



# MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

## CORONIAL DIVISION

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### **Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)**

*Coroners Act 1995*  
*Coroners Rules 2006*  
Rule 11

I, Simon Cooper, Coroner, having investigated the death of William Francis Steffen

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is William Francis Steffen;
  - b) I am unable to determine the circumstances in which Mr Steffen died;
  - c) I am unable to determine the cause of Mr Steffen's death; and
  - d) I am satisfied that Mr Steffen died on or after 17 June 1985, at a place unable to be determined, in Tasmania.
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1. William Francis Steffen was born in Brisbane, Queensland on 22 June 1952, the son of Mr William and Mrs Margaret Steffen. Both his parents are now dead. He was educated in Queensland.
  2. Mr Steffen was employed in a variety of occupations including as a taxi driver, barman, caterer, labourer and miner. Reportedly, his interests included gambling and dog racing. He was well known to police.
  3. He married in about 1978 and had two children, Susanne and Adam. Adam is also now dead.
  4. Sometime in the early 1980s, Mr Steffen moved to Tasmania with his children. He returned to Queensland before moving to South Australia in the mid-1980s. Whilst in South Australia, the evidence is he spent a period of time as an inpatient in a mental health facility. After his discharge from that facility in 1985 Mr Steffen moved back to Tasmania. He seems to have arrived in this jurisdiction in early June 1985. Needless to say, no airline or ferry records exist that are able to certainly verify his arrival, but I am satisfied from a variety of material that this is when Mr Steffen arrived back in Tasmania.
  5. He became involved with a so-called 'Zen Buddhist' practitioner, Mr Robert Peter Walter. Mr Walter (who is now dead) said in a statutory declaration he made on 25 September 2009, that he received several letters from Mr Steffen seeking advice about

the spiritual consequences, if any, of suicide. Mr Walter indicated he had concerns about Mr Steffen's mental health during this time. Mr Steffen stayed at Mr Walter's meditation centre near Saltwater River in south-east Tasmania for a week or so shortly after his arrival in Tasmania.

6. Mr Walter seems to be the last person to have seen Mr Steffen alive. He took Mr Steffen to Hobart on about 13 June 1985. Mr Steffen apparently mentioned something about "climbing Mount Wellington or going to the casino". I doubt much turns on this account, even if it is accurate. I do not think it gives any real clue as to what Mr Steffen had in mind, nor where he went after Mr Walter dropped him off.
7. The last documented evidence of Mr Steffen being alive was an attendance at his GP, Dr Richard Roffe, in North Hobart on 17 June 1985.
8. There is evidence that Mr Steffen was in contact with family in Queensland in late May or perhaps early June 1985. During that contact, he asked for money indicating that he needed help to buy a ticket to return to Queensland. Investigations indicate that Mr Steffen had no further contact with any member of his family after this time. Family members subsequently sent money orders to Mr Steffen and there is evidence that a money order in the sum of \$150, sent by his sister, Dianne Barnett, in June 1985 was collected. There is no evidence of him returning to Queensland, or indeed leaving Tasmania.
9. Mr Steffen's mother reported his disappearance to Queensland Police on 20 June 1989. The Queensland Police investigation included taking statements from his sister and daughter and reporting his disappearance to the Queensland Coroner. No evidence was found which suggested Mr Steffen was in Queensland. Not surprisingly in the circumstances, the Queensland Coroner ruled in 2008 that Mr Steffen's presumed death was not something the Coroner in Queensland had power to investigate. The investigation was transferred to Tasmania Police.
10. A coroner in Tasmania has jurisdiction to investigate any death which appears to have been unexpected, unnatural or the cause of which is unknown and which occurred in Tasmania (and the definition of 'death' in the *Coroners Act 1995* includes 'suspected death').

11. The only reasonable conclusion having regard to all the evidence carefully compiled and presented to me by Sergeant Delpero of Tasmania Police Missing Persons Unit, is that Mr Steffen is dead and that more likely than not his death occurred in Tasmania, sometime after 17 June 1985. Given his body has not been found the cause of his death and the circumstances in which it occurred is unknown.
12. I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Mr Steffen.

**Dated** 4 May 2021 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.

**Simon Cooper**  
**Coroner**