



CORONERS COURT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Inquest:	Inquest into the death of TL
Hearing dates:	12 November 2025
Date of Findings:	16 February 2026
Place of Findings:	Coroners Court of New South Wales, Lidcombe
Findings of:	Magistrate Teresa O’Sullivan, State Coroner of NSW
Catchwords:	CORONIAL LAW – disappearance – Byron Bay – police investigation – police procedures re initial missing persons investigation
File number:	2020/212058
Representation	Counsel Assisting, Mr James Herrington, instructed by Ms Francesca Lilly of the NSW Crown Solicitor’s Office
Non-publication orders	Non-publication orders made pursuant to ss 74 and 75 of the <i>Coroners Act 2009</i> apply in this matter and are available on the Court file. Copies are also annexed to these findings.
Findings:	<p>The identity of the deceased The person who died was TL.</p> <p>Date of Death TL died on or about 4 November 2019.</p> <p>Place of Death TL died at her campsite in bushland in the Cape Byron Recreational Area.</p> <p>Cause of death The cause of TL’s death is unascertained.</p> <p>Manner of Death The manner of TL’s death is unascertained.</p>

Background

1. TL was last seen alive in the Byron Bay area on Monday, 4 November 2019, aged 42 years. TL was a scientist by training who had lived a nomadic lifestyle from about 2017, camping in the areas of Byron Bay, Nimbin and other townships in the far north NSW coast. At the time of her disappearance, TL was not in a long-term relationship and, whilst she stayed in touch with her parents, communications were sporadic, and it was common for her not to be in contact with them for months at a time. In these circumstances, it was not until 18 January 2020 that TL was reported missing.
2. Sometime after the missing person report, the NSW Police Force created a joint command area operation, Strike Force Holby, to investigate TL's disappearance. On 15 July 2020, while conducting a land search, NSWPF located skeletal remains at a campsite in bushland in the Cape Byron Recreational Area near the lighthouse. Personal effects belonging to TL were found at the scene and subsequent DNA testing on the remains confirmed a match to TL.
3. Over the past five years, a thorough investigation has been conducted to try and determine the manner and cause of TL's death. Counsel assisting submitted that, while it is possible to determine that TL died on or shortly after 4 November 2019, it is otherwise not possible to make a finding as to the manner or cause of her death to the requisite standard.

Role of the coroner

4. TL's disappearance and suspected death was initially reported to the Coroner on 3 July 2020. Upon finding remains at a campsite accompanied by her personal effects, police reported her death to the Coroner on 18 July 2020.
5. Where a death is reported to the Coroner, the Coroner must consider and make findings on the following matters:
 - a. the deceased person's identity;
 - b. the date and place of the person's death;
 - c. the manner and cause of the person's death.
6. Pursuant to s 27(1) of the *Coroners Act 2009* (NSW) (the **Act**), an inquest is required to be held in certain circumstances including, relevantly:
 - a. if it appears to the coroner concerned that the manner and cause of the person's death have not been sufficiently disclosed.

7. Despite an in-depth investigation into events surrounding the period both before and after when TL was last seen alive, neither the exact cause nor circumstances of her death have been sufficiently disclosed.
8. Pursuant to s 82 of the Act, a Coroner may make recommendations in relation to matters which have the capacity to improve public health and safety in the future, arising out of the death in question.
9. I am of the view that no recommendations appear necessary or desirable in relation to TL's death.

Hearing and brief of evidence

10. A hearing of this inquest was held on 12 November 2025.
11. A five-volume brief of evidence was tendered, containing evidence compiled by the police and also material obtained by those assisting me.
12. No oral evidence was called at the hearing.

TL's life

13. TL was born on 1 June 1977 in Western Australia. She had a younger brother.
14. TL spent her early years between Perth and Adelaide. She loved reading and was a talented athlete. The family moved to Brisbane when TL was in her late teens.
15. TL was well educated. Although she left school young, at the age of 17, she subsequently, enrolled in TAFE and obtained university entrance qualifications. She went on to study biochemistry and philosophy at the University of New England (UNE) in Armidale, graduating in 2010. TL enrolled in further studies at UNE in around 2012 and it appears that she was still engaged in these studies, by distance learning, at the time of her disappearance.
16. TL was also very well-travelled. She spent about two years living in the United Kingdom in her late 20s and stayed with her parents in Egypt for about a month on her way back to Australia. In 2016, she travelled to Canada, Spain and other countries with a man she was in a relationship with. In July 2018 she attended her brother's wedding in Japan. She stayed in Japan for about three months and then stayed in Thailand for about one month.

17. It is clear from the evidence that TL was an intelligent and fiercely independent young woman with a great curiosity for people and the world around her. She was greatly loved by her family.

Events of TL's disappearance

18. TL moved to Byron Bay in about March or April 2017 and from then on lived a nomadic lifestyle, sleeping in tents in remote bushland locations around Byron Bay, Nimbin and other towns along the far north NSW coast. TL appeared to have campsites in different locations at the same time and travelled between them. She did not have a car and travelled by bus or by getting lifts from friends and acquaintances.

19. Sometime in 2017 TL began a relationship with Bjordie Spanton, whom she met at the Byron Bay library and who also lived in a tent near the main beach. The relationship lasted for about nine months.¹

20. Around the start of 2019, TL established a campsite on a large rural property owned by Sandrine Rangeon at 101 Cullen Road in Nimbin. She stayed there under an arrangement known as WOOFER (Willing Workers on Organic Farms) by which she was supposed to work on the property in exchange for a free campsite. Sandrine Rangeon asked TL to leave her property around the end of September 2019 although TL still had a campsite with some belongings at the property at the time of her disappearance. While staying at Sandrine Rangeon's property TL met a couple, Patrizia Gadzik and Travis Adams, with whom she became friends.

21. At some point during 2019, TL began a casual relationship with Jaymie Browning who resided in Mooball. TL travelled from Nimbin to Mooball, mostly by bus, to stay with Jaymie for a few days at a time. They continued to see each other at Mr Browning's house until the time of TL's disappearance and it appears that Mr Browning was the last person, known to TL, to see her alive.

22. Despite her nomadic lifestyle, TL remained 'connected' electronically. She had an iPhone with data service provided by Telstra, was active on Facebook and was an avid Netflix watcher.

23. TL remained in contact with her parents as an adult, mostly communicating by Facebook Messenger in recent years and occasionally meeting in person. However, communication

¹ Tab 49, p. 3 (all references are to tab numbers in the brief of evidence unless otherwise stated)

was sporadic. Her father said that it could sometimes be months between sending a message to TL and receiving a response.

24. Witnesses described TL as ‘happy’, ‘funny’, ‘intelligent’, ‘nice’ but also very private. She did not have close friends in whom she confided and spent much of her time alone. Even in romantic relationships it appears that she did not disclose much about her past or inner life. There is some evidence that TL was depressed and anxious in the weeks prior to her disappearance but there is no evidence of suicidal ideation or any ongoing or severe mental illness.

TL’s last known movements

25. In the weeks prior to her disappearance, TL travelled between Byron Bay, Nimbin and Mooball, staying at different locations.
26. On about 10 October 2019, TL checked into the Arts Factory, a youth hostel at Byron Bay. She had just spent some time with her parents, who had driven her to Urunga a few days prior and then back to Byron Bay. They spoke about getting TL a car, which TL was excited about. Her parents dropped her at the Arts Factory hostel and paid upfront for her to stay at the hostel for 8 nights (to 18 October 2019).²
27. On 14 October 2019, TL appeared at Byron Bay Local Court represented by solicitor Kate Brady in respect of charges for allegedly resisting arrest and assaulting police officers on 4 August 2019. The matter was listed for 17 December 2019.
28. On about 15 October 2019, TL returned to Nimbin, sending a text message to Patrizia Gadjzik stating “just [drove] back to bin [Nimbin] with Travis.”³
29. On 16 October 2019, TL attended Nimbin Medical Centre to obtain copies of documents she had received at an earlier consultation on 3 September 2019 and subsequently lost. These documents included a pathology request form, a mental health plan and referral to a psychologist for counselling in connection with reported depression and anxiety and a related medical certificate for Centrelink.⁴
30. TL then returned to Byron Bay where she stayed at the Arts Factory until 19 October 2019. She provided her passport as security for the accommodation fees. She returned to the

² Tab 12 at [51]

³ Tab 36, p. 5

⁴ Tab 119, p. 4

hostel at the end of the month and paid the fees but did not collect her passport.⁵ Her passport was subsequently located by the hostel during the missing person investigation and handed in to Byron Bay Police on 22 February 2020.⁶

31. On 30 October 2019, TL attended Nimbin Medical Centre for blood tests.⁷ That afternoon, Patrizia Gadzik and Travis Adams gave TL a lift to Mooball where she said she was visiting a male friend, now known to be Jaymie Browning. Along the way they stopped at Murwillumbah where TL did some shopping at Coles and they ate a pizza from Dominos. TL's bank records show that she withdrew \$100 in cash from an ATM at the Sunnyside Shopping Mall.⁸ Patrizia and Travis dropped TL off near the Mooball Roadhouse that evening.⁹ From the roadhouse, TL appears to have walked to Jaymie Browning's residence on a property at 5867 Tweed Valley Way.
32. Text messages and cell phone records establish that TL stayed with Mr Browning until sometime on 4 November 2019 when she travelled back to Bryon Bay. Her cell location data places her within the 'Byron Bay Industrial' tower area from 12.57 (1.57 UTC).¹⁰ At 14.26 TL sent Patrizia a text saying she was "I'm heading towards Byron soon."¹¹ This was the last 'user-initiated' activity on TL's phone and it was still serving off the Byron Bay Industrial tower at this time.¹²
33. TL is captured on CCTV entering the Caltex service station on Johnson Street in Byron at 14.52. She was not in the company of any other person. She used the toilet and purchased two, two-litre bottles of 'Mooloo Mountain' milk and a bottle of 'Norco' double-shot iced coffee, paying in cash.¹³ She left the store at 15.00.¹⁴ This is the last known sighting of TL. In the footage, she is depicted wearing green leggings, a black singlet top long dress, black thongs and holding a Coles brand shopping bag. She was wearing an "Outer Limits" backpack.¹⁵

⁵ Tab 99, p. 14. S/C Stephenson states he was told by Arts Factory staff that TL paid on 31 October 2019 – Tab 27 at [30]

⁶ Tab 102. It is noted that the P79A form gives this date as 29 October 2019, incorrectly.

⁷ Tab 14. Tab 119

⁸ Tab 99, p. 14

⁹ Tab 33 at [23]-[38]; Annexure A

¹⁰ Tab 25, Annexure E

¹¹ Tab 36, p. 15

¹² Tab 25 at [19], Ann 3. p667

¹³ Tab 96

¹⁴ Tab 96

¹⁵ Tab 11 at [160]

34. At 15.09 (4.09 UTC), TL received a text message from Patrizia's number while within the 'Byron Bay CBD' tower area.¹⁶ The last 'signs of life', user-generated activity from TL's phone was the transmission of data at 17.58 (6.58 UTC) with the service connecting to the 'Byron Bay' tower.¹⁷

The investigation

Missing person report

35. TL's father contacted the Byron Bay Police station by telephone on 4 December 2019 expressing concerns that he had not heard from TL. He was advised to attend his local police station and file a missing person report which would then be forwarded to the Byron command area for follow up.¹⁸

36. On 18 January 2020, TL's father filed a formal missing person report at Bundaberg Police station, QLD.¹⁹ The Queensland Police Service called Senior Constable Michael Stephenson at the Nimbin Police Station. Senior Constable Stephenson made some initial inquiries in the local area, including speaking to Sandrine Rangeon who informed him that TL had previously stayed at her property but moved out months ago.²⁰

37. On 23 January 2020, Detective Senior Constable Dianne Erhardt of the NSWPF Missing Persons Registry (MPR) created an event recording TL as a missing person in NSW. The event was initially transferred to the Tweeds/Byron Police District (PD) and on 31 January 2020 it was reassigned to the Richmond Police District, which covers Nimbin village. A case file was created and allocated to Senior Constable Stephenson on 2 February 2020.²¹ On 13 February 2020, Detective Senior Constable Erhardt of the MPR created an Initial Case Review outlining mandatory and recommended investigative steps and sent it to Senior Constable Stephenson.²²

Initial investigative steps and risk assessment

38. Throughout February and March 2020, the NSWPF conducted canvasses in the Nimbin and Mooball localities and interviewed friends and acquaintances of TL, including Sandrine

¹⁶ Tab 25, Annexure C p. 15

¹⁷ Tab 25 at [16], [27]

¹⁸ Tab 93 at [6]

¹⁹ Tab 9

²⁰ Tab 27 at [4]-[10]

²¹ See Tab 26 at [8]-[10]

²² Tab 124

Rangeon, Patrizia Gajdzik, Travis Adams, and Jamie Hammond.²³ Police also spoke to the Nomad Arts Factory in Byron and established that TL had provided her passport as security for her stay on 18 October 2019 and never retrieved it.

39. On 19 March 2020, Detective Sergeant Bernadette Ingram, Inspections Manager and Missing Persons Coordinator for the Richmond PD completed a Risk Assessment and recommended that the case be transferred back to Tweed/ Bryon PD.²⁴

Strike Force Holby established

40. In early April 2020, Strike Force Holby was established as a joint command area operation and Detective Senior Constable Culgan of the Tweed/Byron PD was assigned as Officer in Charge. Over the ensuing months, NSWPF continued its investigations, interviewing persons known to TL and obtaining access to banking, phone, Centrelink and Medicare records. The more significant investigative steps taken in this period are set out below.
41. NSWPF officers interviewed Jaymie Browning on 2 April 2020²⁵ and later executed a search warrant at his residence on 29 April 2020.²⁶ NSWPF officers also interviewed TL's former partner Bjordie Spanton on 24 June 2020 who provided them with a map of the areas TL used to camp in around Byron Bay.²⁷
42. On 28 April 2020, a formal case review was conducted between officers of Tweed/Byron PD and the Missing Persons Registry. It determined to request the assistance of the Homicide Squad.²⁸
43. On 5 June 2020, NSWPF and TL's parents attended a storage unit TL rented in Armidale and searched its contents for any evidence that may assist with the investigation.
44. Requests were also made during the investigation to online platforms including Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Netflix. From this it was established that TL's last login to Facebook was on 2 November 2019²⁹ and to Netflix was on 3 November 2019.³⁰ However, no further information was able to be provided. Police were particularly interested in obtaining "geotracking" information from Google to help establish TL's movements but were unable

²³ Tabs 31-38, 44-48

²⁴ Tab 26 at [19]-[21]

²⁵ Tab 40

²⁶ Tab 11 at [65]-[76]

²⁷ Tab 49

²⁸ Tab 125

²⁹ Tab 28 at [10]

³⁰ Tab 28 at [13]

to satisfy the legal requirements to obtain this information.³¹ The difficulty of obtaining social media data in missing persons cases has already been the subject of recommendations in the Inquest into the death of Theo Hayez.

Location of remains 15 July 2023

45. On 14 July 2020, NSWPF commenced a coordinated land search of areas in Bryon Bay where TL was known to camp and which overlapped with cellular location data obtained from Optus.
46. On 15 July 2020, at around 13.40, skeletal remains were located at a makeshift campsite within the Cape Byron State Recreational Area off Tallows Beach Road. Crime scene police attended and the scene was examined and processed over the following days.
47. The bones discovered at the crime scene were found under and around a tarpaulin that was tied to a number of banksia trees at differing heights.³²
48. A number of items were found linked to TL, including a mobile phone registered to her, a bank and a library card in her name, and unopened mail addressed to her. Two empty bottles of 'Mooloo Mountain' milk (with an expiry date of 7 November 2019)³³ and an empty bottle of 'Norco' iced coffee milk (with an expiry date of 11 November 2019)³⁴ were also found at the scene. As the purchase records and CCTV obtained from the Caltex service station on Johnson Street reveal, those were the items TL purchased there on the afternoon of 4 November 2019.
49. Other items found at the scene include a backpack containing TL's ANZ debit card (found in the pages of a paperback in the bag) and a white mobile phone connected to a charging power bank.³⁵ The phone was located close to the remains.³⁶ Police verified that the phone's International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number matched that of the mobile phone handset registered to TL.³⁷
50. The contents of the phone have been unable to be further electronically examined in the course of the coronial investigation due to the condition in which the phone was found.

³¹ Tab 28 at [5] to [13]

³² Tab 23, [11]

³³ Tab 11 [157]; Tab 23 [13] and [17]

³⁴ Crime scene photos, DIMS Scene shot, no. 206

³⁵ Tab 11 [137], [158]; Tab 23 [14]

³⁶ Tab 11 [137]

³⁷ Tab 11 [142]; Tab 25 [29]

51. TL's remains were in a state of advanced decomposition and there was evidence of some considerable scene disturbance by animals.
52. TL's skeleton was mostly intact, with some metatarsals and metacarpals missing along with the hyoid bone, right clavicle, left and right patella, coccyx and the right first rib.³⁸
53. DNA performed by the Forensic Biology unit at NSW Health Pathology concluded that the skeletal remains matched the blood sample collected from TL in October 2019 and a sample provided by a relative of TL.³⁹
54. The scene was extensively examined and documented in detail by NSWPF crime scene officers. It is evident that the campsite was TL's home, and, as such, a large number of her personal effects were found throughout the area.
55. None of the findings at the crime scene are ultimately able to permit any finding to be made to the requisite standard as to the cause or manner of TL's death.

Post-mortem examinations and opinion

56. On 22 July 2020, Dr Cala from the Department of Forensic Medicine performed an autopsy on TL's remains. He found no evidence of any penetrating or blunt force injuries to the skull, base of skull, rib cage or facial bones, either on visual examination or on CT scanning.⁴⁰
57. Dr Cala opined that the conditions of the remains were consistent with a period of approximately nine months from time of death to discovery.⁴¹
58. Dr Cala did not consider the circumstances of TL's death to be suspicious.

Forensic anthropological examination

59. TL's remains were also examined by Dr Penny McCardle, forensic anthropologist. Dr McCardle determined that TL's skeletal remains were in a state of very good preservation, with limited skeletal elements absent, likely due to environmental elements and scavenging.⁴²
60. Dr McCardle noted that none of the skeletal elements present exhibited any ante- or peri-mortem fractures, breaks, blunt or sharp force trauma.⁴³

³⁸ Tab 15, pp. 7-9

³⁹ Tab 7; Tab 70

⁴⁰ Tab 5, p. 3 and p. 5

⁴¹ Tab 5, p. 4

⁴² Tab 15, p. 1

⁴³ Tab 15, p. 16

Further opinion by Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine

61. An opinion was further sought from the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine as to the cause and manner of TL's death. Dr Yeliena Fay Baber prepared a report dated 5 October 2023.
62. Dr Baber commented that the scene where TL's remains and belongings were found appeared to be chaotic and would likely have been disturbed over the passage of time by both weather and animals.⁴⁴
63. Ultimately Dr Baber concluded that the cause and manner of TL's death were unascertainable based on the available forensic evidence.
64. Dr Baber considered that investigation of the crime scene to have been "thorough" and she did not believe that there were any further investigations which would assist to make findings as to the manner and cause of TL's death, with the exception of obtaining further details of TL's medical history.
65. The coronial investigation has obtained as much of TL's medical information as is available, but it does not assist to advance the findings as to the manner or cause of TL's death.

Consideration

Date and time of death

66. Having regard to all of the available evidence, a finding can be made on the balance of probabilities that TL died on or about 4 November 2019 at her campsite in bushland in the Cape Byron Recreational Area.
67. That timing can be established having regard to TL's telephone records, which show that the last user-generated activity on her phone was at 17.58 on 4 November 2019, with no such activity after that time, and no log-ins to her Facebook or Netflix account. As TL's phone was found near her remains together with a charger, it is reasonable to infer that she could have, and would have used her phone subsequently had something not befallen her around that time.
68. Also present near her remains were the cartons of milk she had purchased earlier that afternoon at the Caltex service station on Johnson Street, which had been consumed although not yet disposed of. There were no food items located that appeared to post-date those items.

⁴⁴ Tab 16A, p. 7; see also Tab 23 [28]

69. TL's bankcard was found near her remains and it had not been used since the afternoon of 4 November 2020.

70. The clothes in which TL's remains were found (a black sleeveless top and green leggings) were similar in appearance to those which she was pictured wearing on 4 November 2019 in the CCTV footage obtained from the Caltex service station on Johnson Street.⁴⁵

Manner and cause of death

71. The more difficult question is whether the available evidence allows for any finding to be made as to the cause and manner of her death.

72. The manner of a person's death means the circumstances in which that person died whereas the cause of death is the direct and proximate physiological cause of the death.

Cause of death

73. In the absence of anything other than skeletal remains, and having regard to the expert opinion, the cause of TL's death cannot be ascertained.

Manner of death

74. In terms of manner of death, unfortunately, despite the thorough investigation, the evidence does not allow for a finding to be made to the requisite standard as to what were the likely circumstances of TL's death.

75. Dr Cala did not think the circumstances of TL's death were suspicious. While Dr Baber was unable to exclude the possibility of homicide "with certainty", she did not identify any positive evidence of foul play.

76. Overall, the evidence in the police investigation tends to point away from foul play. Police have directed various enquiries towards TL's ex-partners, with a view to establishing whether they may have been involved in TL's death. No evidence was obtained to suggest that any were involved in, or had knowledge of her death.⁴⁶ The officer-in-charge is of the opinion that no other party was involved in TL's death, and that no person had attended the scene of TL's remains in the eight months in which they remained undiscovered.⁴⁷

77. TL's phone, debit card and other valuables among her personal effects were found at the scene and evidently were not stolen.

⁴⁵ Tab 11 [150], [160], Tab 96

⁴⁶ Tab 11 [186]

⁴⁷ Tab 11 [195]

78. Had TL met with foul play, no attempt was then made to conceal her remains from discovery. Her campsite, while somewhat isolated, was still only 30 meters from Tallows Beach Road and in an area where there are walking tracks popular with tourists and locals.

Closing Remarks

79. I thank the officer in charge, Detective Senior Constable Chris Culgan, for his assistance in preparing the initial brief of evidence and his work in the coronial investigation. I also thank James Herrington and Francesca Lilly of the Crown Solicitor's Office for their assistance to me, and the others who have assisted with this matter over the course of the coronial investigation and inquest.

80. I extend my sincere condolences to TL's parents and brother, and TL's other friends and family members for their loss of TL.

81. I close this inquest.



Magistrate Teresa O'Sullivan

NSW State Coroner