



**Bega
Coroners Court
New South Wales**

Case Name: Geoffrey James Buchanan

Hearing Date(s): 29 July 2026

Jurisdiction: Coroners Act 2009

Before: His Honour Judge Coroner D. Dick OAM.

Decision: Inquest – missing person

Representation: Sergeant R. Novatin, assisting

File Number(s): 2025/334981

Publication Restriction: NIL

JUDGMENT

- 1 This inquest is being held into the disappearance and probable death of Geoffrey James Buchanan. It is always a distressing time for family and friends when an Inquest is held into the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of a loved one. Sadly, questions will remain unanswered. Police have performed a commendable job in undertaking and completing several investigations since Mr Buchanan's disappearance.
- 2 By way of background, Mr Buchanan was aged 56 years. In 1994 he was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus which was managed by daily insulin injections. He had also been diagnosed with hyperlipidemia (high cholesterol) and anxiety. Mr Buchanan went missing from his boat in the waters off Batemans Bay NSW on 19 July 2025. He was an avid recreational fisher.
- 3 In 2023 Mr Buchanan purchased a boat powered by a 300hp outboard motor. The boat could be used for cruising, overnighting and fishing. While the boat could be used for fishing it was not purpose built for offshore game fishing.
- 4 On the day of his death, Mr Buchanan is captured on CCTV leaving a marina in his boat, unaccompanied. Mr Buchanan was known as a responsible boater who respected the sea, prioritised safety and exhibited sound judgment. His stated intention was to fish for tuna. At 0641 hours Mr Buchanan sent a group message to his family. The message was a video of the sunrise with the caption "I love this shit". At 0814 hours Mr Buchanan called his wife and told her he had caught a tuna. At 0852 hours Mr Buchanan sent his wife a photo of the tuna on the deck of his boat. At 0936 hours Mr Buchanan sent his wife a photo of the tuna in an ice bag with the caption "All bagged up". At 0949 Mr Buchanan sent his wife a photo of the sea conditions with the caption "It's horrible now, I'm heading in". That was the last communication between them.

- 5 During the fishing trip Mr Buchanan had also been in contact with the skipper of a fishing charter boat. Mr Buchanan stated he was having a great day and asked the skipper to turn his marine radio to channel 71 to keep in touch. At 1013 hours Mr Buchanan sent the skipper a photo of his tuna catch. The response from the skipper was “nice work” to which Mr Buchanan replied, “double hook up too”. That was the last contact between them.
- 6 Mr Buchanan’s family commenced to worry when he could not be contacted during the afternoon. Mr Buchanan did not return to the marina. Marine Rescue was notified and a search commenced. Sydney Water Police were notified and a search by air was also commenced. At 0200 hours the next day the air and sea search were suspended. When light returned the search recommenced by air and sea. The sea search involved NSW Water Police, NSW Marine Rescue, and NSW Surf Life Saving. The air search involved 4 aircraft.
- 7 An expert Doctor in the field of survivability opined, having regard to air temperature water temperature, sea conditions, wind strength, currents and Mr Buchanan’s medical needs, his expected survival would be 6 to 8 hours. The best-case scenario was that Mr Buchanan could still be alive if he was in the boat and able to manage his diabetes, but that probability was small. The search continued and the search area increased over the following days.
- 8 The boat was located 3 days later. It was moving at slow (trolling) speed with no person on board. Nearby commercial fishers attended and stopped Mr Buchanan’s boat by using ropes to foul the propeller of the outboard motor. Water Police attended and towed Mr Buchanan’s boat to shore. The boat was stored securely at the marina for forensic examination, which was unremarkable. The tuna was still on the deck as were 2 fishing rods.
- 9 An examination of the chart plotter did not record the route of the boat because the auto save function was not activated and there was a loss of power when the batteries discharged. Mr Buchanan had manually entered several GPS points. One

of these entries was recorded as "Toona". An examination of the motor log showed that 416.2 litres of fuel had been used and the boat had travelled 220.4 kilometres at an average speed of 5.21 knots. An examination of one fishing rod showed a large amount of line was missing and the reel's drag setting was locked on full. Mr Buchanan's gimble belt with harness, gaff hook and another fishing rod were missing.

- 10 Mr Buchanan did not let anyone know exactly where he planned to fish. Police concluded that notwithstanding the deteriorating weather conditions, Mr Buchanan continued to fish from the boat which not designed for that purpose, in weather that was worsening. Police concluded that Mr Buchanan hooked another fish and while fighting to reel it in, has either fallen or been pulled overboard. A tuna is a strong fish and when hooked may take hours to land. With the boat still in gear, Mr Buchanan was unable to rescue himself. Mr Buchanan did not have a Personal Locator Beacon and it remains unknown if he was wearing a Personal Floatation Device such as a lifejacket.
- 11 Mr Buchanan's disappearance has been extensively investigated by experienced Police and is considered not suspicious. Police also conducted extensive proof of life investigations with the result that Mr Buchanan is presumed deceased. His death being the result of misadventure. After thorough review I am satisfied the investigation is now complete.
- 12 A decision to declare a person deceased is a solemn duty. I am satisfied Mr Buchanan is deceased. On the available evidence I am unable to determine the manner or cause of Mr Buchanan's death and as a result I must return an open finding.
- 13 **I FIND THAT GEOFFREY JAMES BUCHANAN IS DECEASED AND THAT HE PROBABLY DIED ON OR ABOUT 19 JULY 2025 IN THE WATERS OF THE TASMAN SEA OFF THE COAST OF BATEMANS BAY, NSW. AS TO THE MANNER OR CAUSE OF HIS DEATH THE EVIDENCE DOES NOT ENABLE ME TO SAY.**

14 TO THE FAMILY OF MR BUCHANAN, I ACKNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTAND THAT
UNCERTAINTY AND LACK OF FINALITY CAN MAKE GRIEVING ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT.
THE COURT OFFERS SINCERE CONDOLENCES.



Judge Coroner D. Dick OAM

Coroner's Court Bega



29 July 2026
