



GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION SUMMARY REPORT

Publication of this report is authorised by the Secretary under the provisions of Air Navigation Regulations 283 (1)

Reference No

AS/741/1046

1. LOCATION OF OCCURRENCE

20 kilometres north-north-east of Mackay Airport,
QueenslandHeight a.m.s.l.
Sea LevelDate
29.12.74Time (Local)
1445 hoursZone
EST

2. THE AIRCRAFT

Make and Model

Cessna 172K

Registration

VH-KUE

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 At approximately 1445 hours, Eastern Standard Time, on 29 December, 1974 a Cessna 172K aircraft, registered VH-KUE, crashed into the sea some eight kilometres north of Slade Point, Queensland. The bodies of two of the three occupants of the aircraft and portions of the aircraft wreckage were subsequently located and recovered from the sea.

3.2 The holder of the certificate of registration for VH-KUE was M. K. Jones of 24 Penn Street, Mackay, Queensland. The aircraft was engaged on a private travel flight from Mackay to Brampton Island and return.

3.3 The pilot of the aircraft was Neil Alan Darrack, aged 46 years, who was the holder of a private pilot licence endorsed for the aircraft type. He did not hold any instrument rating and was therefore qualified to fly only in visual meteorological conditions by day. His total flying experience amounted to approximately 175 hours. There were two passengers on board the aircraft, Rachael Susan Dodd and Reginald Henry Blount. The body of Mr. Blount has not been recovered.

3.4 The aircraft was operating under a certificate of airworthiness which was valid from 2 October, 1969 until 2 October, 1978. There is no evidence to suggest that it was in other than an airworthy condition or that the gross weight and the position of the centre of gravity were not within safe limits.

3.5 Mr. Darrack had intended to depart from Mackay at about 1000 hours but, at that time, there was heavy rain at Mackay and the flight was delayed. He subsequently obtained the current area and terminal meteorological forecasts which indicated scattered to broken cumulus cloud throughout the area with a base of 6,000 feet in the coastal areas and occasional thunderstorms. Broken stratus cloud with a base down to 1,000 feet in rain areas was also forecast. The pilot then prepared and submitted a flight plan which indicated an estimated flight time of 11 minutes from Mackay to Brampton Island, the same flight time for the return flight, cruising altitude below 2,000 feet and fuel endurance of 230 minutes on departure from Mackay.

3.6 The aircraft departed Mackay at 1234 hours and the pilot subsequently reported arrival at Brampton Island at 1248 hours. At 1441 hours radio communication was again established with Mackay Tower and the pilot reported that he had departed from Brampton Island at 1439 hours and was cruising at 1,000 feet. He was issued with an air traffic clearance to enter the Mackay control zone at 1,000 feet with a clearance limit of abeam Slade Point and this clearance was acknowledged. At 1449 hours Mackay Tower attempted to communicate with the aircraft again in order to cancel the clearance limit and, when this attempt proved to be unsuccessful, the Uncertainty Phase of Search and Rescue Procedures was declared at 1502 hours. Following further fruitless attempts to communicate with the aircraft or otherwise establish its whereabouts, the Alert Phase was declared at 1533 hours followed by the Distress Phase at 1600 hours. At 1644 hours the pilot of a DHC6 "Twin Otter" aircraft reported sighting aircraft wreckage and bodies in the sea some 20 kilometres north-north-east of Mackay Airport.

3.7 The only portions of the aircraft which were recovered from the sea were the nose undercarriage leg and wheel, one front seat and a metal skin panel from the lower surface of the port mainplane. The damage sustained by these components was consistent with the aircraft having entered the water at high speed in a nose down attitude.

3.8 The Twin Otter pilot who sighted the wreckage had also been engaged on a flight from Brampton Island to Mackay at the time of the accident and had departed from Brampton Island at 1430 hours. His cruising altitude for the flight was 2,500 feet and his aircraft had entered cloud at a position 24 kilometres NNE of Mackay and remained in cloud until 11 kilometres from Mackay. A Cessna 206 aircraft departed Brampton Island for Mackay at 1510 hours and was required to divert west of the direct track to avoid a large heavy rain shower off the coast north of Slade Point.

4. OPINION AS TO CAUSE

The cause of the accident has not been determined but the available evidence suggests that the weather conditions were a likely factor.

Approved for publication

(I. M. Leslie)
Delegate of the Secretary

Date

8.1.1976