



# OFFICE OF THE STATE CORONER

## FINDINGS OF INQUEST

**CITATION:** Inquest into the death of Karl Robert Wright

**TITLE OF COURT:** Coroners Court

**JURISDICTION:** Maroochydore

**FILE NO(s):** 2013/2719

**DELIVERED ON:** 18 November 2014

**DELIVERED AT:** Brisbane

**HEARING DATE(s):** 2 September 2014, 27-29 October 2014

**FINDINGS OF:** John Lock, Deputy State Coroner

**CATCHWORDS:** Coroners: inquest, multiple layers of clothing and gags, zip ties, sleeping bags, mechanical asphyxia, uncertainty if accident, suicide or homicide

**REPRESENTATION:**

Counsel Assisting: Miss E Cooper, Office of the State Coroner

Counsel for Paula Wright: Mr Stephen Colditz of Counsel

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## Introduction

1. Karl Robert Wright was 43 years of age when he was found deceased at his home on 29 July 2013. Mr Wright lived with his mother, Paula Wright, at her semi-rural home located at 147-151 Dulong School Road, Dulong (about 10km west of Nambour). He was last seen by his mother before she went to bed at about 11:30pm on Sunday, 28 July 2013.
2. Mr Wright was found in a locked shed by his mother at about 9:30am on Monday, 29 July 2013. His body was located within a closed up sleeping bag, which was lying on top of a foam mattress on the floor of the shed. He was lying in the sleeping bag so that his head was in the end where the feet would normally go. Mr Wright was wearing multiple layers of clothing, namely a heavy ski vest, a second ski jacket, a rain jacket, a hooded jacket, a sloppy joe, a t-shirt, long black ski pants, green track pants, underpants and 2 pairs of thick socks. He had a balaclava on his head, as well as a strip of cloth and a strip of glad wrap around his mouth/head so as to make a gag. A second sleeping bag was wrapped around his head and shoulders.
3. There was a zip tie loosely fastened around his left wrist, and a second zip tie loosely fastened around his right wrist. A third zip tie connected these two zip ties together so as to make a chain. There were two strips of material around the lower legs. One strip was tied quite tightly over the lower parts of the ski pants and fastened by a knot at the front. The other strip was tightly tied over the socks and fastened by a knot at the back.
4. Mr Wright was noted to be blue in the face. The QAS were called to the residence but no attempts at resuscitation were made as rigor mortis had already set in.
5. Ms Wright has understandable concerns with respect to the death and how it occurred. She was adamant that Mr Wright would not have killed himself. She also expressed concerns about aspects of the police investigation.
6. Given these most unusual circumstances, there was considerable uncertainty concerning whether Mr Wright's death was an act of suicide, accidental or the outcome of third party involvement. Accordingly a decision was made to conduct an inquest. The issues for the inquest were determined at a Pre Hearing Conference as follows:
  - The findings required by section 45 of the *Coroners Act*, namely the identity of the deceased person and how and what caused his death
  - To determine as far as possible, whether there was any third party involvement in the death and, if not, whether the death was intentional or accidental on the part of Mr Wright.

## Autopsy results

7. A full internal autopsy was conducted by forensic pathologist Professor Peter Ellis on 2 August 2013. He stated in evidence that the circumstances were very unusual. He had seen cases where men enclosed themselves in various ways in attempted asphyxia, usually for sexual gratification (which he had no

reason to believe was an issue here), but had never seen a case involving so many layers of clothing.

8. External examination revealed no abnormalities. There was no evidence of trauma around or in the mouth, which he would have expected if a forced gag had been applied. The lips were undamaged and the frenula (mucosal fold beneath the lips) were intact. Toxicological examination revealed no alcohol or drugs.
9. Internal examination did not reveal any abnormalities. Microscopic examination revealed fatty change in the liver and a small amount of scarring within the heart.
10. Professor Ellis summarised that there were no external or internal signs of physical trauma. Professor Ellis opined that given the absence of any drugs that may have caused Mr Wright to be submissive or unable to resist an assailant, it must be concluded that there was no evidence to suggest the active involvement of another person in this death.
11. There are no specific observations to support the presence of asphyxia other than the clinical history of him being blue in the face. This was not reproducible by the time of autopsy, thus Professor Ellis had to regard it as an indirect observation.
12. Professor Ellis opined that, given the presence of a gag including plastic glad wrap, mechanical asphyxia would seem to be a reasonable inference. It was not clear at autopsy whether the gag covered the nose as well as the mouth. Professor Ellis had regard to the photographs taken by police at the scene, however the gag had been removed before the arrival of police. Mr Wright's mother indicated to police that the glad wrap and gag had only been around the mouth and was not covering the nose. Despite this, Professor Ellis held the opinion that the possibility of asphyxia was still considered to be reasonable, especially if nasal breathing was impaired in any way.
13. Professor Ellis was asked about the possibility of accidental vagal inhibition as being a possible cause. This usually requires compression of the vagal nerves of the neck and he found no evidence of any injury or trauma to the neck.
14. The formal cause of death was determined as mechanical asphyxia. However, the exact nature of the obstruction was not determined.

## **The investigation and evidence**

15. The Queensland Police Service (QPS) investigation was lead by Detective Senior Constable Jonathan McBride of the Sunshine Coast Criminal Investigation Branch.
16. The investigation obtained a variety of statements from close friends and associates of Mr Wright and his mother Paula. It is clear that the only direct evidence with respect to the exact state Mr Wright was in when he was found deceased is from his mother and his aunt, Ruth Gould.
17. Paula Wright has provided the following information:

- Mr Wright had lived with her all his life, they were the only people living at the residence at Dulong School Road, Dulong. He had not seriously suggested ever moving out of home;
- Mr Wright could not read or write, but he could sign his name. He did not use computers and he would not even know how to turn one on;
- He struggled through school, with the last school he went to being the Nambour Special School;
- After he finished school, he was placed on a disability pension. As far as Ms Wright is aware, he was never diagnosed with anything. He never suffered any mental health issues and never saw a psychologist. He was never seen to be in a stressed state;
- Mr Wright was very community minded – he would visit people at their houses on a daily basis to have a cup of tea and a chat;
- He rarely consumed alcohol and only very little. He was reluctant to take even panadol and certainly no illicit drugs;
- There had been no romantic or other relationships and he had shown no interest in sexual matters;
- He was mainly interested in looking at mechanical magazines or catalogues but could not read them and Paula Wright never saw anything resembling other types of magazines or literature;
- He had his own TV but he mainly looked at English comedies and James Bond movies;
- He was very mechanically and electronically minded – he would fix/service anything from cars to DVD players/TV's;
- In the days and months leading up to his death there was nothing unusual about his behaviour;
- Karl had formed an interest in travelling to Canada with his mother after seeing a TV program;
- He had started to collect ski gear mostly from people who gave it to him, but he also purchased items. These were kept in the boot of a vehicle in the shed. This included a number of sleeping bags but he had not been camping since he was a child nor had he ever visited the snow;
- He had never been known to sleep in the shed;
- She had not seen him previously wearing multiple layers of clothing. He would wear track suit bottoms, socks and a t-shirt or longer shirt to bed;
- The strips of cloth found after the death came from an old doona cut up for rags. She had never seen him use the rags before cut up in strips or the twisted glad wrap. She had seen various zip ties he used for electrical work;
- On the day before the death (Sunday) Mr Wright had been at home all day – he had dinner with his mum at around 7:30 after which they sat watching TV;
- At about 11:30pm, Ms Wright was feeling tired so she went to bed – Mr Wright was in the living room watching TV and said to Ms Wright that he would not be long, that he would just finish watching the TV show and then he would head to bed as well,
- Ms Wright went to bed as usual – she describes herself as a light sleeper – and that night she slept through the entire night and was not disturbed at any time;
- The next morning Ms Wright woke up at around 8am, she went outside and fed the animals before a friend, Alan Shield, called on the phone asking her for help with his computer;

- Ms Wright went to go and wake up Mr Wright – she went to his bedroom door and found it to be locked – this was unusual. The door lock had been installed a few years ago. She went to look for the key to unlock the door but could not find it;
- She went outside to the bedroom window – it was open about an inch and a half – the flyscreen was off the window and was sitting against the bricks near the window – she could see that Mr Wright was not in his bed;
- Ms Wright entered the bedroom through the window and could not see Mr Wright anywhere, she noticed that the doona and the sheet were pulled over as if Mr Wright had gotten out of bed. The bed looked like it had been laid in;
- There was bark on the floor of the bedroom;
- There was nothing else in the bedroom which was disturbed or out of place;
- Ms Wright called her sister, Ruth Gould, to tell her that she could not find Mr Wright and did not know where he was – Ms Gould said she would stop by the house;
- Ms Wright then went over to the shed, the door was locked which was unusual – the shed door is never locked as the lock itself is quite tricky and difficult so the door is always left closed, but not locked;
- Ms Wright had to run back inside to get the keys to unlock the shed – she opened the shed door and saw the following:
  - i. A foam mattress was lying on the floor of the shed and on top of the mattress was a green sleeping bag
  - ii. Mr Wright's feet were sticking out the end of the sleeping bag – she felt that he was cold and stiff with no movement
- Ms Wright ran back into the house to call 000, Ms Gould arrived at the house whilst she was on the phone;
- The 000 operator instructed them to undo the sleeping bag and attempt CPR;
- Ms Gould and Ms Wright went back out to the shed – Ms Gould unzipped the sleeping bag and Ms Wright saw the following:
  - i. There was another sleeping bag which was wrapped around his head and shoulder area – the 000 operator told them to remove anything around from around or below the head
  - ii. After the sleeping bag was removed from around the head she saw that a balaclava was over his head, and a piece of rag and a piece of twisted glad wrap was tied around his mouth – she does not think the gag was covering his nose
- Ms Wright removed the rag, the glad wrap and the balaclava – Mr Wright's face was distorted and his hands were stiff;
- The 000 operator told her to try and open his mouth but it was locked in position – Ms Gould started to do chest compressions until she was too tired to continue at which point Ms Wright continued compressions until the ambulance came;
- Ms Wright provided an addendum statement where she also clarified the following observations:
  - i. When the sleeping bag was opened, she saw that Mr Wright's wrists were tied together with interlocking cable ties – there

were 3 cable ties that interlocked, namely two around his wrists and then one that joined the other together in a chain

- ii. She does not believe the cable ties were tied to his waist or his clothing
- iii. She broke these ties with her hands so that CPR could be attempted
- iv. There were other cable ties that were tied around Mr Wright's clothing but she did not remove any of these

18. Mr Wright's aunt, Ruth Gould confirmed much of what was provided about Karl's private life and provided the following information:

- Ms Gould is Mr Wright's aunt – she would see him quite often, sometimes 2-3 times per day given that she only lived some 5 minutes away;
- To the best of her knowledge, Mr Wright suffered from dyslexia – he wasn't able to read or write however he could sign his own name;
- Despite his issues with reading and writing, Mr Wright was quite hands on and could service vehicles to the extent of changing oil, fixing brakes and general maintenance and repairs;
- On Monday 29 July 2013, she was in the car at about 9:30am when she received a phone call from Ms Wright – Ms Wright said that she couldn't find Mr Wright and that he wasn't in his room;
- His bedroom door was locked and when she knocked there was no response – she then went to the bedroom window and couldn't see him through the window – she opened the window and climbed through but he was not in the room;
- Ms Wright was frantic, so Ms Gould said she would stop into the house on her way home;
- When she got to the house, Ms Wright was on the phone to 000 – she said that Mr Wright was in the shed – Ms Gould went over to the shed and noted the shed door fully open – she went inside and saw the following:
  - i. There was a person inside a sleeping bag – the sleeping bag was fully zipped up and the person's feet were sticking out the top of the sleeping bag – this meant that the person's head was in the bottom of the sleeping bag where the feet are meant to go
  - ii. The person was wearing socks and she could see that the person was also wearing ski pants
  - iii. The person's legs were bound around his ankles with glad wrap and ripped pieces of cloth
  - iv. She touched the person on the outside of the leg and there was no movement
- It was at this point that Ms Wright came over to the shed, she was still talking to the 000 operator who was giving her instructions – Ms Wright was relaying those instructions to Ms Gould;
- As a result of the instructions, Ms Gould unzipped the sleeping bag all the way down the side which exposed the person completely – she saw the following:
  - i. The persons hands were zip locked with zip ties

- ii. He was wearing a ski jacket with the zip done up to the top of his chest – it seemed that the zip had small zip ties which locked the zip closed
- iii. The person had a balaclava covering his head which she removed – when she removed it she could tell it was Mr Wright
- iv. There was a piece of glad wrap type plastic and some cloth material tied around his head and through his mouth like a gag
- v. Ms Gould could tell from his face that he had already passed away – his body felt stiff like rigor mortis had started

- At the request of the 000 operator, Ms Gould tried to get to his chest to see if he was breathing – the zip locks made it hard to get to the chest so Ms Wright ripped the zip apart which broke some of the small zip ties;
- Ms Gould noticed that Mr Wright's hands were crossed in front of his chest and they were stiff – she saw that there were zip ties around his wrists but she could not tell if his wrists were tied together;
- When Ms Gould opened the ski jacket, she could tell that Mr Wright was wearing a second vest under the ski jacket – he was then wearing his normal bed jumper under the vest and he had a t-shirt under his bed jumper;
- Ms Gould started to do chest compressions on his chest – the 000 operator instructed to give him mouth to mouth resuscitation but his mouth was locked shut so this was not possible;
- Ms Wright took over from doing the chest compressions until the ambulance arrived at which time Mr Wright was pronounced deceased.

19. The inquest was provided with a large number of character references from members of the local community which were requested by Ms Wright. Most of those persons gave evidence at the inquest. These references attest to the overall good character of Mr Wright. All agreed he had a good quality of life at his home with his mother. They all support the views of Ms Wright by confirming the unlikelihood of Mr Wright committing suicide.

20. Given the unusual method adopted in this case by utilising ski clothing and sleeping bags, it is noted from the statement of Christopher Barnes there is a context to this. Mr Barnes noted that he last saw Karl on Wednesday, 24 July 2013 when they drove to Kawana where the shop Anaconda was situated. He noted that Karl loved looking at ski jackets and ski gear and also loved sleeping bags and particularly snow sleeping bags. Mr Barnes did not think that Christopher would have committed suicide.

21. Mrs Jennifer O'Brien recalls Karl had a long term interest in ski clothing which seemed to commence when her family went on a ski holiday. They had purchased him some ski jackets. Other witnesses, including his close family all confirmed that the interest in ski gear and mechanics was a dominant feature of his conversations with people and a distinct personality feature.

22. Numerous other people have come forward to provide police or Karl's family with letters and statements verifying that they did not believe Karl would have taken his own life. They were consistent in their descriptions of him being a gentle and a happy man who despite the fact he did not read or write was most happy when he was doing mechanical things. He had a wide circle of



neighbours and friends that welcomed him into their households and he had a great deal of support from the community. He appeared to be balanced and none of these people had ever seen any evidence of him being depressed or mentally unwell, particularly in the period around his death. Many of the witnesses stated that Karl would not read or write other than by the signature. He was unable to use a mobile telephone SMS texting and was unable to use a computer.

23. In fact, the evidence as a whole suggests that Mr Wright was a good natured, community minded, helpful, trustworthy person who would always see the best in others. He never spoke of depression and was always in good spirits. It seems that he hated to have anything on his face or head, whether it was a hat or clothing or sheets. However, there was evidence given that Karl was known to wear a cap on occasion. No-one had ever seen him wearing excessive multiple layers of clothes.
24. Mr Wright's long-term GP Dr Jocelyn Eggins told police he had attended the surgery for over 20 years. He had a congenital disability causing some cognitive delay, but was always a cheerful and positive personality. At no time during her long period of contact had Karl ever presented as depressed or suicidal. He took no medication and did not smoke or drink alcohol or take drugs. She stated he was very proactive in keeping himself fit and active. He was socially active and well supported by his mother and many friends. He was not socially isolated. She also noted his interest in anything motorised or electrical and he was very law-abiding.
25. Police examined the shed area and found that the only other point of entry to the shed (aside from the main entry door) was a small window on the northern side. This window was closed and locked and had numerous cob webs and considerable dust around the ledge and window. The window did not appear to have been opened for some amount of time. There were no other items in the shed which appeared to be disturbed or out of place.
26. Police observed that Mr Wright was lying on top of a foam mattress and two sleeping bags. The mattress was normally stored on top of the brown Ford vehicle which was in the shed. The vehicle was non-operational, however, a car battery charger had been connected. The rear driver's side door of the brown Ford was slightly ajar, so the interior car light was on. The sleeping bags were normally stored inside this vehicle. Mr Wright was wearing six layers of clothing on his top half including two thick ski jackets. He was wearing a pair of ski pants, a pair of track pants and underwear on his lower half and two pairs of socks on his feet. Some of the clothing was tied together with cable ties.
27. Placed near Mr Wright's head was a set of black boots, a balaclava, a piece of red/white/blue rag and a piece of twisted glad wrap. Upon closer inspection of these items, police noticed that there were in fact two beanies in addition to the balaclava. It was noted that the black boots (which apparently belonged to Mr Wright) were placed neatly side by side.
28. Examination of the wrists showed 1 x blue cable tie around the left wrist and 1 x black cable tie attached to the blue one. The blue cable tie around the left wrist was loosely tied and the end of the tie was between Mr Wright's fingers. A third broken/cut black cable tie was lying on Mr Wright's torso. There were no ligature marks around either wrist.

29. Examination of the legs/feet showed that they were bound with two separate ties. The tie around the lower legs was red/white/blue; the same material as was found near the head - this knot was tied at the front. The second tie was around the ankles and was a different type of cloth – this knot was tied at the back.
30. A search of the shed found further pieces of the red/white/blue material and other cable ties. It was noted that the shed door locked from the inside – the lock operated easily and functioned normally. At the front of the shed was a small blue wheelie bin inside which police found further pieces of the red/white/blue material which were tied together like gags. Police also located further pieces of twisted glad wrap.
31. A search of Mr Wright's bedroom did not show any signs of disturbance. The room was relatively neat and tidy with stuffed toys throughout. The bed was unmade and appeared to have been laid in at some stage. On the bed, under the pillow, police located a further piece of the red/white/blue material which was tied like a gag. In a bin inside the bedroom police located a further piece of twisted glad wrap that was tied like a knot.
32. A fingerprint examination was conducted of the bedroom window frame and the fly screen. No prints were located on the fly screen and there were non-identifiable partial prints on the window. There also appeared to be a minor disturbance to the ground underneath the window.
33. Ms Wright informed police that the red/white/blue cloth was from an old doona cover that she had cut up and placed in a container in the shed for Mr Wright to use as rags. She stated that the only item noticed missing from the shed after the death was a 20 litre fuel can.
34. Some weeks after the death, Mr Wright's brother Byron Wright, presented police with 2 plastic bags. These bags contained rags and glad wrap that he had located in an incinerator at the house. He said that he also located a piece of glad wrap that had been twisted and tied in knots in another vehicle, which was parked beside the shed.
35. Ms Wright mentioned to police two people who lived locally whom she thought Mr Wright did not like – Andrew Noble and Blake Sutherland. Police spoke to and took statements from both men.
36. Both men gave evidence at the inquest and there is no evidence whatsoever they were involved. Mr Noble stated that he was at home on the night of the death which was confirmed by his father. He stated that Mr Wright would visit him every fortnight.
37. Mr Sutherland said to police that Mr Wright was a happy person who used to visit him about 4 times a week. He lived around 5 km away in Dulong. Common to most witnesses the main subjects for conversation were about motor vehicles, fixing cars and ski jackets. He said that Mr Wright had no enemies. He saw Mr Wright on Sunday 28 July 2013 at about 4pm. Mr Wright had come to visit him at his home. Mr Wright only stayed for a short time as Mr Sutherland had to leave to go to work. Before Mr Wright left, they made arrangements for Mr Wright to help him do an oil change on his car the next day.

38. The family, for some reason, disputes this visit to Mr Sutherland occurred but clearly it had. There is no reason why he would make this up and given the events of the next day there is every reason why he would remember the visit or mistaken it for another day. Ms Wright in fact drove her mother home sometime shortly before this visit and the time frame, which would be unknown to Mr Sutherland, fits precisely. This may be evidence supportive of two things. Firstly, that Mr Wright had plans for the next day and secondly, that he kept some things to himself.

## **QPS Investigation findings**

39. QPS have concluded that Mr Wright died as a result of mechanical asphyxia. Based on the material as a whole, the Police considered there was no evidence to suggest that the death was suspicious and no evidence to suggest that another person or persons were involved in the death. It is evident that within a few hours into the investigation police had reached this conclusion and had probably come to the view that it was suicide.
40. The investigating officer has the following opinions regarding the various bizarre features of the case:
- The shed door being locked from the inside – the shed door would have had to be locked from the inside by the deceased. Otherwise, if another person was involved they would have had to locate the sets of keys and then return them to their positions in the dwelling;
  - The car door being slightly ajar – the deceased used the light from the car to see what he was doing in the shed;
  - The multiple layers of clothing – the deceased clothed himself in this manner. This is based on the assumption that to clothe a person in such a manner would have required an extreme amount of effort and there were no signs of this;
  - The gag and balaclava over the head/mouth with no signs of resistance – presumably, if this was unwanted the deceased would have resisted;
  - The wrists being tied together with no signs of ligature marks – The deceased tied his own hands together. This was possible due to the way the cable ties were secured. If another person had tied the wrists of the deceased, less cable ties would have been required and presumably, the ties would have been tighter to prevent the deceased from escape. If the deceased did not want to be tied, there would surely be ligature marks on the wrists from the resistance and presumably, the deceased being a fit and healthy male could have broken the ties, as his mother did;
  - The numerous pieces of twisted glad wrap and piece of red/white/blue cloth which were found in various locations – it would appear that the deceased had some sort of fascination with these ties due to the large amount located.

## **Private investigator**

41. Ms Wright briefed a private investigator who provided a report. Mr Bob Munt, from Advanced Investigations, is a former police officer and has been performing inquiries for the legal fraternity for some 23 years.

42. His report contains some amended information from Ms Wright. In her original statement to police, Ms Wright confirmed that she had found Mr Wright's car keys in his bedroom under a teddy bear, which was on a chest of drawers. Since providing that statement, she had realised that Mr Wright's shed key was missing from this set of keys. The other two similar shed keys were all located where they should have been within the house. Ms Wright now presumes that Mr Wright's shed key has been stolen.
43. Mr Munt confirms that the only missing property is Mr Wright's shed key and the 20 litre fuel can which should have been in the shed.
44. The report then outlines the improbability of the body position denoting suicide, thus supporting Ms Wright's views. Mr Munt supports this view by detailing the circumstances of how Mr Wright's body was found. He says that the death is so unusual for a suicide that it required a re-enactment to be performed so as to test whether someone of similar age and fitness could possibly conceal themselves in the same way.
45. The report suggests that any search for remnants of the glad wrap box or the central roll holder of the glad wrap, has not been successful.
46. Mr Munt suggests a different cause of death, namely vagal reflex inhibition. He says that this cause of death is accidental and caused by microtrauma. The stimulus should be sudden and abnormal for the reflex to occur. The reflex is exaggerated by a high state of emotional tension, and also any condition which lowers voluntary cerebral control of reflex responses, such as mild alcoholic intoxication, a degree of hypoxia or partial narcosis due to incomplete anaesthesia.
47. Professor Ellis discounted a vagal reflex as being the cause of death.
48. Mr Munt puts forward a possible scenario of what might have happened to Mr Wright. He acknowledges that the scenario is purely hypothetical and, at this time, is unsupported by any evidence.

## **Re-Enactment**

49. A video re-enactment was conducted by a number of police officers on 11 September 2014.
50. The re-enactment was to endeavour to ascertain the degree of difficulty in applying unassisted the zip ties to the hands in a manner that was seen. It is clear from the re-enactment that there were a number of successful methods and each of them were relatively easy. Movement side to side and up and down was not particularly restricted indicating that the capacity to zip and unzip the sleeping bags was not strictly restricted.

## **Report of Professor Diego De Leo**

51. Professor De Leo is a consultant psychiatrist and the director of the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention. He is a highly qualified internationally renowned expert in suicide research and prevention. He was asked to provide his opinion about the following:

- Any aspect of Mr Wright's behaviour/tendencies in the lead up to his death which would may indicate suicide as a plausible possibility.
  - Any aspects of the circumstances surrounding Mr Wright's death which might indicate suicide as a plausible possibility.
  - Any other comments deemed important to the case
52. Prof De Leo noted a number of personal elements concerning Mr Wright including that he had an intellectual disability; past physical/psychological violence/abuse within the family; and knowledge of suicide behaviour in a relative. He stated that none of those elements represent a strong indicators/precursor of suicidal ideation and/or behaviour. As such, the hypothesis of suicide as a cause of death would come as completely out of the blue in the eyes of his mother and this is perfectly understandable.
53. Nevertheless Prof De Leo stated that in Western countries, suicide does occur even in complete absence of warning signs and even in absence of mental disorders. He concluded that there were no elements to say that the medical and psycho-social history of Mr Wright were particularly indicative of an existing suicide risk, however on the basis of the available evidence he had no elements to exclude this possibility either.
54. In relation to the scene in the way it was detected and reported, he said this was compatible with a suicide event. Prima facie the scene seemed to suggest:
- an elaborate attempt at reducing mobility;
  - the creation of an adequate setting inside his beloved shed;
  - a careful dressing with multiple layers of clothing with the ski equipment possibly representing preferred clothing and beanies and balaclava to complement the dressing but also to reinforce the gagging structure created by him in order to favour asphyxiation.
55. Prof De Leo considered that Mr Wright had possibly chosen the location that best fit into his passions and talents, put a mattress on the floor, overdressed himself while performing his long and accurate preparations, and delicately mummified himself inside many layers of clothing, glad wrapping and binding in order to persist in his attempt of provoking self-suffocation and preventing a possible change of mind. He agreed this reconstruction was speculative but considered it plausible.
56. Prof De Leo noted that in this case the method adopted resembles very closely self-asphyxiation through plastic bag, which is a quite common form of suicide. The method requires strong determination in resisting the natural impulse to breath.
57. He declined to comment on the hypothesised scenario suggested by the private investigator that it was a possible fatal case of vagus nerve inhibition and possibly provoked by third parties.
58. Prof De Leo also stated the possibility of foul play cannot be excluded. He noted the positives in this direction include the many character references; the lack of any known triggering event; the reportedly uneventful night preceding the death; the work commitment plan for the day after; and the lack of any known distressing conditions in his life.

59. In addition, he said one might think that many simpler and more immediate methods were available to a suicide mind, instead of the very complicated method adopted. The method seemed to suggest the presence of a certain number of 'experiential' aspect in the procedure, maybe not alien to the desire to impress third parties. He stated it is not infrequent that persons with intellectual impairments often conceive very elaborate collaborated initiatives in order to gain admiration.
60. He also noted the literature abounds of descriptions of cases in which people initiated a suicidal action but then change their mind and tried to survive the attempt, as well as of cases in which the beginning of the action was aimed at exploring risky situations, sometimes in the context of self-eroticism, but then it turned into a fatal event.
61. In his conclusion he stated that he was inclined to conclude the most probable cause of death was suicide. He stated that an experimental trial where there was an unplanned accidental death could not be excluded. The possibility of foul play cannot be completely ruled out given the difficulty of verifying all of the necessary components for fulfilling the required criteria for the definition of suicide were there, namely the intention to die, the appropriateness of means to cause death and the knowledge of fatal outcome as a consequence of the act. He could not find the elements suggestive of a case of homicide.

## **Conclusions**

62. There is no doubt that this is and remains a very unusual and mysterious case.
63. I accept that there is no evidence of third-party involvement or homicide for the reasons as stated by the police investigator.
64. I was impressed by the evidence of the family, friends and neighbours and I am satisfied as a result this was not a case of suicide. There is no evidence Mr Wright had ever expressed anything resembling suicidal ideation. He was a happy and well liked man. There was no evidence of sadness or depression impacting on him at the time. He was well cared for and supported by his mother, close family and neighbours. There is no evidence of any triggering point which would have made him take this action with an intention to kill himself.
65. It is evident that Mr Wright had a very unusual fascination with snow and skiing clothing. It is also apparent from the other pieces of rags and Glad Wrap that were found in various locations around the property that this was not the first time that Mr Wright had used those materials, presumably in a similar manner.
66. The evidence supports a conclusion that the most likely scenario was that this was some sort of experiment. It involved clothing that he was fascinated with and occurred in the shed that he spent so much time in. The planning was quite elaborate. There is no evidence to suggest it was for some sexual gratification. It remains unclear as to why Mr Wright was conducting such an experiment but I find that it was conducted by him freely and without

assistance from any other person. His death occurred by accident in that context.

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

**Identity of the deceased** – Karl Robert Wright

**How he died** – Karl had a moderate intellectual disability. He had a fascination with ski clothing. He was found encased in multiple layers of such clothing, inside a sleeping bag, bound and gagged with rags and twisted Glad Wrap. He had made an elaborate plan and had probably practised some elements of what he was going to do. This all occurred in a shed where he conducted his mechanical interests, at which he was adept. There is no evidence of third party involvement. Although it was open to find elements suggestive that this was a case of suicide, I am satisfied it was not. I find he died by accident in the course of an unusual experiment being conducted voluntarily and solely by him.

**Place of death** – 147-151 Dulong School Road, Dulong

**Date of death**– 28 to 29 July 2013

**Cause of death** – 1(a) Mechanical asphyxia

I close the inquest.

John Lock  
Deputy State Coroner  
Brisbane  
18 November 2014