



MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION

Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

*Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11*

I, Leigh Mackey, Coroner, having investigated the death of Kerry Selwyn Frankcombe

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Kerry Selwyn Frankcombe, date of birth 26 November 1947. He was 75 years of age when he died and had been married to Susan for 53 years. Together they have two adult children, Jean and Terry.
- b) Mr Frankcombe was a retired fitter and turner and enjoyed fishing and boating. He had been fit and healthy however his recent medical history included asthma, hypertension, osteoarthritis of the right knee, high cholesterol, lower left sided back pain, sleep apnoea and diabetes mellitus type II. and constipation. He took Metamucil¹ for constipation on the evening prior to his disappearance.²

Mr Frankcombe owned a 6 metre, Caribbean style fibreglass vessel equipped with a diesel sterndrive engine, a small Yamaha outboard engine as an auxiliary (back up) motor. He held a motorboat licence and was an experienced boatsman, having held a licence since 1988. He regularly went boating and was a strong swimmer.

On 10 September 2023, Mr Frankcombe departed his residence at approximately 7:00 am and towed his vessel to the boat ramp at Port Sorell. As he left home, he briefly spoke to Susan who was returning after having concluded her shift as a paramedic. He told her that he intended to test the vessel's engine and to fish and anticipated returning in approximately 3 hours. He drove to Port Sorell, and it is estimated that he

¹ An over the counter fibre supplement that is used to assist digestive health including by relieving constipation.

² Affidavit – Susan Frankcombe Page 2.

most likely departed the boat ramp there at 8.30am. Sea conditions in the area were choppy³ and the sea temperature when measured that night was approximately 12 degrees⁴.

When he failed to return home, Susan called friends to request they check the boat ramp for him. They did and found his car remained at the ramp but there were no signs of him nor his vessel. Susan then contacted Tasmania Police and reported Mr Frankcombe missing.

Extensive search efforts were undertaken by Tasmania Police, including the deployment of air, marine and dive resources to locate Mr Frankcombe. His body was not found. An Essendon based Challenger Jet under the control of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority Joint Rescue Coordination Centre, located Mr Frankcombe's vessel at 12.30 am whilst searching the area between the Rubicon and Tamar Rivers. The vessel had drifted approximately 12 nautical miles offshore from Beechford⁵ when found. Mr Frankcombe was not on board the vessel. Expert medical opinion obtained by the search and rescue controller, Constable Godfrey, as to the survivability of Mr Frankcombe in the water was that the longest timeframe for survival would expire at daylight on 11 September 2023.⁶

Once retrieved the vessel was inspected by Constable Hugo, who has expertise in vessels as the holder of a coxswain grade 1 NC including a component for marine engineering and his attachment to the marine division of Tasmania Police. He found the vessel to be in good condition without any concerns regarding its watertight integrity or sea worthiness.⁷ The electronic components of the vessel were in good working order including the marine radio. The vessel had approximately 1/3 of a 100 litre tank of fuel left and its engine turned over when operation was attempted. The fuel tank for the auxiliary outboard was, however, empty. It cannot be determined whether this tank had been empty from the commencement of the voyage or became empty, for example, if it had been left running at the time of Mr Frankcombe's departure from the vessel and disappearance.

³ Affidavit - Sgt Riggall.

⁴ Affidavit - Sgt Riggall.

⁵ Affidavit – Snr Const Godfrey.

⁶ Affidavit – Snr Const Godfrey Page 4.

⁷ Affidavit - Const Hugo Page 2.

The vessel was not fitted with safety railings and its gunwales⁸ were approximately 600mm above the water line, wide and fitted with removable spray coverings which attached to the front windscreen, roof and gunnel on either side and swept back and attached to the stern of the vessel. There were no ropes, ladders nor leverage or holding points on the gunwales and it was assessed as extremely difficult to impossible to board the vessel from the water without the assistance from another person onboard the vessel.⁹ The other option for re-entry to the vessel other than its sides was at the sterndrive motor. This could only be attempted if the motor was turned off or was in neutral and it would have been difficult to re-enter the vessel from the water at this point.

Mr Frankcombe's personal flotation device (PFD) and clothing were located on board the vessel. The clothing was soiled with faeces, and a blood stain was located at the stern. DNA testing conducted on the blood stain, faeces, and on a toothbrush known to have been owned and used by Mr Frankcombe matched to a high degree of probability.¹⁰ A comprehensive forensic examination of the vessel identified no suspicious circumstances on board.

The presence of soiled clothing and the absence of any structural or mechanical defect on the vessel, suggests Mr Frankcombe may have experienced an episode of faecal incontinence, removed his clothing and PDF and sought to access the water to clean up, either by leaving the vessel and entering the water intentionally, mistaking his capacity to re-enter the vessel, or by leaning his weight toward the water and whilst doing so unintentionally falling in.

Checks have been conducted by the Missing Persons Unit of Tasmania Police most recently in June 2025 which have shown no evidence of Mr Frankcombe being alive. Those checks included checks of all Australian police jurisdictions, fourteen of the most commonly used financial institutions, Medicare, Centrelink, Australian Electoral Commission, Tasmanian Births Death and Marriages Registry, Housing Tasmania, Aurora, Tasmania Mental Health Services, Tasmania Oral Health Services, Australian Border Force, motor vehicle registries nationwide and travel checks with five of the most commonly used airlines and the

⁸ The area of the vessel at the top edge of the hull.

⁹ Affidavit - Const Hugo Page and Const McCulloch Page 2.

TT Line. These checks did not reveal any activity of Mr Frankcombe since the date of his disappearance on 10 September 2023.¹¹

I find that Mr Frankcombe was on board his vessel on 10 September 2023, having entered the water at Port Sorell to fish and check the running of the engine on his vessel. He was alone on the vessel. At some point he became soiled with faecal matter, undressed and attempted to clean himself. While doing so he has either intentionally or accidentally entered the water and has been unable to re-enter the vessel. Given the water temperature, sea conditions and his age, health and fitness, it is unlikely he would have been able to re-board the vessel unaided nor survive in the water beyond daylight on 11 September 2023.

Mr Frankcombe's body has not been found. Given the length of time since his disappearance, the absence of any signs of him remaining alive and the nature of the environment in which he has gone missing I find that he has died and that the manner of his death was accidental.

- c) Mr Frankcombe died as a result of probable drowning.
- d) Mr Frankcombe died between 10 and 11 September 2023 at Port Sorell, Tasmania.

In making the above findings I have had regard to the evidence gained in the investigation into Mr Frankcombe's death. The evidence includes:

- The Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Affidavits as to identity and life extinct;
- Affidavit from Susan Frankcombe sworn on 3 October 2023;
- Affidavit from Jason Glare, sworn on 25 October 2023;
- The Police reports of investigation and corresponding affidavits; and
- The DNA Report from Dr Charles Connor, Forensic Scientist dated 11 January 2024.

Comments and Recommendations

I extend my appreciation to investigating officer Constable James McCulloch for his investigation and report and to all those individuals and agencies involved in the search for Mr Frankcombe.

¹⁰ Forensic Science Service Tasmania report dated 11 January 2024.

¹¹ Affidavit - Snr Const Brown Page 1.

The circumstances of Mr Kerry Frankcombe's death are not such as to require me to make any comments or recommendations pursuant to Section 28 of the *Coroners Act* 1995.

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

Dated: 4 May 2026 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.

Leigh Mackey
Coroner