



MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION

Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11

I, Olivia McTaggart, Coroner, having investigated the death of Raymond Henry Elson

Find, pursuant to Section 28(1) of the *Coroners Act 1995*, that:

- a) The identity of the deceased is Raymond Henry Elson, date of birth 13 March 1928.
- b) Mr Elson was born in Launceston on 13 March 1928. He was married to Doreen Elson (née Sheridan) and together, they had one daughter, Lynette Butler. Mrs Elson died in 1974. Mr Elson was a commercial fisherman by occupation and owned a 30-foot fishing vessel *Jocelyn* ("the vessel").

On 10 June 1959, Mr Elson and his 17-year-old crewmate, Brian Howard (now deceased), commenced a fishing trip from Bridport on the vessel. Mr Howard had been a fisherman for only four months. The following day, 11 June 1959, the vessel was travelling in the waters of Bass Strait near Waterhouse Island, located 41.4km north-east of Bridport. At that time, a storm began to develop and Mr Elson anchored the vessel behind Waterhouse Island. He notified his position by radio to the Tasmanian Fisherman's Co-operative.

On the morning of the next day, 12 June 1959, Mr Elson notified the Tasmanians Fisherman's Cooperative that the vessel's radio batteries were running flat. This was the last radio transmission made from the vessel. The storm strengthened, which damaged the vessel's steering and radio aerial and caused the anchor to drag. The batteries also became flat. Mr Elson and Mr Howard were unable to pull up the anchor. They therefore detached it from the vessel, causing the vessel to run under sail. Whilst Mr Elson was above deck, he was struck by the boom which knocked him overboard. At the time, Mr Howard was below deck attempting to repair the steering, but he heard Mr Elson call for help. When he came onto the deck, he saw Mr Elson in the water and threw a life belt in his direction. He saw

Mr Elson swimming towards the life belt, but both the life belt and vessel drifted away from Mr Elson in the storm. Mr Howard did not see Mr Elson again. Given the situation and size of the storm, which included 20-foot seas and 60 knot winds, Mr Howard returned to safety below deck.

On 13 June 1959, the vessel washed up at Two Mile Beach near Cape Portland, 72.5km east of Waterhouse Island. Mr Howard telephoned his father from Cape Portland and raised the alarm. Sea and air searches commenced. The life belt was recovered in Ringarooma, 33.8 km southeast of Waterhouse Island. The boom of a vessel, likely that of the *Jocelyn*, was also recovered in that area. Mr Elson was not found and has not been seen since 12 June 1959. Interrogation of Tasmanian and National databases since that time has not indicated any evidence that Mr Elson is alive. I am satisfied that he drowned on 12 June 1959. I find that Mr Elson died as a result of misadventure whilst working on the vessel as a commercial fisherman. There are no suspicious circumstances surrounding his death.

- c) Mr Elson's cause of death was drowning.
- d) Mr Elson died on 12 June 1959, aged 31 years, in the waters of Bass Strait near Waterhouse Island.

In making the above findings, I have had regard to the evidence gained in the investigation into Mr Elson's death which includes:

- The Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Affidavit of Lynette Butler, daughter of Mr Elson;
- Affidavit and investigation information Sergeant John Delpero, Coroner's Associate;
- Print media reports containing Mr Howard's account of events surrounding Mr Elson's death;
- Supreme Court of Tasmania records; and
- Office of Births, Deaths and Marriages Tasmania records.

Comments and Recommendations

Mr Elson's death came to the attention of the Coroner's Office on 19 September 2025 as a result of his daughter making a request for coronial records. Searches revealed that Mr Elson's death had not previously been reported to the Coroner,

likely because the applicable legislation at the time¹ did not give the coroner jurisdiction to investigate suspected deaths. Searches conducted by the Tasmania Police Missing Persons Unit also failed to locate any police records relating to the matter. I note that in 1962, Mr Elson was declared dead by the Supreme Court of Tasmania. However, court records do not contain statements or affidavits in relation to the circumstances of Mr Elson's death, apart from the location. My findings regarding the circumstances of death have been made on the basis of the account provided by Mr Howard to The Examiner newspaper published on 16 June 1959, which I accept as inherently reliable.

Mr Elson died at his "workplace" (as that term must be construed), of unnatural causes. As such, his death would ordinarily be required to be the subject of a public inquest pursuant to section 24 of the *Coroners Act* 1995. However, I have received a representation from the senior next of kin under section 26A(2) of the *Act*, that she does not seek that an inquest be held. Further, I am satisfied that, under section 26A(3) of the *Act*, it is not contrary to the public interest not to hold an inquest. I have therefore decided not to do so.

The circumstances surrounding Mr Elson's death are not such that require me to make any recommendations pursuant to section 28 of the *Coroners Act* 1995.

I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Mr Elson.

Dated: 27 February 2026 at Hobart, in the State of Tasmania.

Olivia McTaggart
Coroner

¹ *Coroners Act* 1957