

Coroner rules no inquest for dead central Queensland miner Donald Rabbitt

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Robin Rabbitt says he wants answers about his son Donald's death. (Supplied: Robin Rabbitt)

In short:

A Queensland coroner has ruled mine worker Donald Rabbitt was crushed to death but says there is no need for an inquest.

Charges against the mine's owner, contractor and senior site executives have also been dropped.

What next?

Mr Rabbitt's father Robin Rabbitt is calling for answers and wants to know why no one is being held accountable.

A coronial investigation into the death of a 33-year-old man killed at a central Queensland mine has been abandoned because a coroner has decided it will not lead to any recommendations that could avert similar deaths.

Donald "Donnie" Rabbitt was alone when he was crushed by a heavy falling tyre and rim at Curragh Mine, north of Blackwater, on January 12, 2020.

His father Robin Rabbitt said he was devastated to receive a letter from Central Coroner David O'Connell on Friday saying no inquest would be held.



Robin Rabbitt says he is disappointed to receive news from the coroner that an inquest will not be held. *(Supplied: Robin Rabbitt)*

Mr O'Connell found that Mr Rabbitt died as the result of his injuries caused when he was crushed by a tyre assembly weighing more than five tonnes.

He wrote he would not hold a full inquest as "there did not appear to be any prospect of making recommendations that would reduce the likelihood of similar deaths occurring".

The coroner found Mr Rabbitt was trained in the mine site's standard operating procedure which said three people should be present for the task.



Donald "Donnie" Rabbitt was 33 when he died at work. *(Supplied: Robin Rabbitt)*

The report said when he was directed to change the tyre there was no discussion about it being a multi-person job.

The coroner also found that while Mr Rabbitt was familiar with the theoretical requirements he had had no practical training for that particular task.

Mr Rabbitt said the findings attempted to blame his son for his own death.

"They're saying Donald had the right to say no," he said.

"I want to know why my son's dead. I want to know why he wasn't afforded any duty of care."

Charges dropped

All charges relating to Mr Rabbitt's death have now been dropped.

A spokesperson for the Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor (OWHSP) said the case against mining contractor Thies Pty Ltd was discontinued in August this year.

This follows proceedings against the mine owner Coronado Curragh being discontinued in July 2024.



Mining company Coronado Curragh has been charged with breaching its safety obligation to workers. (ABC News: Jemima Burt)

Earlier in December 2023, the case against the site's senior executive was also discontinued.

The three parties were charged with breaching the Coal Mining Safety and Health Act 1999 following an investigation by the industry regulator Resources Health and Safety Queensland (RHSQ).

"The matters were continuously and carefully reviewed against the director's guidelines published by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions," the OWHSP spokesperson said.

A loss of faith

Across the Bowen Basin, four people have died on mine sites this year.

The Mining and Energy Union (MEU) believes that figure should trigger a "board of inquiry", a temporary investigative body with an independent chair and involvement from mining companies, the Queensland Resources Council and the union.

MEU industry safety and health representative Jason Hill said a new inquiry would give added rigour to the investigation into the four deaths.



Jason Hill says mine safety needs greater scrutiny. (Supplied: Mining and Energy Union)

He said he was concerned about calls from the new Queensland Minister for Natural Resources and Mines Dale Last for a return of mining warden inquiries.

"We'd be going back 25 years, in terms of the reforms of holding people to account," he said.

"Being able to prosecute someone for a death that they've caused, will be taken away, and families won't get closure."

In a statement, Mr Last said he intended to deliver on his promise to establish a Mining Warden's Court, which would make recommendations "with the full force of the Coroner's Court behind it".

He said he was working with Resources Safety and Health Queensland, to "enhance the ways we educate and implement safety controls at sites".

'How many other parents?'

The 2019 Brady Review into mining fatalities in Queensland found a top-down approach to mining safety controls had allowed ineffective safety procedures to remain and fester.

Report author and industry consultant Sean Brady said five years on, he was only seeing "pockets of engagement".

"There's still a view that you can have a compliance-based approach to generating safety," he said.

"You need constant feedback on what systems or which controls are ineffective, and I don't think we've seen that step forward from companies."

Dr Brady warned that people still held misconceptions about the causes of deaths and serious injuries at mine sites.

"What you see is that a lot of the causes of these fatalities are very, very mundane, and they're occurring in the day-to-day work of mine workers," he said.

Robin Rabbitt said news of more mining fatalities was not good enough.

"I wonder how many other parents and families are in the same situation as us?" he said.

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