



IN THE CORONERS COURT
OF VICTORIA
AT MELBOURNE

COR 2022 004364

FINDING INTO DEATH FOLLOWING INQUEST

Form 37 Rule 63(1)

Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008

Inquest into the Death of Glykeria Skalistis

Delivered On: 11 November 2024

Delivered At: Southbank

Hearing Dates: 11 November 2024

Findings of: Coroner Dimitra Dubrow

Counsel Assisting the Coroner: Dr Declan McGavin, Coroner's Solicitor

Keywords: Missing Person; drowning; suspected death

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INTRODUCTION

1. On 30 August 2019, Glykeria Skalistis was reported missing by her husband, Aristidis ‘Harry’ Skalistis from their address in Mount Waverley. Glykeria lived with Harry and their son, Alexis. The couple also had an older son, Constantine ‘Dean’.
2. On 31 August 2019, members of Victoria Police located Glykeria’s vehicle at Schnapper Point carpark. Examination of the nearby beach located a chair with Glykeria’s phone, clothing, and handwritten notes. Air and sea searches failed to locate a body and Glykeria was never found.
3. In July 2022, after contact was made by family members, Detective Sergeant Mark Fitt of the Monash Crime Investigation Unit reviewed the available evidence from the case and formed the belief that there was sufficient evidence to refer the case to the Coroners Court of Victoria (**the Court**) as a suspected death.
4. On 3 August 2022, DS Fitt wrote to Court to request that an investigation into the suspected death of Glykeria Skalistis be commenced.

THE CORONIAL INVESTIGATION

5. Judicial Registrar Katherine Lorenz, then coroner, initially held carriage of this investigation and on 24 August 2022 directed that the Court commence an investigation into the suspected death of Glykeria Skalistis. I took carriage of this matter upon my appointment in September 2024 and following Judicial Registrar Lorenz’s appointment to the Supreme Court of Victoria.

Purposes of coronial investigations

6. The *Coroners Act 2008* (**the Act**) requires coroners to investigate reportable deaths and to ascertain, if possible, the identity of the deceased person, the cause of death and the circumstances in which death occurred.¹ Reportable deaths include deaths that appear to

¹ Section 67(1), of the Act.

have been unexpected, unnatural or violent or have resulted from an accident or injury.² For coronial purposes, death includes suspected death.³

7. The cause of death refers to the medical cause of death, incorporating where possible the mode or mechanism of death. The circumstances in which death occurred refer to the context or background and surrounding circumstances. Surrounding circumstances are limited to events which are sufficiently proximate and causally related and can include a finding that the suspected death in fact occurred.
8. The purpose of a coronial investigation is to establish facts, not to cast blame or determine civil or criminal liability and are specifically prohibited from including in a finding or comment any statement that a person is, or may be, guilty of an offence.⁴
9. Under the Act, coroners also have the important functions of helping to prevent deaths and promoting public health and safety and the administration of justice through the making of comments or recommendations in appropriate cases about any matter connected to the death under investigation.⁵

Investigation of Suspected Deaths

10. The coronial investigation of a suspected death differs significantly from most other coronial investigations which commence with the discovery of a deceased person's body or remains. The focus in those cases is on identification of the body or remains, a forensic pathologist's examination and advice to the coroner about the medical cause of death and the circumstances in which the death occurred.

² See section 4 of the Act for the full definition of "reportable death".

³ See section 3 of the Act for the definition of "death".

⁴ Section 69(1) of the Act. However, a coroner may include a statement relating to a notification to the Director of Public Prosecutions if they believe an indictable offence may have been committed in connection with the death. See sections 69(2) and 49(1) of the Act.

⁵ See sections 72(1), 67(3) and 72(2) of the Act regarding reports, comments and recommendations, respectively.

11. Absent a body or remains, the coronial investigation focuses on the last sighting of the person suspected to be deceased; any subsequent contact with family or the authorities; and evidence of proof of life since.
12. In such cases, the coronial investigation is essentially an exercise in proof of death through the absence of evidence that a person has been alive or active via searches and a series of checks of records held by various authorities and databases.

Inquests into Suspected Deaths

13. The standard of proof for coronial findings or facts is the civil standard of proof on the balance of probabilities.⁶
14. It is self-evident that a finding of a person whose remains have not been found is deceased is a serious matter with significant legal consequences that is not made lightly and requires me to reach a comfortable level of satisfaction as to facts based on the evidence.
15. In that regard, and in what is common practice among coroners, I considered it appropriate to use my discretion to hold an inquest on 11 November 2024.
16. The only witness called at inquest was DS Fitt who provided an overview of the missing persons investigation and subsequent proof of life checks. DS Fitt concluded that Glykeria was deceased.
17. This finding is based on the totality of the material produced by the coronial investigation into Glykeria's disappearance and suspected death. That is, the investigation and brief of evidence compiled by DS Mark Fitt, reports and investigations at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (**VIFM**), and proof of life checks.
18. In writing this finding, I do not purport to summarise all the material and evidence but will refer to it only in such detail as is warranted by its forensic significance and in the interests

⁶ This is subject to the principles set out in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336. The effect of this and similar authorities is that coroners should not make adverse findings against, or comments about, individuals unless the evidence provides a comfortable level of satisfaction as to those matters taking into account the consequences of such findings or comments."

of narrative clarity. The brief will remain on the coronial file, together with the inquest transcript.

BACKGROUND

19. Glykeria was born on 4 December 1948 in Greece. She and Harry were married in 1969 and have two sons, Alex and Dean. Glykeria also had two grandsons. The family, including Glykeria's daughter in law, were close and would see each other every few days.
20. Glykeria had a previous incident in September 2018 where she walked into the water and was rescued by bystanders and subsequently admitted to hospital. At this admission, Glykeria was diagnosed with depression and prescribed anti-depressant and anti-psychotic medications. Glykeria also had a long-standing history of schizophrenia managed by a psychiatrist.
21. During this admission, Glykeria was also treated with electroconvulsive therapy (**ECT**).
22. For the last six months, Glykeria had not been taking her regular medications. Nonetheless, Harry noted that she had been well over the last nine months, taking Japanese lessons, learning Greek online, and regularly volunteering at hospitals and residential aged care facilities to keep people company.
23. Other family and friends also noted Glykeria's mental health history and that her mood varied from time to time. The family were quite open about how things were travelling, noting when Glykeria was well or when she was having a bad day.
24. While Glykeria had been well for previous six months, Harry noticed some changes more recently. Other family and friends also noted subtle changes to suggest the Glykeria was flatter. Harry also stated Glykeria had started going to the beach on her own in the previous two weeks which she did not do when she was well.
25. On one of these occasions, on 6 May 2019, Glykeria was conveyed to Monash Medical Centre Emergency Department after bystanders observed her swimming at Parkdale beach alone in her underwear.

26. The Emergency Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team (**ECATT**) reviewed Glykeria with Harry and assessed a mild impairment in judgement: Glykeria was unable to say why she went swimming, just that she *“felt like it”* and denied doing so with suicidal ideation. She admitted that it might look odd and reported that she had not taken her medications for a few days in a row.
27. The ECATT assessed Glykeria as low risk, denied suicidal ideation or symptoms of psychosis, and requested for GP follow-up in ten days. The discharge summary and ECATT notes were faxed to the GP who arranged an appointment on 16 May 2019. The notes from this consultation note that Glykeria denied any suicidal thoughts or psychotic symptoms and was *“feeling ok now”*.

CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE DISAPPEARANCE

28. On 29 August 2019, Harry left for work at approximately 6:45am.
29. At about 7am, Glykeria woke up and chatted with Alexis about their plans for the day.
30. At about 8am, Alexis went for his daily walk around the block and returned 10 to 15 minutes later to Glykeria getting ready to leave. Glykeria said goodbye and told Alexis that there were sardines to cook for dinner. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary to Alexis.
31. Between 11 and 11:30am, Harry called Glykeria from work and spoke with her. She seemed very happy and asked what time Harry would be coming home.
32. Between 2 and 2:30pm, Harry returned home and noted that Glykeria was not there. He attempted to call her multiple times throughout the afternoon, but she did not answer the phone.
33. At about 7pm, Harry and Alexis drove along the beaches towards Elwood looking for her and her car.
34. At 11pm, Harry and Alexis returned home. Harry continued to try and call Glykeria, but there was no answer.

35. The next day, 30 August 2019, at about 7:30am, Harry and Alexis continued to search for Glykeria and her car. They went to various friends' addresses and a local beach.
36. At 10am, they went to Oakleigh Police Station to report Glykeria as a missing person.

MISSING PERSON INVESTIGATION

37. Primacy of the investigation remained with uniform police from the Oakleigh Police Station with oversight from the Monash CIU.
38. On 30 August 2019 the following actions were taking:
 - (a) Local police members patrolled beach car parks in the area.
 - (b) The house was searched which found no suspicious circumstances. It was also noted that Glykeria had left home without her handbag or wallet.
 - (c) A statement was obtained from Harry and Alexis
 - (d) Attempts were made to call Glykeria's phone, but it appeared to be turned off. This also prevented Location Based Search.
 - (e) Checks of local hospitals.
 - (f) Checks with the Coroners Court for recent admissions.
 - (g) Contact with local Crisis Accommodation.
 - (h) Hourly radio broadcasts to local and surrounding police response area units.
 - (i) Other searches of places of interest.
 - (j) A media release.
 - (k) Notification to Search and Rescue Squad.
39. On 31 August 2019, a police patrol unit located Glykeria's car in the Schnapper Point car park. There were no signs of forced entry into the Glykeria's car. Inside the car, police located underwear and a bra in the front passenger footwell. Nothing else of note was located.
40. While making enquiries about the car, a bystander approached police and informed them that they had seen a chair near the water's edge with clothes on it the day before and that it was still there. Initially, the bystander assumed it belonged to a swimmer and didn't think anything of it until they saw it again that morning apparently unchanged and unmoved.

41. These items were subsequently identified as Glykeria's clothes and belongings and included her phone, clothing, watch, reading glasses, car key, and handwritten notes in a notepad. There was an additional loose leaf handwritten note folded in the pants on the chair which included the Lord's Prayer.⁷
42. An air and sea search was conducted by Water Police, Air Wing, and Local Volunteer Marine Rescue. The search did not locate a body. Search and Rescue reportedly advised that if a body is not located within 10 to 12 hours of entering the water, then it would likely be caught on the seabed.

Proof of life checks

43. By 1 October 2019, the following additional checks occurred:
 - (a) Review of CCTV footage at the local shopping strip and where Glykeria's car was found. Not all entries and exists were covered and so the time of Glykeria's arrival is not known.
 - (b) Review of bank accounts showed no unaccounted transactions.
 - (c) Review of mobile phone data suggests that Glykeria's phone was in the Mornington Beach area from 10:17am 29 August 2019 until at least 23:59pm when it is presumed that the phone was either switched off or the battery had gone flat.
44. On 4 September 2023, Judicial Registrar Lorenz directed DS Fitt to perform contemporary proof of life checks.
45. DS Fitt advised via email on 21 September 2023 that these had been completed: none of the major banks had accounts in Glykeria's name, no mobile phone data from any carrier showed an account linked to Glykeria, and that Medicare Patient History Records had been requested but not yet received.

⁷ CB, 97.

46. These records were obtained on 7 May 2024, and showed no data from 30 August 2019 to 6 May 2024. However, these records did show that Glykeria presented to her usual GP clinic on 23 August 2019. Glykeria was prescribed reflux medication, an anti-depressant, and an anti-psychotic which were all filled at a pharmacy in Preston the same day.
47. Unfortunately, there were no notes from the GP in the medical record about this presentation other than that these medications were prescribed.

Evidence at Inquest

48. At inquest, DS Fitt confirmed that the proof of life checks had not found any evidence that Glykeria was alive.
49. DS Fitt gave further evidence about the initial investigation regarding several outgoing calls which Glykeria had made on 28 and 29 August 2019. There was a documented plan from the initial investigators to obtain statements from the people who talked to Glykeria during these calls. However, the results of these inquiries were not provided to the Court and did not form part of the coronial brief of evidence.
50. DS Fitt confirmed that these checks had occurred, and that he had made additional inquiries with some of these witnesses. DS Fitt concluded that there was nothing out of the ordinary about these phone calls, and Glykeria appeared to be interacting normally.
51. DS Fitt provided an opinion that Glykeria was deceased. DS Fitt also provided an opinion that there were no suspicious circumstances and that in his view Glykeria had entered the water of her own accord.

VIFM reports

52. A DNA sample was collected from Glykeria's eldest son, Dean. A complete nDNA and mtDNA profile was obtained and added to the Victorian Missing Persons DNA database.
53. No matches were identified at the time of entry. Should there be a match against any human remains discovered in the future, the Court will notify the family.

54. Similarly, a forensic odontologist reviewed Glykeria's dental records and provided an opinion that a dental comparison could be possible to identify Glykeria from any subsequently discovered human remains.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

55. To this day, Glykeria has not been found, and a lack of any signs of life indicates that, on the balance of probabilities, she is most likely deceased. Having applied the applicable standard to the available evidence, and having held an inquest on 11 November 2024 at Southbank, I make the following findings pursuant to section 67 of the Act:

- (a) The identify of the deceased was Glykeria Skalistis born 4 December 1948;
- (b) The death occurred on 29 or 30 August 2019 at Mothers Beach, 5 Schnapper Point Drive, Mornington, likely from drowning but ultimately an undetermined cause; and,
- (c) Glykeria entered the water of her own accord and there were no suspicious circumstances surrounding the death.

56. There is no presumption for or against a finding of suicide. Nevertheless, a finding that a person has deliberately taken their life can have long lasting ramifications for families and friends of that person. Therefore, it should only be made when there is clear and cogent evidence.
57. I am not prepared to make a finding that Glykeria entered the water with an intention to take her own life. An alternative explanation includes that Glykeria's judgement was impaired from relapse of her known mental health issues, and/or she entered the water blind to the risk of injury or death.
58. By seeing her GP on 23 August 2019 and filling prescriptions for anti-depressant and anti-psychotic medication, Glykeria appears to have recognised that her mental health was deteriorating and resumed taking her regular medications. Unfortunately, Glykeria died before these medications could take effect.

Pursuant to section 73(1) of the Act, this finding is to be published on the internet in accordance with the rules.

I direct that a copy of this finding is provided to:

Aristidis Skalistis, Senior Next of Kin

Signature:



Coroner Dimitra Dubrow

Date: 12 November 2024



NOTE: Under section 83 of the ***Coroners Act 2008*** ('the Act'), a person with sufficient interest in an investigation may appeal to the Trial Division of the Supreme Court against the findings of a coroner in respect of a death after an inquest. An appeal must be made within 6 months after the day on which the determination is made, unless the Supreme Court grants leave to appeal out of time under section 86 of the Act.
