

**CERTIFICATE OF FINDINGS**  
**Section 94, Coroners Act 2006**

IN THE MATTER of **Owen George Thomas**  
**Takarua-Reid**

**The Secretary**, Ministry of Justice, Wellington

As the Coroner conducting the inquiry into the death of the deceased, after considering in Chambers all the evidence admitted to date for its purposes, and in light of the purposes stated in section 57 of the Coroners Act 2006, I make the following findings:

Full Name of deceased:	Owen George Thomas Takarua-Reid
Date of:	947 Waiomatatini Road Ruatoria
Occupation:	Fencer
Sex:	Male
Date of Birth:	28 June 1972
Place of Death:	Whareponga Bay Ruatoria
Date of Death:	24 August 2013
Cause(s) of Death	
(a). Direct cause:	Accidental drowning
(b). Antecedent cause (if known):	
(c). Underlying condition (if known):	
(d). Other significant conditions contributing to death, but not related to disease or condition causing it (if known):	

**Circumstances of death:**

At about 1.00pm on 24 August, Mr Takarua-Reid, his partner Rachel Poutu, and Ms Poutu's child went to Whareponga Bay to dive for crayfish. Mr Takarua-Reid swam about 175 metres offshore, and was diving just past the breakers. He was a regular diver and was familiar with crayfishing. Ms Poutu monitored him from shore.

At about 3.00pm, Ms Poutu saw Mr Takarua-Reid floating face down in the water. He was not kicking. Her child went for help while she went out to Mr Takarua-Reid, turned him onto his back and began dragging him to shore. She attempted cardio-pulmonary resuscitation in the water without effect.

After almost an hour Mr Takarua-Reid was finally on shore after a sustained effort by his partner to drag him back. CPR was again attempted, and brown fluid was noticed emerging from his mouth. Emergency services were called at about 4.20pm and arrived a short time later. No further resuscitation effort was made by attending ambulance officers and Mr Takarua-Reid was declared deceased at the scene.

The police were satisfied that there are no suspicious circumstances surrounding Mr Takarua-Reid's death. I accept their conclusions in that regard.

On 26 August 2013, a post mortem examination of Mr Takarua-Reid's body was undertaken. The forensic pathologist determined that the cause of death was drowning. Coronary artery atherosclerosis and epilepsy were contributing factors.

Mr Takarua-Reid's partner had indicated that his seizures were increasing in frequency and the pathologist noted that a seizure whilst swimming is a possible cause for drowning. The pathologist also noted that Mr Takarua-Reid's atherosclerosis meant that exertion such as swimming or diving may have

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increased the oxygen demand of his heart muscle and accordingly may have caused an episode of ischemic heart disease as a result of insufficient oxygenation.

Toxicology tests identified trace levels of alcohol in Mr Takarua-Reid's blood, and the presence of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC, which is indicative of cannabis use). The effects of cannabis on Mr Takarua-Reid are unclear.

I accept the medical opinion as to the cause of death.

I note Mr Takarua-Reid had a history of (apparently worsening) seizures and previous head injuries. He appears to have been periodically non-compliant with his seizure medications, and was a heavy drinker. Alcohol was considered to contribute to his seizures. In the two days before his death he had consumed about 30 bottles of beer, despite previous advice from Gisborne Hospital to cut his alcohol consumption.

The circumstances of the death were investigated by Andrew Harlow of the Police National Dive Squad. He noted Mr Takarua-Reid had been free diving wearing a hooded sweatshirt, shorts and sneakers. His catch bag was not tied to him, and in fact was not found.

The tide was low and the sea was calm. Mr Takarua-Reid was found in an area where there were submerged rocks; the water was waist deep for Ms Poutu when she got to Mr Takarua-Reid but it was not clear how deep the water was between the rocks.

In Constable Harlow's view neither Mr Takarua-Reid's equipment nor the sea conditions contributed to the death. He did consider that alcohol and cannabis consumption may have.

Constable Harlow recommended that free divers:

- i. Should dive in pairs with an observer positioned a safe distance away on the surface monitoring the submerged diver. If this is not achievable the surface spotter from a boat or land should monitor the diver.
- ii. Should incorporate one diver up and one down, and rotate at regular intervals so the divers get time to recover and expel excess carbon dioxide built up from the dive.
- iii. Take regular breaks of at least a minute on the surface to replenish oxygen levels in the body reducing the risk of shallow water black out.

He also noted that the use of drugs and alcohol are not recommended safe practice in any water sport or activity.

I take no issue with Constable Harlow's recommendations and will not be making any recommendations or comments.

#### **Formal finding**

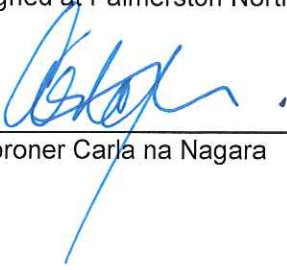
I find that Owen George Thomas Takarua-Reid died in the afternoon of 24 August 2013 as a result of an accidental drowning while free-diving alone for crayfish. While he did have someone monitoring him this was done from shore at a distance that precluded being able to give him immediate assistance.

#### **Prohibition on publication**

Pursuant to section 74 of the Act, I prohibit making public any of the photographs of Mr Takarua-Reid taken in the course of the investigation into his death upon the grounds of decency and personal privacy.

I extend my sympathy to Mr Takarua-Reid's family and friends on their loss.

Signed at Palmerston North on 26 August 2015

  
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Coroner Carla na Nagara