

Inquest into the death of Che-Wei Su.

Che-Wei Su died when he was swept downstream by strong currents whilst swimming in the Mossman River. He struck his head on boulders and drowned.

Coroner Jane Bentley delivered her findings of inquest on 14 July 2014.

The Queensland Government responds to recommendations directed to government agencies at inquests by informing the community if a recommendation will be implemented or the reason why a recommendation is not supported.

Further information relating the implementation of recommendations can be obtained from the responsible minister named in the response.

Recommendation 1

All of the stakeholders who operate in, or respond to incidents at, Daintree National Park form a committee and consider the issues raised at this inquest, including but not limited to:

- a. The safety of pedestrians and cyclists on the Mossman Gorge Road and whether a separate walking and bicycle path should be established.
- b. The information provided to visitors at the centre including the content of that information and how it is delivered.
- c. The signage in the national park.
- d. Information sharing between rangers and centre staff in regard to water levels in the gorge and associated risks to visitors.
- e. Whether at any time it would become appropriate to prohibit swimming in the national park due to high water levels in the gorge.
- f. Review of procedures relating to responses to emergencies occurring in the national park.
- g. Changes to the centre's website and brochures.
- h. Access to the landline in the rangers' hut for all stakeholders.
- i. Improved mobile phone coverage in the national park.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Department of National Park, Sport and Racing.

On 16 June 2015 the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef responded:

This recommendation was implemented when Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia (Voyages) trading as the Mossman Gorge Centre, The Queensland Police Service, Queensland Emergency Services and the Douglas Shire Council formed a committee to consider the issues raised at the inquest into Mr Su's death.

The committee's consideration of the specific issues raised in this recommendation are:

A. *The safety of pedestrians and cyclists on the Mossman Gorge Road and whether a separate walking and bicycle path should be established.*

The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (through Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service) advise that the issue of the safety of pedestrians and cyclists accessing the national park via a Douglas Shire Council gazetted road (under a memorandum of understanding with Voyages) is the subject of further discussion and agreement between those two parties (the Council and Voyages).

B. *The information provided to visitors at the Centre including the content of that information and how it is delivered.*

The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing advises that Voyages control the access point to the Mossman Gorge through the Mossman Gorge Centre and that Voyages also control all information available to the public as they transit through. Since commencement of the Safety Review Committee, Voyages have revised their web information to the public upon arrival at the centre and at the bus booking area, and the information to the public who use the bus by way of a sign, alerting those about to board the transfer buses on the status of swimming in the gorge.

C. *The signage in the national park.*

Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ) conducted an audit of signage at the Mossman Gorge and provided a detailed report with recommendations to the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing for consideration. The SLSQ review addressed all obvious access points to the water. In addition, the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing engaged Southern Cross University to undertake an expert review of safety signage in parks and forests. This study includes a case study of Mossman Gorge. This review will consider approaches taken by other park agencies and identify best practice principles for safety signage. The review findings will influence the design and content (words and graphics) of safety signage to protect visitors, ensure messages are clearly understood and to minimise the state's liability. The recommendations will be used to guide a review of the Mossman Gorge signage and signs will be replaced if necessary.

D. *Information sharing between rangers and centre staff in regard to water levels in the gorge and associated risks to visitors.*

Mossman Gorge Visitor Centre staff and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service officers (who occupy the same building) developed a protocol to ensure there is consultation on the status of the Mossman Gorge for swimmers. This information is then passed onto visitors via a sign at the bus pickup point, advising of the status of swimming. The sign is only changed if conditions change. In the example provided, the sign is locked to the wording 'swimming is not advised'. See attached photo.

At present, Centre and QPWS staff discuss the conditions twice a week and more often as weather conditions require. This is a work in progress to establish what the best methodology and frequency should be. The factors that are taken into consideration are the water level at the time, as well as current and prevailing weather conditions.



This approach would not reach free and independent visitors, who walk or cycle to the gorge without accessing the centre. The access gate, operated by the Mossman Gorge Centre is left in the open position and unattended between 6.00pm and 7.40am so anyone can access the gorge along the access road by any means at those times. The best way of advising free and independent visitors about swimming conditions is under review, based on the SLSQ review and safety sign review.

E. Whether at any time it would become appropriate to prohibit swimming in the national park due to high water levels in the gorge.

The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing does not believe it would be appropriate to prohibit swimming in the national park for two reasons:

- It is not possible to provide 24 hour compliance at the gorge. To effectively enforce a ban on swimming - a permanent 'lifesaver' or ranger presence would be necessary. Safety signage is considered to be an effective deterrent and reasonable given that the site is a very popular swimming destination. Advice about swimming safety is provided in track entry signs and on web pages. This advice will also be provided in a new brochure being produced this year for the park.
- What is deemed to be 'high' is a subjective assessment and does not in itself present a greater risk. A low water flow can expose traps and hazards that are not risks when the water level is high. There are risks at all water levels. The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing identified and acknowledges those risks, and intends to mitigate them through education/information, communication and appropriate signage. This is a work in progress as there are no similar procedures the committee was able to adapt to these circumstances. The committee is compiling a history of the water levels and will make a joint decision on what is believed to be an appropriate 'water level' for swimming.

F. Review of procedures relating to responses to emergencies occurring in the national park.

The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing, Queensland Emergency Services and Voyages have separate responsibilities for emergency response to any incidents. The committee is represented by these stakeholders and each organisation is revising their emergency action plans in light of the improvements in signage, communications and water level monitoring —now underway. These plans will be finalised when Southern Cross University completes its safety sign review in late June 2015. Provision of consistent safety information across all media to the public is a key objective.

G. Changes to the Centre's website and brochures.

Advice about swimming safety is provided in track entry signs and on web pages. Existing website information and warning messages have been improved. This advice will also be provided in a new brochure being produced this year for the park.

H and I. Access to the landline in the rangers' hut and improved mobile phone coverage in the national park.

Access to a landline in the rangers' hut and improved mobile phone coverage is being explored. Discussions to date confirm that coverage is likely to be unviable and unreliable due to the impacts of the weather on the line. Telstra have conducted tests with no success. The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing are now exploring radio communications.