

SOUTH



AUSTRALIA

FINDING OF INQUEST

An Inquest taken on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at Adelaide in the State of South Australia, on the 2nd and 22nd days of February, 2001, before Wayne Cromwell Chivell, a Coroner for the said State, concerning the disappearance of Jevan Wright.

I, the said Coroner, find that Jevan Wright, aged 17 years, late of 26 Sinclair Street, Port Lincoln, died at Blackfellows Point near Elliston, South Australia on the 25th day of September, 2000 as a result of multiple injuries. The circumstances of death were as follows:-

1. Jevan Wright disappeared on Monday 25th September 2000. He had been surfing at Blackfellows Point near Elliston, South Australia.
2. Section 12(1)(e) of the Coroners Act, 1975 empowers me to conduct an inquest into “the disappearance from, or within, the State of any person.” I am satisfied that I have jurisdiction to conduct an inquest into the disappearance of Mr Wright.
3. Graham Keith Chapman, then aged 40 years, a fisherman of Port Lincoln was the father of Jevan Wright’s girlfriend. On the 25th September 2000 Mr Chapman was surfing at Blackfellows Point, which is approximately 5 kilometres north of Elliston on the west coast of South Australia.

4. When Mr Chapman came out of the water at around 10.30am he saw Jevan Wright getting changed to go surfing. When he returned at about 11.40am, Mr Chapman saw that Jevan was still surfing and so he and two other men, Craig Pringle (“Nugget”) and Kym Castley, paddled out to joint him.
5. Mr Chapman said there were a number of dolphins and also a particularly friendly seal in the area where they were surfing.
6. At about 12.45pm, Mr Chapman, Jevan and Kim Castley all decided to go in. Mr Castley caught the first wave in towards the cliffs, and Mr Chapman saw that the seal followed him in. Jevan caught the next wave, but he disappeared soon afterwards. Mr Chapman said:-

“Jevan caught the next wave in. When I thought that he should have reached the rocks and standing up, I couldn’t see Jevan. I was scanning the water and couldn’t see him anywhere and I turned to Nugget and asked if he could see Jevan. Nugget couldn’t see him either. The sea at the time was flat and a short time later, a wave came and lifted us both up and I could see the back tail of the shark sticking out about two feet out of the water. I could also see quite a bit of the length of the body of the sharks tail, and Jevan’s board was inside of the shark and the board looked quite small.

Jevan was wearing a black wet suit and a light blue helmet, and I kept looking for the helmet but I couldn’t see it.

I then turned to Nugget and said, “It’s a shark and it’s got Jevan”.

Looking at the shark’s tail and the white of it’s underbelly, I could tell that it was a white pointer and it’s tail was bigger than the surfboard which is 6’2” long, and that wasn’t taking into account the sharks body.

When the next wave lifted us up again, the shark was still there, with it's tail sticking out of the water, thrashing from side to side. Jevan must have still been attached to his leg rope because the board was still right alongside of the shark.”

(Exhibit C2a page 2)

7. Mr Chapman and Mr Pringle then paddled their boards into the rocks where they looked out to sea but could see nothing. They paddled out again and recovered a piece of Jevan's surfboard, which had been severely damaged, and then paddled into shore and raised the alarm.
8. Mr Chapman gave a further statement on 2nd January 2001 in which he provided some further information. He said:-

“I remember Jevan was wearing a light blue Gath helmet, a special brand surfing helmet. I remember seeing Jevan's helmet and his right arm sticking out of the sharks mouth as he was being pushed under the water. This part should have been included in my statement prior to me seeing the back tail of the shark sticking out of the water.”

(exhibit C2b page 2)

Mr Chapman's version of these events is corroborated by the statements of Mr Pringle (exhibit C3a) and Mr Castley (exhibit C5a). Mr Castley confirmed Jevans disappearance, although he did not see the shark. Mr Pringle said that he saw the shark's tail thrashing and sending spray to each side. (exhibit C3a, page 3).

9. Senior Constable A L Traeger of the Elliston Police Station initially spoke to Mr Castley who came to his house. Constable Traeger proceeded immediately to the area, having spoken to Mr Chapman on the way.

10. Constable Traeger then organised a search of the area for the rest of the afternoon and for the following three days.
11. During the afternoon of the 20th September 2000, a small piece of Jevan's surfboard was found by Mr David Bascomb who had been assisting in the search in his boat. The piece measured only about six inches by four inches, and was found approximately one kilometre north west of the surf-break. (exhibit C6a).
12. Nothing further was discovered during the subsequent searching.
13. The surfboard and the fragment found by Mr Bascomb were examined by Dr Jane Taylor, Forensic Odontologist. Dr Taylor is unable to reach any firm conclusion that the damage evident in the surfboard and the fragment was caused by a shark, since the fracture line was irregular in nature and showed none of the characteristic markings. (see Exhibit C1a)

14. **Conclusion**

In view of the evidence, particularly the evidence of Mr Chapman, I have no doubt that Jevan Wright died as a result of a shark attack. Having regard to his evidence, the shark in question must have been an extremely large one. Having regard to Mr Chapman's observations, it is not surprising that Jevan's body, or a part thereof, has not been recovered. The precise cause of his death cannot be ascertained, although it was obviously due to multiple injuries.

15. **Recommendations**

Section 25(2) of the Coroners Act empowers me to add to this finding any recommendation "that might....prevent or reduce the likelihood of a recurrence of an event similar to the event that was subject of inquest."

16. Mr Geoff Wright, Jevan's father, made a number of very sensible observations about the frequency of shark attacks, and ways in which this phenomenon might be minimised, although none of these suggestions were strictly relevant to the circumstances of Jevan's death. They related more to tuna farming in Boston Bay, and salmon fishing.
17. In relation to Jevan's death, he was taken by a shark without warning, and despite an extensive search, neither Jevan's body nor the shark involved was located afterwards. In those circumstances, I see little point in making recommendations about how Jevan's death might have been avoided. All experienced surfers, particularly people who surf on the West Coast of South Australia, must be aware of the risk, however remote, of shark attack. I very much doubt that any further warning or other preventative measure will reduce the likelihood that such an event will happen again. In those circumstances, I make no recommendation pursuant to Section 25(2) of the Coroners Act.

Key Words: disappearance; shark attack

In witness whereof the said Coroner has hereunto set and subscribed his hand and

Seal the 2nd day of February, 2001.

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Coroner