



National Coronial Information System

Department of Justice
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NATIONAL CORONIAL INFORMATION SYSTEM (NCIS) DATABASE SEARCH

SPORTING RELATED EXTERNAL CAUSE DEATHS REPORTED TO AN AUSTRALIAN CORONER (WITH A FOCUS ON HUNTING FATALITIES)

TIME PERIOD (01/07/2000 – 31/10/2012)

NATIONAL CORONIAL INFORMATION SYSTEM (NCIS)

NOVEMBER 2012

(UPDATE TO AUGUST 2010 REPORT)

NCIS DISCLAIMER

This dataset does not purport to be representative of all relevant cases within the time period specified, due to occasional processing and coding errors, missing data, and cases not being closed. The Department of Justice accepts no liability for any loss or damage that may arise from any use of or reliance on the data.

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide information about deaths reported to an Australian Coroner between 1st July 2000 and 31st October 2012 which involved a sporting related activity, and are closed on the NCIS.

A more in-depth search and analysis of deaths relating to persons who were engaged in “hunting” activities was also undertaken.

METHOD

Data Source

The data was obtained through conducting a search of the National Coronial Information System (NCIS). The NCIS is an electronic database of coronial information containing case details from the coronial files of all Australian states and territories, except Queensland, dating back to 1st July 2000. Queensland data is contained from 1st January 2001.

Case Identification / Data Analysis

The Query Design Screen was used to identify cases of relevance. The method of case identification involved searching for cases where:

- **Date notified** = Between 01/07/2000 and 31/10/2012
- **Case status** = Closed
- **Jurisdiction** = All Australian Jurisdictions
- **Intent on completion** = All
- **Case type on completion** = Death due to External Cause(s)
- **Activity code** = Sport and Exercise During Leisure Time, Other Specified Leisure or Play Activity or Other Specified Activity excluding Travel¹

AND

A keyword search was performed on the full text reports (Police Circumstances for all jurisdictions; Findings Reports for all jurisdictions apart from NSW; Autopsy Reports for NSW), being:

- **Keywords** = "hunting"
- **Intent on completion** = Unintentional

From the above searches, duplicated cases were removed, and all cases obtained through the specified keyword search were examined in order to determine whether the circumstances of the death were associated with a hunting activity. Any instances where it was found the deceased was deliberately killed (e.g.: assault as intent on completion) were removed.

¹ The activity codes of "Other Specified Leisure or Play Activity" and "Other Specified Activity excluding Travel" were reviewed only to identify any hunting deaths that had not been classified under the "Sport and Exercise" Activity code.

LIMITATIONS OF DATA SOURCE

Coded fields are generally not completed until the closure of a case, and the extent of information contained in the attached text reports may vary. There are also a number of other factors which may have influenced the number of cases identified within this dataset, which are outlined below. Given these factors, there is therefore a possibility of under-reporting.

Only closed cases included

Since only cases that were closed on the NCIS following a coronial investigation were included in this dataset, there may be cases of relevance still under coronial investigation that are not included in this report.

Availability of documentation within NCIS database

The level of attachment of documentation varies within the NCIS database according to the reporting jurisdiction. In addition, coronial findings in relation to non-inquest cases may not contain details about the circumstances surrounding death. These issues have the potential to impact the accurate identification of relevant fatalities via keyword searching of attached documents on the NCIS.

RESULTS

There were ONE THOUSAND, NINE HUNDRED AND NINETY-THREE (1,993) deaths involving a *sporting related activity* identified, that were reported to an Australian Coroner with the date of notification between 1st July 2000 and 31st October 2012. All deaths reported were closed cases that have been formally concluded by coronial investigation.

Of these 1,993 fatalities, twenty-three involved a target sport, with thirteen of these deaths relating to an unintentional shooting incident. An additional sixteen fatalities involving an unintentional fatal event during a hunting activity were identified where the activity had not been coded under the “Sport and Exercise” activity code.

Table 1: Australian external cause deaths involving sporting related activities, by category of Sport/Recreation activity and jurisdiction of investigation*

Category	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Total
<p>Individual Water Based Sports</p> <p>(e.g.: swimming, fishing, scuba diving, surfing, snorkelling, rock fishing, diving, water-skiing, wind surfing)</p>	9	385	49	274	69	39	156	175	1156
<p>Wheeled Motor Sports</p> <p>(e.g.: motorcycling, motor car racing, riding an all-terrain vehicle, go-carting, motorised scootering)</p>	≤ 3	69	n.p.	40	16	22	23	40	223

<p><i>Wheeled Non-Motored Sports</i> (e.g.: cycling, skateboarding, rollerblading, inline skating)</p>	≤ 3	52	≤ 3	23	13	14	25	10	141
<p><i>Boating Sports</i> (e.g.: yachting/sailing, kayaking, white water rafting, canoeing, jet-skiing, power boat racing, rowing/sculling)</p>	0	40	≤ 3	26	12	n.p.	26	14	128
<p><i>Aero (Non-Motored) Sports</i> (e.g.: parachuting, sky diving, gliding, hang gliding, paragliding, parasailing, aerobatics)</p>	≤ 3	28	≤ 3	11	≤ 3	≤ 3	32	9	90
<p><i>Equestrian Activities</i> (e.g.: riding, racing, rodeo, polo, mustering, trotting, pony club, show jumping)</p>	0	15	≤ 3	17	≤ 3	≤ 3	10	n.p.	51
<p><i>Adventure Sports</i> (e.g.: hiking, rock climbing, abseiling/rappelling, mountaineering, orienteering, river rafting)</p>	0	12	6	8	≤ 3	n.p.	10	5	47

Individual Athletic Activities (Land Based) (e.g.: walking, jogging/running, aerobic exercise with equipment)	0	16	≤ 3	6	4	≤ 3	11	4	44
Target/Precision Sports (e.g.: firearm shooting, golf, darts, croquet, billiards/pool/snooker)	0	6	≤ 3	≤ 3	≤ 3	0	9	≤ 3	23
Ice Or Snow Sports (e.g.: downhill/cross-country skiing, snowboarding, freestyle skiing)	≤ 3	n.p.	0	0	0	0	≤ 3	0	21
Team Ball Sports (e.g.: Australian Rules football, soccer, rugby, touch football, basketball)	0	7	≤ 3	4	≤ 3	0	≤ 3	≤ 3	16
Other (includes team water sports, combative sports, racquet sports)	0	15	1	7	3	2	3	4	19
Unspecified (UTBK / Still Enquiring)	0	27	0	≤ 3	≤ 3	0	0	≤ 3	34
Total	17	680	78	418	129	94	308	269	<u>1993</u>

n.p. = Not published, in order to suppress small cell counts

Case Summaries

De-identified case summary information for each of these shooting/hunting related deaths is provided below:

Firearm Injuries

Case 1: VIC

The deceased and a companion went duck shooting at a lake. Companion fell out of boat while trying to retrieve a shot duck from the water. Deceased grabbed hold of companion and in the process the companion's firearm (which was pointed upwards) discharged. Appears that, prior to falling in the lake, the companion had placed the loaded firearm across their lap but had not engaged the safety. It also appears that the swivel seat in the boat used by the companion could overbalance when engaged in activities such as retrieving a shot duck from the water.

Case 2: NSW

Deceased and friends were preparing for an evening of rabbit hunting. Before departing, deceased borrowed a .22 rifle from a friend (whose shooting licence had been revoked), looked through the scope, and placed the weapon under his chin. In the process the firearm discharged, causing fatal injuries. Appears deceased was unaware that the rifle was loaded.

Case 3: NT

Deceased and companion were pig hunting. Deceased shot a pig and went into swamp after it. Appears that firearm may have discharged while the deceased was retrieving the pig. Fatal injury to chest sustained.

Case 4: VIC

The deceased had been deer hunting with friends when one of the party members noticed rustling in the trees. Not knowing where the deceased was, one of the party yelled out multiple times and when there was no response, fired their high powered lever action rifle once then a short time later, a second time. The shooter then went and inspected what had been shot at and found the deceased shot in the back of the head. The deceased was wearing camouflage clothing.

Case 5: VIC

The deceased was accidentally shot by a companion with a .22 calibre Winchester Magnum Rimfire, lever action rifle. The deceased and three companions were spotlight shooting kangaroos. Shortly after alighting from their vehicle and using the bonnet as a rest, one animal was wounded. The deceased and the companion walked beside the animal while trying to re-load. The companion was then asked to open a gate and while undertaking this task, their firearm discharged, striking the deceased. Neither the deceased nor the companion was licensed.

Case 6: NSW

Deceased and friends were kangaroo shooting. After shooting a kangaroo, a member of the party began re-loading their rifle. As they gripped the .308 Ruger rifle it became unbalanced and discharged. Deceased (who was sitting in the front of the vehicle) sustained head injuries.

Case 7: QLD

The deceased accidentally shot themselves in the head while shooting on a private property. It is believed that the deceased was driving and shooting from the driver's side window. As the deceased replaced the .223 Rifle in the Passenger's seat foot well, the weapon has accidentally discharged, striking the deceased in the head. Police investigations showed that the rifle had a very light trigger.

Case 8: SA

Deceased (hunting alone), alighted from vehicle. The firearm being held discharged, causing head injuries.

Case 9: VIC

Deceased and friends were fox shooting in a paddock. It appears that members of the group were walking along a gully trying to scare the foxes out of the bracken when one of the group members saw a fox. The shooter took aim at the fox, which was between the shooter and the gully and fired. Part of the spread of shotgun pellets hit the fox, but the rest of the spread went through the bracken and struck the deceased.

Case 10: VIC

Deceased set out to shoot a fox they had seen in the area. It appears that the deceased tripped on a fallen tree branch, causing the gun to discharge.

Case 11: TAS

Deceased and a friend were spotlighting for wallabies. As the vehicle was reversing, the rifle being held by the deceased discharged. This was found to be due to a faulty safety catch.

Case 12: VIC

Rifle discharged while deceased was attempting to shoot a fox on the deceased's property. It is suggested the rifle may have discharged while the deceased was climbing through a fence.

Case 13: QLD

The deceased was returning home after wallaby shooting with friends. Deceased was climbing down from the roof of the vehicle when his shotgun has discharged, resulting in a fatal chest injury.

Case 14: QLD

The deceased was sustained fatal injuries while hunting. The incident resulted from a loaded rifle discharging when the vehicle the deceased was travelling in came to a stop.

Case 15: VIC

The deceased went on a hunting excursion with two family members to hunt rabbits on a private property. The shooter shot at a rabbit and in the same movement brought the rifle to the right side. It was at this point the rifle unintentionally discharged a second time, hitting the deceased.

Case 16: VIC

Upon arriving home the deceased retrieved a .22 rifle from the gun cabinet, indicating there was a fox on the property. The deceased was found later lying next to a forked tree with one of their legs in the tree fork. The police officer who investigated this matter has said that it is possible that the deceased may have grasped the firearm by the barrel whereby it has discharged, possibly after the trigger snagged in the undergrowth.

Case 17: QLD

Whilst hunting with friends, the deceased was left alone in the “ute” in order to open a gate in between paddocks. In the process of opening the gate, the friends heard a single rifle shot which resulted in the deceased sustaining a fatal gunshot wound to the chest from an accidental discharge of the Browning pump action 0.22 Rimfire rifle.

Other injuries

Case 18: VIC

The deceased was fox shooting with friends, and was traveling in the rear of a vehicle which had a stock crate attached. Upon entering a paddock, the vehicle has rolled onto its roof, with the deceased crushed by the steel crate.

Case 19: NT

The deceased was a passenger in a vehicle which rolled during a shooting trip on a rural paddock.

Case 20: NSW

Deceased and friends were hunting feral pigs. During the expedition, the deceased was an unrestrained passenger travelling on the rear tray of utility with several dogs. Driver lost control of vehicle, causing the vehicle to roll. Deceased crushed underneath.

Case 21: QLD

Deceased and friend were pig hunting. Deceased was in possession of a 20cm double bladed knife which was extremely sharp and the other person was in possession of a dolphin torch. The deceased was carrying the knife in their hand and the blade was not protected. The deceased and friend have fallen into water. The deceased has accidentally stabbed themselves in the right outer thigh just above the knee, sustaining a fatal injury.

Case 22: SA

The deceased was a passenger in the back of a ute with a tray attachment spotlight shooting when the vehicle overturned.

Case 23: NT

Deceased drove to an outstation in order to hunt animals. While chasing animals the deceased lost control of the vehicle, causing it to roll. Multiple injuries sustained.

Case 24: NSW

Deceased and friend were riding quad bikes along dirt tracks during a day kangaroo shooting. The bike came off the track, before travelling out of control. Deceased was thrown from bike and into a tree. Traumatic head injuries sustained.

Cases 25 & 26: QLD

A group of four people had been drinking when they decided to go pig hunting. All four persons were seated in the front of a utility which had the roof and tray removed when the vehicle was being driven along a dry creek bed. The vehicle overturned on an embankment and overturned landing on the roof. Two of the four persons were killed.

Case 27: QLD

At some stage during a pig hunting trip, it appears that the deceased slipped over and drowned at a dammed river site.

Case 28: QLD

Whilst pig hunting in the middle of the night with friends, it appears that the deceased has stumbled to the ground from the back tray of a "ute" and sustained traumatic head injuries. When the vehicle was turned around, the spotlight revealed the deceased lying face down on the ground.

Case 29: QLD

During a night-time pig hunting session, the deceased has fallen from the back tray of a "ute" that had swerved suddenly in order to avoid a kangaroo. The deceased sustained multiple injuries as the rear passenger side wheel ran over the deceased.

DATA SOURCES

Data on the NCIS has been provided by each State and Territory Coroner's Office around Australia.

Additional codes are provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Safe Work Australia.

 	 ACT Coroner's Court
	 Coroner's Court of Western Australia
 Office of the State Coroner	COURTS ADMINISTRATION AUTHORITY SOUTH AUSTRALIA
 MAGISTRATES COURT OF TASMANIA	 Coroners Court of Victoria

NOTE: In some States/Territories the Coroner's Office is part of the Magistrate's Court.

FUNDING AGENCIES

Operational funding for the NCIS is provided by the following agencies:

- Each State and Territory Justice/Attorney-General's Department
- Australian Department of Health and Ageing
- Australian Institute of Criminology
- Safe Work Australia
- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
- Australian Department of Infrastructure and Transport