



**CORONERS COURT
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

Inquest:	Inquest into the suspected death of missing person Taewoo KIM
Hearing dates:	8 April 2026
Date of findings:	8 April 2026
Place of findings:	Coroners Court of New South Wales, Lidcombe
Findings of:	Judge Kasey Pearce, Deputy State Coroner
Catchwords:	CORONIAL LAW – whether missing person now deceased – swimming at unpatrolled beach – Moonee Beach
File number:	2025/00221090
Representation:	Mr D Winter-Mirenzi, Coronial Advocate Assisting the Coroner
Findings:	<p>On the available evidence I find that Taewoo Kim, who was reported as a missing person on 27 December 2024 is now deceased.</p> <p>Taewoo Kim died on 26 December 2024 in the ocean waters in the vicinity of Moonee Beach, NSW, 2450</p> <p>The available evidence and the absence of any postmortem examination do not allow for any finding to be made as to either the cause or manner of Taewoo Kim’s death.</p>

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Taewoo was last seen by workmates at about 11:00am on 26 December 2024 entering the water at the northern end of Moonee Beach, an isolated and unpatrolled beach on the Mid North Coast of NSW. He was reported missing to police on the evening of 27 December.
- 1.2 Despite an extensive search, Taewoo was not found. There has been no activity since Taewoo was last seen that suggests that he is alive.
- 1.3 In making these findings, I acknowledge the profound impact that Taewoo's disappearance has had and will continue to have on his friends and family, particularly his parents and sister. I extend my sympathies for their loss.

2 Why was an inquest held?

- 2.1 Under the *Coroners Act 2009* ("the Act") a coroner is responsible for investigating all reportable deaths or suspected deaths.
- 2.2 After all existing lines of enquiry to locate Taewoo had been exhausted, in June 2025 the New South Wales Police Force (**NSWPF**) submitted a report to the coroner advising that it was suspected that he was deceased. When the case of a missing person, who is suspected to have died, is reported to a coroner, the coroner must determine from the available evidence whether that person has in fact died. In such cases there will often be very little information, despite extensive enquiries, about what happened to the person after they were last seen alive.
- 2.3 If a coroner forms the view that a missing person has died then the coroner is obliged to make findings to answer questions about the identity of the person who died, when and where they died, and the cause and the manner of their death. The manner of a person's death means the circumstances in which that person died. If the coroner is unable to answer these questions, then an inquest must be held. In Taewoo's case, the missing person investigation conducted by the NSWPF has been unable to reveal precisely what happened to him after he was last seen alive on the morning of 26 December 2024. As it has not been possible to answer the questions that a coroner is required to answer, it is mandatory that an inquest be held.

2.4 The material gathered during the coronial investigation was tendered at the commencement of the inquest in the form of a one-volume brief of evidence. Apart from the NSWPF Officer-in-Charge (**OIC**) of the investigation, Sergeant Andrew Plichta, none of the witnesses who provided statements were required to give evidence.

3 Taewoo's life

3.1 While any inquest inevitably focuses on the circumstances of the death of a person, it is important to recognise and acknowledge the life of the person the subject of the inquest in a brief and hopefully meaningful way, to appreciate what their life, and their loss, means to those who knew and loved them.

3.2 Taewoo was born in Seoul, South Korea on 18 October 2003 to parents Sunghoon Kim and Kumsoon Hwanbo. He had one sibling, a sister, Hanul Kim. His immediate family continue to live in South Korea.

3.3 After he finished school, Taewoo worked on construction sites and at logistics companies in Korea. He travelled to the United States and after returning to Korea, later decided to spend some time in Australia.

3.4 Taewoo arrived in Australia on 21 May 2024 on a working holiday visa. He spent some time in Western Australia, before coming to Sydney. In Sydney he worked in facilities management at Sydney airport. Later he travelled to Macksville, a small town on the Nambucca River in NSW. There he worked as a berry picker for ECW Farming Pty Ltd (**ECW**). He lived at 53 Old Coast Road, North Macksville with about a dozen other employees of ECW who were also overseas travellers.

3.5 According to his father, Taewoo showed great interest in health and fitness while in Korea, and after coming to Australia had sent his family photographs of his well-built upper body. Taewoo told his father that he started learning to swim in Australia. It was unclear exactly how Taewoo had been learning to swim. As far as his father knew, Taewoo had never been in the ocean.

4 Events leading up to Taewoo's disappearance

4.1 On 23 December 2024 Taewoo spoke to his mother by phone for several hours, telling her about what he had been doing in Australia. He told his family that he was doing well

and not to worry. Taewoo sent his family some money as a gift a few days before his disappearance.

- 4.2 On 25 December 2024, Taewoo attended a Christmas party, along with some of the other workers who were sharing his accommodation. According to Taewoo's workmate, Akane Tamura (**Akane**), Taewoo had been drinking at the party. She described him as 'cheerful' and commented that he 'seemed happy.'
- 4.3 Because they were not required to work on 26 December, Taewoo and his workmates planned to spend some time at the beach, have lunch in Coffs Harbour, and then do some shopping.

5 Events of 26 December 2024

- 5.1 On Thursday 26 December 2024 Taewoo went with some of his workmates in two separate vehicles from the North Macksville residence to North Moonee Beach. In the same vehicle as Taewoo were Sukhum Sapauaysuk, Chisa Thanabunyakit (**Chisa**), Chiao Jou Wang, Eiko Yoshida (**Eiko**), Mayu Iijima (**Mayu**) and Akane.
- 5.2 At approximately 11am the group parked at the 'Look at Me Now' Headland car park. They walked south along a path for about 500 metres down to the northern end of Moonee Beach, which was isolated and unpatrolled. Mayu, Eiko and Taewoo were ahead of the others.
- 5.3 Mayu and Eiko last saw Taewoo running towards the ocean. A photograph taken by Akane captured Taewoo entering the ocean, as did a video taken by Eiko. Taewoo was shirtless and wearing black shorts.
- 5.4 According to Akane, the group decided to leave Moonee Beach at about 12.45pm. Taewoo was nowhere to be seen, and although she and Eiko looked for his belongings, they were unable to find them.
- 5.5 Eiko, who was closest to Taewoo, attempted to contact him by phone, but when she failed to hear from him, the group left the beach to have lunch in Coffs Harbour. Eiko continued to try to contact Taewoo throughout the afternoon. According to Akane, there was some discussion within the group about the possibility that Taewoo had drowned, however, because Taewoo was physically strong and he often acted

independently and didn't always stay with the group, they concluded he had gone somewhere alone.

5.6 Later in the afternoon, the employees' supervisor and house manager of Taewoo's residence, JC, came to Coffs Harbour due to an issue with one of the vehicles. He was told that Taewoo was missing, and he and Mayu went back to the beach to look for him. They did not find Taewoo and appear to have concluded that Taewoo would likely return to the North Macksville residence on his own.

5.7 Taewoo did not return that evening.

6 Search efforts to locate Taewoo

27 December 2024

6.1 Taewoo failed to attend work on 27 December 2024. There was some discussion between several of his workmates throughout the day about the possibility of a further search for Taewoo and about reporting his disappearance to the police. It appears that the making of a missing person's report in relation to Taewoo was delayed by language difficulties between the various workers, a perception that the making of a report would cost money, and a belief that making a report would likely lead to difficult interactions with the police.

6.2 Ultimately at about 9:36pm with the assistance of an interpreting service, Akane contacted the Police Assistance Line to report Taewoo missing.

6.3 At about 9:49pm the same evening police attended the North Macksville residence and spoke to Eiko and Akane.

6.4 Police tried to call Taewoo multiple times on his mobile phone, however the phone was switched off.

6.5 The Coffs/Clarence Police District Commander, the Coffs/Clarence Police District Crime Manager and Marine Area Command were notified of Taewoo's disappearance late on 27 December. The South Korean consulate was also notified.

28 December 2024

- 6.6 About 1:00am on 28 December 2024, the northern end of Moonee Beach was searched by two police officers who located a black bag and shoes in the sand dunes belonging to Taewoo. The bag contained Taewoo's wallet and mobile phones.
- 6.7 At about 3:30am the State Emergency Service (**SES**) arrived and used All Terrain Vehicles (**ATVs**) to conduct a search of Moonee Beach.
- 6.8 The Marine Area Command drift model indicated possible locations of interest, including Moonee Beach and the 'Look at Me Now' headland. These areas were patrolled by Police and SES in ATVs.
- 6.9 Fire and Rescue NSW attended with drone and prioritised the headland and Moonee Creek end of the beach.
- 6.10 Ongoing land and sea search operations continued throughout Saturday 28 December 2024. Sea operations were coordinated by the Search and Rescue Coordinator at Sydney Water Police, Marine Area Command. Resources deployed included vessels from Marine Area Command and Marine Rescue, PolAir from NSWPF Aviation Command, the Westpac Helicopter and Surf Lifesaving Australia. Land operations were coordinated by Lismore Police Rescue utilising resources from the SES, Fire and Rescue NSW and the NSWPF.
- 6.11 At some point Police contacted Dr Paul Luckin, an expert in survivability in the context of search and rescue operations. His opinion was that if Taewoo was a poor swimmer he could have survived 1-2 hours at most in the water. If a moderately good swimmer, he might have survived 10-12 hours.
- 6.12 In view of this information, the formal marine search was suspended at 5:00pm on 28 December 2024.

29 December 2024

- 6.13 Further searching was undertaken on 29 December 2024, coordinated by Marine Area Command utilising Coffs Harbour Water Police vessels, Marine Rescue vessels, and Surf Life Saving jet skis. PolAir was also in attendance conducting a search.
- 6.14 As at 5:00pm 29 December 2024, Taewoo had not been located.

7 Sign of life checks

7.1 Following suspension of active search operations, police conducted extensive enquiries, including:

- a) examination of mobile phone records and data
- b) financial transaction analysis
- c) immigration and border movement checks
- d) Centrelink and Medicare enquiries
- e) checks with interstate police services
- f) ongoing monitoring of unidentified remains databases
- g) regular checks of unidentified deceased remains within the missing persons database

7.2 These searches are commonly known as 'sign of life checks.' The results from these searches disclosed no new communications, no new financial activity, or official records that would indicate that Taewoo was alive following his disappearance.

7.3 The OIC has also obtained fingerprint and dental records for Taewoo and DNA from his parents. These samples have been stored and may be used for comparison purposes in the event that any unidentified human remains are found which are believed to be those of Taewoo.

8 Is Taewoo deceased?

8.1 The first finding that a Coroner must make following an inquest into the suspected death of a missing person is whether that person is now deceased. A finding that a person is deceased is a finding of great significance, not only for the family members of that person and the emotional burden 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 missing person has died before such a finding can be made.

8.2 In considering the question of whether Taewoo is now deceased, regard must be had to the results, or lack of results, from the NSWPF investigation, together with other information relevant to the circumstances in which Taewoo went missing. A consideration of all the available evidence establishes the following:

- (a) Despite extensive and comprehensive physical, documentary and electronic searches no evidence has been identified indicating that Taewoo is still alive.
- (b) The eyewitness observations and photographs showing Taewoo entering the water at Moonee Beach and the absence of any sighting of him after that point suggest that Taewoo went swimming at Moonee Beach but did not leave that location.
- (c) The discovery of Taewoo's backpack containing his personal items on 28 December 2024 in the sand dunes at Moonee Beach suggest that he did not leave the location.
- (d) Taewoo appears to have been close to his parents and maintained regular contact with them. There is no plausible explanation why he would not maintain contact them after 26 December 2024.
- (e) The opinion expressed by Dr Luckin is that if Taewoo entered the water it is likely that, as a poor swimmer, he would have survived for 1-2 hours at most given the weather and tidal conditions at the time.

8.3 Having regard to the matters set out above, the conclusion that must, sadly, be reached is that, on the balance of probabilities, Taewoo is now deceased.

9 When and where did Taewoo die?

9.1 Having concluded that Taewoo is now deceased, the questions that now arise, as part of the coroner's functions, is whether the available evidence allows for any finding to be made as to where and when Taewoo died, and the cause and manner of his death. Given the evidence referred to above, it appears that Taewoo intentionally entered the water at Moonee Beach at or about 11:00am and most likely died in the ocean waters in that vicinity. Given the opinion of Dr Luckin that, as a poor swimmer, it was unlikely that Taewoo survived in the water for more than 1-2 hours, it is likely that he died sometime on 26 December 2024.

10 What was the cause and manner of Taewoo's death?

- 10.1 The police investigation did not identify any evidence regarding the circumstances in which Taewoo went missing that might lead to a conclusion that his death was suspicious. Similarly, there is no evidence that any third party had any involvement in his disappearance. Therefore, the possibility that Taewoo died because of the actions of another person can reasonably be excluded.
- 10.2 There is also no evidence that Taewoo suffered from any mental health concerns or conditions in the period immediately preceding 26 December 2024, or that he had previously ever voiced any thoughts of self-harm. Therefore, the possibility that Taewoo died because of his own intentional actions can also reasonably be excluded.
- 10.3 However, determination of the precise manner and cause of Taewoo's death is problematic. Taewoo intentionally entered the ocean at a beach that was isolated and unpatrolled and with which he was unfamiliar. He was not an experienced swimmer, and it is not known whether he had ever swum in the ocean before. It is plausible that the manner of Taewoo's death is misadventure, however, it is unclear whether Taewoo remained alive for a period before succumbing to the ocean and weather conditions, or whether he may have been subject to marine animal predation.
- 10.4 In the absence of Taewoo being found, and a post-mortem examination being performed it is not possible to reach a reliable conclusion as to the cause and manner of Taewoo's death.

11 Findings required by s 81(1)

- 11.1 I find that Taewoo Kim, who was reported as a missing person to the NSWPF on 27 December 2024, is now deceased.
- 11.2 The findings I make under 81(1) of the Act are:

The identity of the deceased

The person who died was Taewoo Kim.

Date of death

Taewoo Kim died on 26 December 2024.

Place of death

Taewoo Kim died in the ocean waters in the vicinity of Moonee Beach, NSW, 2450

Cause of death

The available evidence and the absence of any postmortem examination do not allow for any finding to be made as to the cause of Taewoo Kim's death.

Manner of death

The available evidence and the absence of any postmortem examination do not allow for any finding to be made as to the manner of Taewoo Kim's death.

12 Close of inquest

12.1 I would like to express my gratitude to Danny Winter-Mirenzi, Coronial Advocate, for his assistance throughout the course of the coronial investigation and during the inquest.

12.2 I also acknowledge the assistance provided by Sergeant Andrew Plichta, the NSWPF OIC, in investigating Taewoo's disappearance and in compiling the initial brief of evidence.

12.3 Families whose loved one is reported missing, but is not found, experience a grief, anguish and uncertainty that is impossible to put into words. It is hoped that one day further information may come to light that may provide some measure of solace to Taewoo's family.

12.4 Once again on behalf of the Coroners Court, I offer my sincere and respectful condolences to Taewoo's family and particularly to his mother, father and sister.

12.5 I close this inquest.



Judge Kasey Pearce

Deputy State Coroner

Coroner's Court of New South Wales

Date 8 April 2026