



IN THE CORONERS' COURT OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Rel No: D0158/2024

Police No: 24 61256

**CORONERS' FINDINGS**  
**ROAD DEATH 29 OF 2024**

*Section 34 of the Coroners Act 1993*

I, Elisabeth Armitage, Coroner, having investigated the death of a **65-YEAR-OLD CAUCASIAN MALE** and without holding an inquest, find that he was, born on **23 April 1959** and that his **death occurred on 22 June 2024, at Litchfield Park Road, Litchfield in the Northern Territory.**

**Introduction:**

60 people lost their lives on Territory roads in 2024. These findings concern road death number 29 (compared with 6 at the same time in 2023).

Motorbikes represent approximately 3% of registered vehicles in the Northern Territory, however, over the last decade account for 12% of lives lost and 14% of serious injury crashes. 96% of motorcyclist fatalities were male and of these, 42% involved riders aged over 40 years.

This was a single motorcycle run-off crash on a remote road. The 65-year-old Caucasian rider (the rider) was sober, licenced, and wearing a helmet. He was not speeding. The motorcycle was registered. For a reason that cannot be ascertained, his front wheel developed a head shake. He ran off the road and struck trees, causing fatal head injuries.

He is mourned by his family and friends.

**Cause of death:**

- |      |   |   |
|------|---|---|
| 1(a) | Disease or condition leading directly to death:   | <b>Multiple blunt force injuries</b>        |
| 1(b) | Morbid conditions giving rise to the above cause: | <b>Reported motor vehicle crash (rider)</b> |

Following an autopsy on 24 June 2024, Forensic Pathologist, commented:

1. A postmortem CT scan and full postmortem examination showed injuries to the head, chest, abdomen and left femur. The injuries are consistent with a motorcycle crash and



were not survivable.

2. There was no evidence that a medical event had occurred prior to the crash. No pre-existing pathological conditions were identified.
3. Toxicology showed no alcohol was present and there were no drugs detected.

### **Background:**

The rider was born, lived, and worked in Darwin. He had one child. He was a keen fisherman, loved camping and enjoyed the Northern Territory lifestyle. He frequently travelled overseas and one of his favourite destinations was Bali.

### **Circumstances:**

On Friday evening 21 June 2024, the rider played pool with friends and complained of a headache.

On Saturday 22 June 2024, the rider met friends at the Darwin River Tavern. They had plans to ride to Batchelor and Adelaide River via Litchfield Park Road. The rider was still complaining of a headache.

The trio of motorcycles set off on their journey along Cox Peninsula Road and turned left onto Litchfield Park Road. The rider was riding in the middle of the three bikes and the friend was on the last bike. The ride was going well and as planned but from time to time the friend saw the rider take his left hand off the handlebar and shake it (as though he had a cramp).

At approximately 11.45am, they passed the Termite Mound Parking Bay and entered a left-hand sweeping bend. The friend said they were travelling at about 70km/h in the 80km/h zone. The friend said the rider travelled normally through the first half of the bend.

When he was halfway through the bend, the rider's front wheel began to slightly wobble (shuddering) and then straightened up. The rider's motorcycle began to drift off to the right, onto the opposite side of the road. The motorcycle ran off the road and collided with several trees. The rider suffered a significant, catastrophic, and un-survivable head injury.

The crash was reported to emergency services by a passing motorist at 12.01pm.

The friend immediately commenced CPR. Soon after two other vehicles stopped to render assistance. Two nurses from those vehicles took control of the situation and continued CPR for 15 minutes. However, the rider could not be revived. He was declared deceased at 12.40pm by a Batchelor Community Health Centre Remote Area Registered Nurse after she consulted the District Medical Officer.

### **Police investigation:**

A coronial investigation by police found no suspicious circumstances surrounding this death.

The crash was 2 kms east of the Magnetic Termite Mounds, on Litchfield Park Road. At the site of the crash Litchfield Road was a dual lane road and was sealed and dry. There were no fluids or lubricants on the road, and the road was in good condition. The sky was clear and the temperature ranged between 19 - 31 degrees Celsius.

The scene was photographed, measured and assessed by attending Police. No speed calculations or other tests were completed on the road surface due to insufficient evidence. The speedometer was stuck at 57km/h. This did not indicate that the crash occurred at 57km/h, rather that the speedometer stopped on that speed.



Afront wheel wobble, also known as a 'head shake', can be caused by a combination of factors, including incorrect tyre pressure, uneven weight distribution, bad wheel bearings, poor rear suspension, or worn-out tyres.

The open-faced helmet worn by the rider was inspected and showed multiple heavy scuff markings and was crumpled on the right-hand side from heavy impact, likely from striking a tree.

The rider had a NT driver's licence with a rider endorsement.

### **Vehicle Inspection:**

The motorcycle was a 2009 Black Harley Davidson Motorcycle FLST bearing NT registration (which was due to expire on 29 June 2024).

The motorcycle was visually inspected at the scene by a Senior Constable from the Traffic Unit. Its tyres were in good condition and inflated, and the braking system was functional. Overall, the motorcycle appeared to be kept in a well-maintained condition. It was not subjected to any further mechanical examination.

### **Scene images:**

Still images from the Senior Constable's body worn video are date/time stamped and are extracted below.



Looking towards the crash scene, to the right of the photo is the path the motorcycle travelled.





The motorcycle.



Senior Constable inspecting the braking system, which was in good working order.





The speedometer stuck on 57km/h.



The front tyre in good condition.





From the crash site looking back up to Litchfield Park Road, the path the motorcycle travelled as it left the road. A large gouge mark can be seen on the tree trunk to the right.



Front forks appeared intact. Front tyre looks like it lacks tread, but this could be due to the bike sliding on the gravel verge of the road when it tipped and skidded.



Forks extended.

### **Opinion as to cause of crash:**

The investigating member could not conclusively confirm the reason for the crash.

He considered that there were two possibilities:

- (1) As the rider entered the curved section of roadway, his motorcycle suffered a 'head shake' resulting in momentary loss of control of the front wheel. The rider was unable to fully recover from this and crossed onto the opposite side of the road and collided with several trees suffering fatal head injuries.
- (2) As the rider entered the curved section of roadway, he suffered a medical episode and slumped forward causing the front wheel 'head shake'. As a result, the motorcycle left the road and the rider struck several trees suffering fatal head injuries. However, there was no evidence of a medical episode on autopsy.

### **Decision not to hold an inquest:**

Under section 16(1) of the *Coroners Act 1993* I decided not to hold an inquest because the investigations into the death disclosed the time, place and cause of death and the relevant circumstances concerning the death. I do not consider that the holding of an inquest would elicit any information additional to that disclosed in the investigation to date and the circumstances do not require a mandatory inquest because:

- The deceased was not, immediately before death, a person held in care or custody; and
- The death was not caused or contributed to by injuries sustained while the deceased was held in custody; and
- The identity of the deceased is known.

