

Inquest into the death of Darrell Gene Simon

Darrell Gene Simon took his own life shortly after he got on his bicycle and rode to his rural property at Laidley Creek West on 16 November 2014.

Deputy State Coroner John Lock delivered his findings of inquest on 19 December 2018.

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.

The departments named in this response will provide implementation updates until the recommendation is delivered. Further information relating the implementation of recommendations can be obtained from the responsible minister named in the response.

Recommendation 1

Where internal reviews are conducted by the Queensland Police Service (QPS) in relation to the adequacy of police investigations into a death reported to a coroner (including isolated aspects of an investigation such as, in this case, the review conducted by Senior Sergeant Whitehead regarding the search of Darrell's property), QPS ensures a copy of the findings of any such review are provided to the investigating coroner as a matter of course and without delay.

Response and action: implementation of the recommendation is in progress.

Responsible agency: Queensland Police Service.

On 2 May 2019 the Minister for Police and Minister for Corrective services responded:

The Queensland Police Service will amend the *Operational procedures manual* to include a requirement to provide an investigating coroner with findings of any internal reviews into the adequacy of police investigations into reported deaths.

Recommendation 2

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) considers the adequacy of resources, information and training currently provided to its officers for the purpose of coordinating and conducting land searches, to ensure officers are able to and do in fact access high quality map products and GPS tracking data in a timely way. Whilst not prescribing how QPS might ensure officers take these steps in the future, an example may be to implement some type of quality assurance checklist that officers are required to complete as they go.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Queensland Police Service.

On 2 May 2019 the Minister for Police and Minister for Corrective services responded:

The QPS reviewed the mapping resources being used and the training associated with these resources. Search and rescue (SAR) coordinators rely on the OziExplorer mapping system which has been in use since 2005. It provides the SAR coordinator with the ability to obtain accurate digital topographic maps, prepare and distribute search areas on those maps, and to download GPS tracking data. These maps can be loaded allowing the system to be used in areas without internet access.

The standard fall back for SAR coordinators is Google Earth as it is easily available on all service computers. QTopo, an online application providing topographical maps, has been a recent addition to mapping availability and is provided by the Department of Natural Resources.

The mapping products available to the QPS are considered appropriate and suitable for SAR activity.

The training provided to all SAR coordinators in Queensland exceeds the standard benchmarked by the National Search and Rescue Council. Training is provided on SAR courses on how to set up, use and download information from these devices for SAR purposes and an online guide for the devices has been developed.

A land SAR checklist has been available since 2004 and is included in Appendix E of the *National search and rescue manual*. The checklist now includes a section in respect of GPS devices, including the recording of data. SAR coordinators and team members assisting during SAR events are being trained in the use of SAR checklists and GPS devices.

Recommendation 3

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) consider whether improvements can be made in relation to communication between the State Emergency Service (SES) and QPS at the conclusion of a land search involving SES volunteers, to ensure vital information is passed on to QPS officers responsible for the quality and accuracy of that search.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Queensland Police Service.

On 2 May 2019 the Minister for Police and Minister for Corrective services responded:

The introduction of search and rescue (SAR) task sheets in 2010 has improved the communications between the SES volunteer searchers and the Queensland Police Service (QPS) coordinators. The task sheets are provided to each asset involved in a search, including foot searchers, aircraft and vessels. The sheet identifies the individual task for that asset, including location, boundaries, search pattern and sweep widths in either a map format or written description depending on the technology available. The task sheet is accepted by the asset and returned to the coordinator at the conclusion of that assigned search. The team leader signs the task sheet to identify that it has been completed, or otherwise denotes on the sheet areas that were not able to be searched and the reasons why. This allows the coordinator to make alternate plans for those unsearched areas.

The task sheet was redesigned to emphasise the search area description to improve clarity with search teams based on feedback from the Queensland State Emergency Service (SES). In respect of the search conducted in response to the disappearance of Mr Simon, task sheets were not initially used. The land SAR checklist was been modified to include the use of task sheets as standard practice by SAR coordinators.

Since 2015, there has been a significant integration in training between SES and QPS, including the use of the task sheet and GPS devices. This has provided both agencies with insight into each other's abilities, capabilities and limitations.

Current processes to ensure effective communication between SES and QPS members involved in SAR activity are considered to be appropriate.

An additional 200 GPS devices were acquired and distributed within the QPS in 2017. Training is provided on SAR courses on how to set up and download these devices for SAR purposes and an online guide for the devices has been developed.