



CORONERS COURT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Inquest: Inquest into the disappearance and suspected death of AL

Hearing dates: 20 January 2026

Date of findings: 20 January 2026

Place of findings: NSW State Coroner's Court, Lidcombe

Findings of: Magistrate Carmel Forbes, Deputy State Coroner

Catchwords: CORONIAL LAW – missing person – missing person now deceased – manner and cause of death

File number: 2023/00255664

Representation: Coronial Advocate Assisting the Coroner: S Perry

Findings:

Identity of deceased:
The person who died was Mr AL

Date of death:
AL died on 13 September 2022

Place of death:
AL died at Vaucluse NSW 2030

Cause of death:
The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the cause of AL's death

Manner of death:
AL's death was intentionally self-inflicted

NOTE: PURSUANT TO S 75 OF THE CORONERS ACT 2009 I DIRECT THAT THERE BE NO PUBLICATION OF ANY MATERIAL THAT IDENTIFIES THE DECEASED PERSON OR HIS FAMILY

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REASONS FOR FINDINGS

Introduction

- 1 This is an inquest into the disappearance and suspected death of AL. At the time of AL's disappearance, he was 35 years old. He was last seen alive on 13 September 2022 when he was captured on CCTV footage on Macquarie Street, Vaucluse leaving his vehicle and walking towards the Macquarie Lighthouse at 11:27pm.
- 2 AL was reported missing on 26 September 2022, and police have made extensive enquiries in an attempt to locate him.
- 3 When police suspect a missing person may have died, the suspected death is reportable to the coroner. Once that report is made the coroner has an obligation to investigate in order to answer a number of questions. The primary question is whether the person is in fact deceased. If that can be established, the coroner is to make further findings as to the date, place, manner and cause of death.¹
- 4 In addition to deciding these questions, at the conclusion of proceedings, the coroner may, if necessary, make recommendations in relation to matters arising directly from the evidence.²

Background

- 5 AL was born on 9 June 1987. He lived with his uncle and grandmother and worked as an ophthalmic technician. He had a long history of mental health issues.
- 6 When AL was 18 years old, he was injured during a robbery and required an orbital implant in his right eye. AL's parents described this as a turning point in

¹ Section 81 *Coroners Act 2009* (NSW)

² Section 82 *Coroners Act 2009* (NSW)

his life. AL became more frustrated and unhappy with life in general. He started smoking and drinking alcohol.

- 7 In 2006, AL started seeing a psychologist. He began writing his thoughts in a journal. Many of the entries expressed how distressed he was, and that he could not cope with life and did not see any positives.
- 8 In 2007, AL attended a three-week mental health treatment program at the Northside Clinic in Greenwich.
- 9 Between 2010 and 2016, AL was hospitalised on various occasions for mental health issues.
- 10 In 2019, AL was diagnosed with autism. After the diagnosis, AL would frequently talk about his damaged brain.
- 11 From April 2020 to August 2022, AL saw his psychiatrist, on 21 occasions. He was diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder, social anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, substance use disorder, autism spectrum disorder and an eating disorder. During a session on 25 July 2022, AL reported that he was not going well and stated that the future did not look so good given his autism diagnosis. He also spoke about his dog's death, which caused him great distress.
- 12 In 2021, AL began to withdraw socially.
- 13 In December 2021, AL attempted suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning by burning charcoal in his garage.
- 14 In August 2022, AL's beloved dog died. AL's friend told police that he believed that AL only lived for his dog. In the same month, AL set his house on fire. He told his uncle he was trying to kill himself and had left a suicide note.

- 15 Throughout 2022, AL's mental health deteriorated and he became more agitated. His father arranged for AL to see a psychiatrist at St George Hospital. However, AL was not involuntarily detained and he left soon after.

The last recorded sighting of AL

- 16 On 13 September 2022, his uncle observed AL chain smoking out the front of the house and pacing back and forth. AL told his uncle, "I'm not coming home, I'm staying with friends". At the time, court proceedings were in place which required AL to move out of the house the following day. He then got into his car and left.
- 17 At 8:46pm on 13 September 2022, CCTV footage from Kennards Self Storage shows AL removing items from his car and taking them to his storage unit. At 9:03pm, AL is seen getting back into his vehicle and leaving.
- 18 At 11:27pm on 13 September 2022, CCTV footage shows AL parking his vehicle on Macquarie Street in Vacluse and walking in an easterly direction towards the Macquarie Lighthouse.
- 19 AL's phone's last usage was 11:39pm on 13 September 2022 in the vicinity of the Vacluse phone tower. The phone remained on (but had not been used) until 4:53pm on 15 September 2022. Police provided evidence that a phone can remain connected while immersed in water until the battery runs out.

The police investigation and efforts to locate AL

- 20 On 15 September 2022 his employers found a note from AL along with a watch which appeared to be a gift. In the note, AL apologised for not giving them a "proper goodbye". He said that he made this decision a couple of months ago and there was nothing they could have done to stop him after his diagnosis and the death of his dog. He said that he was going to wait until the end of the year to make sure they were not short staffed and apologised that he couldn't make it that long. He expressed his appreciation to them for their support throughout the years.

- 21 On 26 September 2022, his uncle went into AL's room and noticed a lot of belongings that AL had not taken with him. He located a note on a side table addressed to his grandmother in which he stated that she was the "most important person in the world". He stated that with his disability, he did not have a good life and that he had suffered his whole life. He apologised and said goodbye. In the note, he also explained that he had just paid to renew his registration and CTP insurance, that he rented a storage unit at Kennard's Self Storage and provided the code for the gate and for the padlock on the door to his unit and requested that his regular medical practitioners be contacted to advise them that he would not be seeing them anymore.
- 22 At 6:00pm on the same day, his uncle reported AL missing at St George Police Station.
- 23 At 10:00pm on 26 September 2022, AL's vehicle was located on Macquarie Road in Vaucluse. Shortly afterwards, PolAir conducted a flyover of the location that AL was last believed to be. A door knock was conducted and a canvass of the Macquarie Lighthouse and Lighthouse reserve was conducted.
- 24 Police published a photograph of AL on its Facebook page asking anyone with information about AL's whereabouts to contact police or Crime Stoppers. No information was obtained as a result of this media release.
- 25 On 27 September 2022, police attended Kennards Self Storage and searched AL's storage unit. Police located furniture but nothing else of any significance. Police confirmed that AL rented the storage unit for one month on 9 September 2022.
- 26 On 28 September 2022, police organised for a coordinated cliff line search to be conducted by PolAir and Police Rescue. Nothing was located. The cliff line at Vaucluse is steep, unstable and poorly lit. It is an area where recovery is often not possible.

- 27 On the same date, police obtained AL's bank records which confirmed the payments for his registration, CTP insurance and storage unit rental. There were also two pre-planned payments to his grandmother of \$150 with the description, "I love you mama".
- 28 On 3 October 2022, police viewed CCTV footage from 142 Old South Head Road in Vaucluse, which did not show AL walking past.
- 29 On the same date, police conducted another search of the Macquarie Lighthouse area but did not find anything of significance. Police noted that there were various areas of the cliff with fences that were only around a metre tall and could easily have been scaled.
- 30 Police reviewed AL's Medicare records and noted that the last record was on 22 August 2022 when AL filled two prescriptions.
- 31 On 2 December 2022, police various conducted checks with the following outcomes:
- (1) AL had not access Medicare.
 - (2) AL had not filled any scripts.
 - (3) The Australian Border Force had no record of AL leaving Australia and there were no activations of the Australian Passport Facial Recognition.
 - (4) The Missing Persons Unit in the other States and Territories confirmed they had no record of AL being active in their jurisdiction.
- 32 On 19 January 2023, police made enquiries with Google in relation to a Gmail account belonging to AL. The records provided by Google indicate it was last used on 9 September 2022.

- 33 On 27 April 2023, police conducted further signs of life checks for any activity between 13 September 2022 and 27 April 2023. There were no results.
- 34 Based on the police investigation, Detective Senior Constable Archbold-Digby opined that AL was meticulous at planning out his actions. Detective Senior Constable Archbold-Digby noted that AL could easily have climbed over the barrier where AL is suspected to have accessed in order to cause his own death by jumping from the cliff at the Macquarie Lighthouse.

Conclusion

- 35 A finding that a person is deceased is a finding of great significance and gravity, not only for the family members of that person and the emotional toll that such a finding will invariably bring, but also because such a finding carries with it important legal and administrative consequences. Such a finding is made on the balance of probabilities, but there must be clear, cogent and exact evidence that a person has died before it can be made.³
- 36 The available evidence establishes the following:
- (1) AL was last seen alive on 13 September 2022 walking alone towards the cliff line at Vaocluse.
 - (2) Despite extensive and comprehensive searches undertaken by police, no evidence has been obtained indicating that AL is still alive.
 - (3) Although AL had a tumultuous relationship with his family, the evidence indicates that he frequently saw, spoke to or contacted them. There is no evidence of any contact with AL's family after 13 September 2022.

³ *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336.

- (4) There is no evidence that AL has contacted his employers or any other person known to him.
- (5) AL had an extensive history of mental health issues, and his mental health deteriorated significantly in 2022.
- (6) AL's dog died in August 2022. AL mentioned that the only thing he lived for was his dog and after his dog's death, he had nothing to live for.
- (7) AL had previously attempted to take his own life.
- (8) AL left a number of notes saying "goodbye" to people. He also left a note with instructions in relation to his belongings and told his uncle that he was not coming home.

37 Having considered the evidence I am satisfied on the balance of probabilities that AL is deceased and that he intentionally took his own life at Vacluse. In relation to the date of death I agree with his parents submission that it most likely that he died on 13 September 2022 shortly after he left his vehicle and then stopped using his phone.

38 As AL's body has not been recovered, a post-mortem examination has not been conducted to determine a precise cause of his death. While it is possible that AL died from multiple injuries sustained after jumping off the cliff, I accept AL's father's submission that it is also possible that he died from drowning after sustaining injuries from which he was unable to self-rescue. Accordingly, I am unable to make any findings as to the precise cause of AL's death.

Findings

39 For the reasons set out above, I make the following findings pursuant to section 81(1) of the *Coroners Act 2009*

Identity

The person who died was Mr AL.

Date of death

AL died on 13 September 2022.

Place of death

AL died at Vaucluse NSW.

Cause of death

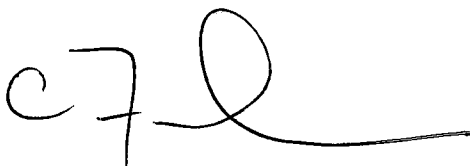
The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the cause of AL's death

Manner of death

AL's death was intentionally self-inflicted

Closing remarks

- 40 On behalf of the Court, I express my sincere and respectful condolences to AL's family and friends for their tragic loss. I assure AL's family that should further information ever become available about the cause of AL's death; the inquest can be re-opened.
- 41 I thank the officer in charge, Detective Senior Constable Edward Archold-Digby, for the very thorough investigation and for preparing a detailed brief of evidence. I also express my gratitude to the coronial advocate assisting me throughout the inquest, Senior Constable Scott Perry.
- 42 I close this inquest.



Magistrate Carmel Forbes
Deputy State Coroner
NSW State Coroner's Court, Lidcombe

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