

David Routledge death: Charge dropped against Middlemount mine manager

Prosecutors have made a shock move in a Central Queensland mine death case as a union chief says the worker's family simply wants answers.

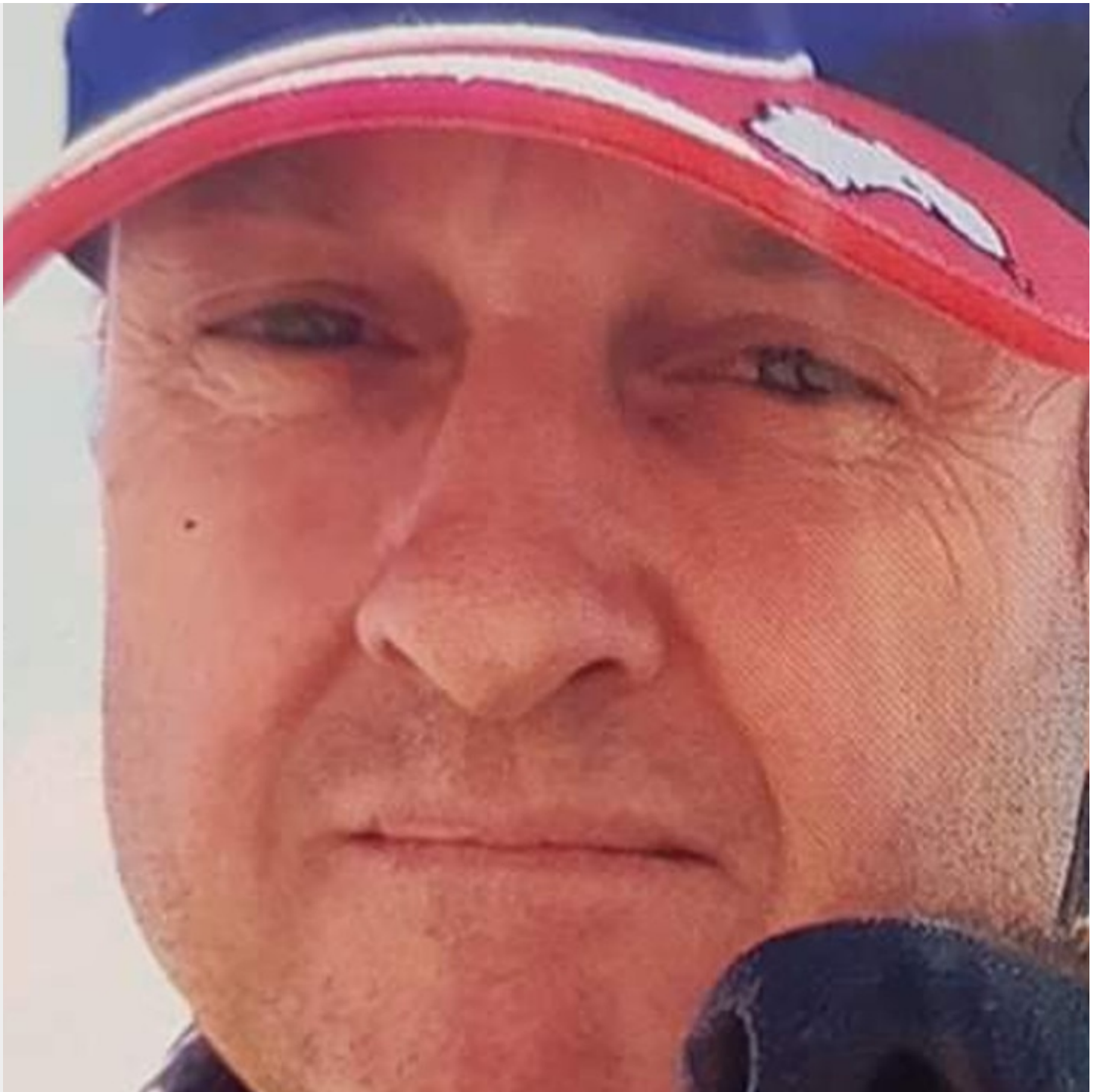


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David Routledge was killed in June 2019 in a high wall crush at Middlemount mine.

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Charges have been dropped against a mining manager over the crushing death of South Mackay grandfather David Routledge in a high wall collapse.

But charges against the mine operator and the site senior executive and are expected to play out in an up to three-week hearing in Mackay next year over the 2019 tragedy.

The 55-year-old had been using a digger at Middlemount mine on June 26 when part of the high wall collapsed and engulfed the machine just after midday.



David Routledge was killed in June 2019 in a high wall crush at Middlemount mine.

[In June 2020, charges were laid against site senior executive Darren Lee Cuthbertson, mine manager Darrin Brian Milner and open-cut examiner Neville John Whitley](#) over allegations of serious health and safety breaches.

Mine operator Moranbah Coal Pty Ltd has also been charged with failing to discharge health and safety obligations – cause death or grievous bodily harm over the fatal incident.

[It is alleged no assessment and no effective measures were taken to mitigate any hazards after a blast – that occurred 10 days earlier](#) – resulted in up to three metres of hanging rock on the high wall, which was identified as being a “Geotech issue”.

A spokesperson for the office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor confirmed Mr Whitley “died of natural causes” on December 1, 2021 “resulting in the abatement of the charge against that person”.



The Middlemount Mine, 6km southwest of Middlemount in central Queensland. Pic Macarthur Coal.

On September 29, the Acting Work Health and Safety Prosecutor decided there were “reasonable prospects” of securing convictions against Middlemount Coal and Mr Cuthbertson at trial, but not against Mr Milner.

“Workers within the industry, his family and friends would want answers on why David was put in a position where he lost his life,” CFMEU Queensland president Stephen Smyth said.

“He should never have been put in that position.

“Now charges are dropped and people will be asking the question ‘why?’”

Matters against Middlemount Coal, Mr Cuthbertson and Mr Milner were mentioned in Mackay Industrial Magistrates Court on Wednesday when it was confirmed the charge against Mr Milner would be discontinued.



REST IN PEACE: Middlemount mine worker, David Routledge is laid to rest in front of hundreds of loving friends and family.

“How do you commence charges against people and then drop them?” Mr Smyth said.

“All the family want is answers.”

The court matters against Middlemount Coal and Mr Cuthbertson would be set for a two-to-three-week hearing in Mackay sometime after April next year.

The case will be mentioned again in January 2023.

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[This comes on the back of a decision not to prosecute charges laid against two senior mine workers over the death of Bradley Hardwick](#) at Moranbah North underground mine for the same reason.

In that case charges remain against the mine operator and is expected to go to hearing next month in Brisbane.