



# 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, Olivia McTaggart, Coroner, having investigated the death of Wolfgang Shane Mohr

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Wolfgang Shane Mohr, date of birth 10 December 1962.
- b) Mr Mohr was 59 years of age, lived in Launceston and was separated from his wife. He was a teacher throughout most of his working life, although he was working casually as a courier at the time of his death. He has a daughter, Salina Mohr, who was 18 years of age when her father died.

In April 2022, Mr Mohr purchased a 7.8 m fibreglass yacht, *Pearl*. He had no previous sailing or boating experience, although it had been his long-held dream to own a yacht. After purchasing the yacht, which was seaworthy and in good condition, he undertook a familiarisation sail with the previous owner, this apparently being his first experience of boating. About one month before his death, he gained his Tasmanian motor boat licence after completing an authorised course. It does not appear that he operated or sailed the yacht until 3 October 22.

On 3 October 2022 Mr Mohr set out with his daughter, Salina, from the Launceston Seaport, where the yacht was berthed. It was the intention of Mr Mohr to proceed through the heads of the Tamar River to Badger Head where he intended to anchor off Bakers Beach for two nights. This location is situated on the open coast facing Bass Strait, prone to swell and not recognised as a safe anchorage in any recognised anchorage guides. Mr Mohr motored (likely without using any sails) to the intended location, arriving there at 2.45 pm. The yacht had sufficient anchor chain and rope and Mr Mohr set the anchor about 300 m from the shore. The weather conditions were mild with a 10 knot south-westerly wind. Salina, who was also not experienced in boating,

became seasick and asked to return home. Mr Mohr told her that they would need to stay until morning when the tides were favourable to return.

At 11.00 pm that evening, Mr Mohr went to the bow of the yacht, being the location of the anchor well, as he believed the anchor was dragging. He was not wearing a PFD (personal floatation device). Whilst at the bow of the boat checking the anchor, Mr Mohr fell into the water. It is unclear how he did so. Salina was inside the cabin at that time and heard her father calling out. When she came out of the cabin, she saw him in the water and, at his request, went inside the cabin and retrieved a PFD. She threw him the PFD but he was unable to put it on whilst in the water fully clothed. Salina lent over the side of the yacht to assist her father but, as she did this, a wave hit the side of the yacht causing her to fall from the yacht into the water. She grabbed hold of the anchor rope at the suggestion of her father and made her way to the stern where she was able to climb aboard. At this time she lost sight of her father, who had been unable to climb back aboard. She continued to look for him in the water and then went into the cabin and called 000 on her phone. Police officers attended the shore location 50 minutes later and requested an air and sea search. By 2.40 am the sea and air search had commenced. At 2.56 am police officers on a rescue vessel confirmed that they had located the body of a male face down in the water, obviously deceased. The male was subsequently identified as Mr Mohr.

- c) Mr Mohr's cause of death was drowning. The autopsy and toxicological tests revealed that there were no medical issues or substances contributing to the cause of death. I am satisfied that his death was accidental and that there were no suspicious circumstances.
- d) Mr Mohr died between 3 and 4 October 2022 at Badger Head in Tasmania.

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

- The Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Affidavits confirming identity;
- Opinion of the State Forensic Pathologist who conducted the autopsy upon Mr Mohr;
- Launceston Medical Centre records for Mr Mohr;
- Affidavit of Li Huilin, wife of Mr Mohr;

- Affidavit of Salina Mohr, daughter of Mr Mohr;
- Affidavits of six attending, rescuing and investigating police officers, including body worn camera footage and photographs;
- Documentation relating to the yacht; and
- Information and opinion from Peter Hopkins, Manager Recreational Boating, Marine and Safety Tasmania.

### **Comments and Recommendations**

Mr Mohr's unfortunate death was preventable. The evidence in the investigation allows me to assess the contributing factors in his accidental death to be as follows:

- He had virtually no previous experience as a sailor or with boats;
- He embarked upon the journey through the heads of the Tamar River not accompanied by any experienced sailor;
- His chosen anchorage in the open waters facing Bass Strait was unsuitable and unsafe, with the rocking and rolling motion of the sea at that location making walking on deck difficult; and
- He did not wear a PFD whilst on the bow of the boat attending to the anchor, as he should have done.

Further, the yacht was ill-prepared for safe anchoring in the following ways, which *may* have contributed to Mr Mohr accidentally falling into the water:

- The anchor line was not through the fairlead on the bow of the boat, contrary to appropriate anchoring practice;
- The headsail was in a crumpled state at the bow of the boat, therefore not providing clear access to the anchor well (when it should have been stowed or lashed to the side lifelines);
- The clew of the headsail (bottom rear corner) and headsail sheets were found to be over the side of the boat and posed a safety risk; and
- The headsail and mainsail halyards were not secured tight, again posing safety risks.

I extend my appreciation to investigating officer, Constable Anita Rattray, for her investigation and report.

The circumstances of Mr Wolfgang Mohr's death are not such as to 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 Mohr.

**Dated:** 6 July 2023 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.

**Olivia McTaggart**

**Coroner**