coast of Boigu Island.
19. The search and rescue effort continued over the next day, with private vessels and PNG based organisations assisting in the operation.
20. On the 2nd of August 2019, a survival expert, Dr LUCKIN, advised that by first light on 02/08/2018 there would be 20% chance of survival for adults, and 0% chance of survival by children. This would drop to 0% chance for adults by midday on the same date. Thursday Island CIB officers were briefed into the search and rescue operation due to the likelihood the matter would be progressing towards a missing person / coronial investigation.

### **Ongoing investigation after Pana Boy recovered**

21. On the 1st of August 2019 the vessel was recovered and towed back to Saibai Island. The vessel was found with the rear bung out, the engine cowling off, and in 'ok' condition, with no damage to the prop. A mechanical inspection was conducted QPS Marine Technician Cyril CARNARVON on the 7th of August 2019 at Saibai Island. The throttle was found in the idle position, and the choke in the cold start position. The gear shift was in neutral and no damage was found to the gear box or thermostat. The tiller was loose, but operational, and the emergency stop lanyard was still attached to the stop switch.
22. Phone triangulations were conducted at the commencement of the search and rescue effort and identified the mobile phone numbers belonging to Allan BIGIE and Donald MOOKA had last pinged in the vicinity of the Saibai Island cell tower at 1954hrs on the 01/01/2018. The mobile phone of Gina GAIDAN last registered a connection to the Badu Island cell tower at 1537hrs on the same date. This is indicative of the phone being turned off or going flat after this.
23. The phone data indicates that the vessel came within approximately 20km of Saibai Island. Saibai is the only mobile phone tower in the northern Torres Strait area. As there is only one tower in range, triangulation was not possible.
24. Analysis of call charge records of the missing persons corroborated the fact that no contact or registration of the mobile phone was made after 1954hrs on the 1st of August 2019. The cell tower movement data also corroborates their travel from Seisia to Badu Island (via Thursday Island) then north toward Dauan Island.
25. BINAWEL saw the vessel and occupants off from the Seisia Wharf in the morning of the 31st of July 2019. He provided a photograph sent from their arrival at Thursday Island later that morning, showing all the missing persons in the vessel, their clothing, and belongings within the boat. All appear in good health and spirits.
26. ELISALA was confirmed as the last to see all 5 persons. He told police that around 3pm he travelled down to the wharf on the south eastern side of Badu Island, and observed the 5 missing persons, whom he all knew, in the boat near the wharf. He said it looked like they were filling up with fuel at the time. ELISALA spoke briefly with Donald MOOKA who confirmed that they were still heading on from Badu. ELISALA said it was late, but MOOKA confirmed that they were still planning to travel (to Dauan Is.). ELISALA states

he believed that Donald MOOKA was operating (driving) the vessel when he left. No persons were wearing life jackets. ELISALA said the wind was a strong 30kts, with 2m swell in the open water. ELISALA asked MOOKA to call him when he arrived to let him know he had arrived safely.

27. Police also obtained a statement from Gandi WOSOMO, the owner of the vessel. WOSOMO stated the vessel was a 21ft fibreglass banana boat, purchased from PNG approximately 2 years ago (not uncommon in the Torres Strait area). He didn't know how old it was when he purchased it. The vessel was described as having a beam of 2m, and a draft of 0.3m. The vessel was not fitted with any GPS or depth sounder (again not uncommon for vessels operated by Torres Strait Islanders in the area).
28. WOSOMO had a 60hp 2 stroke Yamaha engine fitted to the vessel when he purchased it. He stated he serviced the engine every 3-4 months, and had last serviced it around 1 month ago, when he changed the gear oil, cleaned the carburettor, spark plugs, and flushed the motor with fresh water. The vessel was stated to have a 25l fuel tank on board. As the engine is a 2-stroke type, it requires approximately 400-500ml of oil to every 20l of fuel. WOSOMO predicted the vessel would use approximately 30 litres of fuel during the trip from Thursday Island to Badu Island due to conditions experienced at the time the vessel went missing.
29. WOSOMO advised the vessel usually handles well, however in some seas, it can slide down the waves and swings to one side, as the vessel has a small keel. He stated it was best to 'zig zag' around waves as opposed to going straight through them. WOSOMO told police that Donald MOOKA asked him to borrow the vessel from Dauan Island to Seisia, leaving on the 24/7/19. WOSOMO knew MOOKA had a tiller steer dinghy on the island, but stated he wanted something bigger. He stated he didn't think that MOOKA had driven a banana boat for around 5 years. He provided rough sketch of the likely potential route taken by the vessel.
30. WOSOMO stated he met with the boat and occupants as it arrived at Thursday Island on the 31/7/19 at approximately 12pm. The occupants purchased a number of items from the hardware store and bottle shop, before leaving the Island around 1pm. WOSOMO took the last known photos of the missing persons at this time.
31. A statement was obtained from Torrenzo ELISALA, the Dauan Island councillor, who provided ongoing assistance during the search and rescue. ELISALA was onboard the private vessel that located the overturned 'Pana boy' vessel on the 1st of August 2019. ELISALA is an experienced mariner, and very familiar in the use and operation of 'banana boats. Torrenzo ELISA stated he had heard talk of the boat having issues with the handle of the outboard, and that the operator had to be strong as the vessel was hard to manoeuvre.
32. Torrenzo ELISALA had attempted to travel south from Dauan Island on the 31/07/2019 but turned back due to engine trouble. He reported experiencing very rough weather at the time. He received a phone call from Allan BIGIE at around 3.30pm and was told that they were leaving Badu Island. Torrenzo noted the wind picked up that night, and that they were waiting for the vessel to come in later that afternoon / dusk. At 9.00pm they spoke to Torres Strait Island Police Support Officer (TSIPSO) Wrench MAU and asked the matter to be reported to police.
33. Torrenzo ELISALA assisted with the search the next day in a 23 ft vessel. They travelled to Turnagain Island to see if they had stopped there for the night. In the early afternoon

they located the overturned vessel, which was mostly submerged, with the bow up. They contacted the local council and provided the co-ordinates to pass onto police.

34. ELISALA continued to search along the tidal flow (east to west) and headed NW towards Boigu Island. Not long after they found a red bucket lid, and around 10-15m later, some flooring from the vessel. At around 3pm they arrived on the south eastern coast of Boigu Island and located the orange esky and dry bag. The esky lid was closed and contained boat parts that had been purchased by MOOKA. The items were subsequently handed to police. ELISALA continued assisting with the search and over the next few days.

### **Proof of life checks**

35. In early September 2019, proof of life requests were made via the Missing Persons Unit for all five missing persons.
36. Responses from Medicare, the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme and Centrelink all confirmed that there had been no access to any service by any of the missing persons since their disappearance.
37. Banking records for all five missing persons indicated no activity on accounts.
38. Information request were made to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) in August 2019. The data obtained confirmed the heavy winds and high sea state during from the 31/07/2019 – 04/08/2019. Investigators also liaised with the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) to obtain analysis of the location of the boat, the recovered drifted items, to obtain any data about likely point of origin.
39. A lack of reliable weather data was identified by police during the investigation. The BOM only operates data stations on Horn Island and Coconut Island (far to the south east of Dauan Island), and as such weather reports and predictions may not be accurate for the islands to the far north of the Torres Strait. AIMS operates a number of more relevant stations including on Badu and Saibai Islands, however whilst freely observable on the internet, this data is not widely known about in the Torres Strait. Furthermore, the Saibai Island station has not measured wind data since about February 2019. The Badu Island Station indicates winds in excess of 40km/h during the afternoon / night of the 31/07/2019.

### **Safety Equipment on-board**

40. At the time of the disappearance, the vessel was known to contain an item known as a 'grab bag'.
41. The Grab bag scheme was commenced by Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ) in 2012 to provide access to safety equipment in an easy to carry manner for remote islands in the Torres Strait. To date 35 bags are in operation around the NPA and Torres Strait.
42. Each bag is signed out by the local TSIPSO on each island, and the persons signing out the items are responsible for their return. Each grab bag contains life jackets, a MT600G GME EPIRB, attached to a floating 'Life-cell', which itself contains 2 orange flares, 2 red flares, 1 signalling mirror, 1 x V sheet and a dolphin torch.

43. The 'Pana boy' was known to be carrying the Dauan Island Grab bag. The bag was recovered from the South Eastern Coast of Boigu Island on the 1st of August by Torrenzo ELISALA. The bag was sealed and did not appear to have been accessed. The EPIRB within the bag was tested and found to be operational, the Life-cell containing the flares and other items was in good conditions and closed. The grab bag contained three adult lifejackets. It could not be verified if it contained more prior to it signing out. The vessel also carried a child's life jacket for use by Claude MOOKA (it bore the name Annie Gaidan and was provided by the TSMSP at primary schools in the Torres Strait).
44. Local community members, and police, have advised this investigation that Torres Strait Islanders rarely wear marine safety equipment when operating vessels, even in rough weather. The next of kin of these missing persons have indicated that a cultural change is needed.

### **Items retrieved from water**

45. Police obtained a number of items from the recovered esky and dry bag. This included vessel tools and equipment purchased prior to their departure, as well as clothing in the dry bag, and personal documentation and medication belonging to Donald MOOKA.
46. A child's size lifejacket was also recovered north of this area (northern coast of Boigu Island), marked with 'Annie GAIDAN' and had been lent to occupants of the boat for use by Claude MOOKA before it left Dauan Island
47. On the 1st of August 2019, PNG resident Jorega JAEA located 5 empty white fuel drums tied together on a low-lying mangrove island (possibly Yapere Island). The items were marked with the name 'Rex GAIDAN', linking them to the missing vessel. JAEA transported the items to Daru. QPS were informed of the discovery of these items on the 9th of August 2019.
48. Loose items of clothing including shorts, a hat and a shirt were found by searches along the PNG coast on or around the 11th August 2019. They were handed to Dauan Island TSIPSO's and later to police. All were water logged and not suitable for forensic examination.
49. On the 17th -18th of August 2019, a blue grab bag from the vessel was found by an unidentified PNG person on the eastern side of Boigu Island. The bag was taken to Boigu Island TSIPSO's and subsequently handed to police officers on the 22/8/19.
50. The blue bag was found to contain multiple personal items belonging to the missing persons, including wallets, mobile phones, jewellery and identification. All of the items were water damaged.

### **No persons or remains located**

51. No remains have been located despite extensive police search and a prolonged search by local community members.
52. The Torres Strait is renowned for its strong and unpredictable tides and currents, and during the time frame of the disappearance the area was experiencing very strong winds, low cloud and high seas. The northern area of the Strait, particularly between Badu Island



and Boigu Island, and the PNG coastline is unsurveyed meaning navigation for larger vessels (such as those involved in the search and rescue (SAR) operations) is inherently dangerous.

53. A review of QPS data shows no human remains have been recovered from the water since the disappearance of the 5 missing persons from the 'Pana boy'. PNG police are aware of the matter and have assured QPS that contact will be made if remains are located along the PNG/ Torres Strait border coast.
54. The use of Rescue 700 helicopter (R700) was authorised on the 31/7/19. Between 0028hrs and 0157hrs on the same date the aircraft conducted an aerial track line search from Badu to Dauan Islands, then onto Saibai Island. Conditions were very poor, with low cloud cover, meaning the aircraft was unable to fly below 3000ft. There were no sightings during this flight.
55. The use of fixed wing jet aircraft was deemed not suitable during night time hours due to the low level of cloud meaning the safe flying height needed to operate the FLIR and radar devices was above the low cloud level. All searches by aircraft was undertaken in a north-south orientation and was slowly moving towards the north-west in line with drift modelling. Self-locating SAR datum marker buoys were deployed in the search area, confirming computer modelling of the drift.
56. Co-ordination of the aerial assets was conducted by the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) out of Canberra. By the morning of the 1st of August 2019 five aerial assets were assisting in the search.
57. On the 1st of August 2019 computer modelling of the search area identified that any drift would be towards the north-west, parallel to the southern coastline of PNG.

### **Community continues search after conclusion of police operation**

58. Members of the Dauan, Saibai and Boigu Island communities continued with private search and rescue efforts until the 27th of August 2019 when a cultural meeting was held, and in keeping with cultural practices the grieving period commenced. Persons from multiple PNG villages in the nearby area also assisted greatly with search efforts despite being poorly resourced.
59. A ceremony honouring those missing from the vessel was held on the 1st of September 2019 at Dauan Island.

### **Contributory factors**

60. Whilst no family members have indicated a need or desire for this matter to proceed to inquest, a number of concerns and issues have been raised as the basis for possible recommendations by family members, members of the community and police who were involved in this matter including:
  - The lack of accurate weather reporting due to the limited stations in the area, particularly in the northern area of the Torres Strait, increases navigation risks in the area.

- Mobile phone reception is notoriously bad in the northern Torres Strait due to only one mobile tower being in place on Saibai Island. This tower is often overloaded and phone calls and messages cannot be sent / received when in this state. The coverage is even worse on Boigu and Dauan Islands. The lack of a second tower in the area also means phone triangulation for search and rescues is not possible.
  - Initial search and rescue efforts could have been enhanced if the police vessel '*Handran*' and the rescue helicopter R700 had Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR), thermal imaging capabilities.
  - An exemption of pilot flight) hour restrictions whilst conducting aerial search may have aided the operation.
  - A cultural change is required by local people residing in the Torres Strait when it comes to carrying and wearing safety equipment whilst operating vessels, and the risks of travelling in severe weather conditions. Multiple family and community members have articulated that this could be achieved by local television ads, similar as those used for community health projects.
  - The cost of air travel from Dauan Island and the northern Torres Strait is prohibitively expensive, meaning residents are more likely to travel by small vessel, even in inclement weather.
  - Community members recall a ferry service previously operated in the Torres Strait which assisted in community travel between the outer islands, however had been shut down many years ago.
61. A 'grab bag' containing required safety equipment for the operation of the vessel, was onboard although remained unused – it contained an operating EPIRB, flares, torch, life-jackets, V-Sheet and mirror. The vessel also carried a child's life-jacket for use by Claude MOOKA.

### **Summary – police investigation**

62. The vessel and occupants arrived at Badu Island at around 3.30pm, where they were sighted by the last to see, Charles ELISALA. The occupants were stated to be wet from their journey, but the master of the vessel, Donald MOOKA indicated that they were still travelling onwards to Dauan Island. At that time the weather had deteriorated, with winds up to 30kts, and seas up to 2m according to witness ELISALA.
63. The vessel continued on north towards Dauan Island in heavy seas. The vessel itself and the banana boat type is known to handle poorly in following seas of the type that would have been experienced in the late afternoon/ early evening of the 31st of July 2019. Furthermore, the likely master of the vessel, Donald MOOKA had likely not used a similar vessel for some time. The vessel was also stated to have a loose tiller and require some strength to steer for this reason.
64. At 1954hrs on the same date, the mobile phones of Allan BIGIE and Donald MOOKA last registered to mobile phone tower on Saibai Island. After this time, no connections were made by any mobile phones known to be used by the five missing persons.
65. It is likely that at about this time, the vessel was swamped or overturned by the heavy seas and winds, and the occupants thrown from it into inhospitable waters, and dark conditions. It is likely that this occurred to the south east of where the vessel was located at GPS 09dg25.01S / 142dg27.09E.

66. It is likely the vessel was travelling at speed when this has occurred, as indicated by the 'bung' being found to be out when the vessel was recovered. The bung being out allows water to drain from the vessel whilst it is moving. This would be placed back in immediately when the vessel is stopped, to prevent water from entering the vessel.
67. It is likely that no persons on board the vessel wore life jackets at the time of the incident. It also appears no person on board had any time to activate the safety equipment or items of floatation, nor did any person have any time to make any emergency phone calls.
68. Despite all persons on board knowing how to swim, it is almost certain that in the dark and tumultuous conditions all drowned shortly after being thrown from the vessel.
69. The nearest landmass at the time of the loss of occupants was likely to have been Dauan Island, approximately 10km to the NE, however winds and tides would have likely pushed the occupants away from this, towards the remote SE coast of Boigu Island, or the southern coast of PNG. This is corroborated by the location of items including the grab bag, the orange esky in the boat, and a child's life jacket along the SE coast of Boigu Island, and a bundle of empty plastic containers believed to come from the vessel being found on the southern coast of PNG a few days later.
70. The vessel and occupants were reported as missing at 10.00pm on the same date by concerned family and community members.
71. Subsequently a large-scale search and rescue operation was commenced. The search continued until suspended by police on the afternoon of 4 of August 2019. The island community continued searching for an additional three weeks without any formal assistance until 27th of August 2019.
72. No persons or remains have been recovered to date.

## **Findings and conclusions**

73. On 31 July 2019 Donald, Claude, Allan, Gina and Telcy set off on a 174 kilometre journey from Seisa Jetty to Dauan Island in the vessel 'Pana Boy', described as an open style 'banana boat'. They were last seen re-fuelling at Badu Island at approximately 3.00p.m. and intending to continue on to Dauan Island.
74. During their onward journey the weather deteriorated, night was falling with heavy winds and high seas (30knots, with swells of up to 2metres). The Pana Boy was unsuited to those conditions.
75. By 10.00p.m that evening, the group had not arrived at their destination and were reported missing by family and the community.
76. A search and rescue operation commenced and at approximately 1.30pm the following day (1 August) the upturned Pana Boy was found in waters south west of Dauan Island.
77. Personal items, emergency equipment and debris were located over a period of time. None of the bodies have been recovered. Proof of life checks have been conducted and enquiries failed to reveal any activity.

78. Local members of the communities of Dauan Island, Saibai Island and Bamaga, as well as villagers from the coastal villages of Mabadauan and Sigabadura PNG, undertook personal searches of the PNG coastline, waters surrounding the northern Torres Strait Islands and far western islands, including Deliverance Island until around the 27th of August 2019 without locating the missing persons or any human remains.
79. Safety equipment including life jackets, flares and an EPIRB (emergency position indicating radio) was available for those onboard. None of the safety devices were utilised or deployed by the occupants and were later found intact and unused in the emergency grab bag located in the ocean. I note 4 vests were located and there were 5 occupants of the vessel. It is clear that the adult life vests were not worn at all for the duration of the voyage as they remained within the grab bag. I am unable to say if the child's life vest was worn at any time.
80. I find that at, or soon after 7.54pm, and within a 20 kilometre radius of Saibai Island, the Pana Boy became swamped by waves and capsized in the rough conditions throwing all occupants from the boat.
81. In accordance with the findings that I must make I formally find:
  - i. Donald Mooka is deceased presumed drowned at sea on 31 July 2019
  - ii. Claude Mooka is deceased presumed drowned at sea on 31 July 2019
  - iii. Allan Maka Bigie is deceased presumed drowned at sea on 31 July 2019
  - iv. Gina Laiana Precilla Dilaila Gaidan-Banu is deceased presumed drowned at sea on 31 July 2019
  - v. Telcy Patricia Elizabeth (Illyzaveth) Mooka is deceased presumed drowned at sea on 31 July 2019

## **CONDOLENCES and ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

82. I extend my sincerest condolences to the families of Donald, Claude, Allan, Gina and Telcy, and all Torres Strait communities involved in this devastating tragedy. Local communities continued to search for many weeks after the official search was called off, in the hope of recovering their loved ones. Their loss is irreplaceable.
83. This search united police and local people and many acts of kindness and courage came to my attention while investigating these events.
84. I intend to provide a copy of these findings to relevant agencies to review and consider enhancement of weather reporting; mobile phone reception and search capabilities (including mobile phone carriers; the Bureau of Meteorology and Police).
85. I trust that distribution of these findings to local authorities in the Torres Strait and via local Police will improve education and awareness about the need to carry and wear safety equipment (including life jackets) and to ensure familiarity with safety devices such as an EPIRB.
86. Locals have also noted that a previous ferry service to the outer islands is now defunct. It may be that these findings enliven consideration for recommissioning the ferry service, or alternate affordable access to Dauan Island (and others).

87. I accept that many Torres Strait Islanders are excellent mariners and are familiar with local waters. These events highlight the need for caution before travelling into the night and in poor and highly changeable weather conditions, particularly when the vessel is not suited to the conditions, and safety equipment is not utilised.
88. Torres Strait Islanders and police have expressed that a cultural change is required by locals residing in the Torres Strait when it comes to carrying and wearing safety equipment whilst operating vessels, and the risks of travelling in severe weather conditions. Multiple family and community members have articulated that this could be achieved by local television ads, similar as those used for community health projects.
89. I accept those legitimate concerns and support these very sensible initiatives.
90. I thank the people of the Torres Strait for conveying this message to me via the police investigation.
91. I intend to provide a copy to all relevant authorities to consider advancing initiatives for education and awareness around this issue.
92. Most particularly I extend my sincere thanks to the families of those involved in this tragedy for consenting to the publication of these findings in the hope they will raise awareness and improve maritime safety amongst their community. The decision is an act of courage and great humility. I wish each and every family member well in their healing journey.

I close the investigation.

Nerida Wilson  
Coroner  
CORONERS COURT OF QUEENSLAND  
NORTHERN REGION