



CORONERS COURT

FINDINGS OF INVESTIGATION

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

TITLE OF COURT: Coroners Court

JURISDICTION: Cairns

DATE: 13 March 2017

FILE NO(s): 2016/4410

FINDINGS OF: Kevin Priestly, Northern Coroner

CATCHWORDS: CORONERS: Investigation, snorkelling, underlying coronary artery atheroma

MT was 67 years of age and visiting from Japan as part of his retirement holiday. He was travelling with his wife and two long-time friends. The only medical history available is MT was a diabetic and smoker.

At about 8.30am on 20 October 2016 the group travelled to Green Island as part of a tour. At 10am MT went parasailing then walked to the main beach area. The group sat down near the lifeguard hut and in between the flags. MT and one of his friends each hired a mask and snorkel from the beach hire hut. On return to the beach, there was a discussion about the use of the mask and snorkel, then both entered the water. MT and his friend swam and snorkelled within an area about 20m from the beach in neck deep water. They returned to the beach and rested. MT was not seen to have any difficulties while snorkelling and did not report any difficulties.

MT and his friend went for a second snorkel, this time his friend went further out towards some coral while MT remained in the shallower area. His friend returned to the beach after a short period but was unable to locate MT. Along with the others, a search started, walking the beach and looking out to sea in the belief that MT was still snorkelling. At about the same time, two lifeguards recovered MT from the water with a rescue board. He was having difficulty breathing then lapsed into unconsciousness. CPR was started and continued for over an hour, until a doctor from the helicopter rescue arrived and pronounced MT deceased.

Police conducted an investigation into the circumstances of the incident. Weather conditions at Green Island were good, the sea flat with no strong winds. The snorkelling equipment was recovered and inspected. The Dive Inspector with Workplace Health and Safety found the equipment was in working condition with minor wear.

Dr Paull Botterill, Forensic Pathologist, conducted an autopsy and concluded death was due to coronary artery atheroma against a background of diabetes mellitus. Post-mortem examination showed an enlarged heart with hardening and narrowing of the arteries of the heart and rest of the body, as well as scarring of the heart muscle in keeping with past heart attack. Dr Botterill concluded that while drowning remains difficult to exclude, it appeared death was more likely a consequence of underlying coronary artery atheroma and associated heart muscle scarring.

I find MT died on 20 October 2016 at Green Island due to coronary artery atheroma against a background of diabetes mellitus. His death was due to natural causes. No further investigation is required.

Kevin Priestly
Northern Coroner
Cairns
13 March 2017