

4. I have been assisted in this inquiry by investigations made by the Coroners Court of Victoria Prevention Unit. I am advised that there have been six deaths occur on the trail between 2001 and 2009. Some of those deaths are recorded as from cardiac related causes. Information obtained from media reports noted that the number of people attempting the walk have increased from around one hundred in 2001 to nearly six thousand in 2009.¹
5. I am further advised that the Kokoda Track Authority ("KTA") is a Papua New Guinean Special Purpose Authority and a joint initiative with the Australian Government. The KTA is commissioned to develop and maintain a tourism industry with tourism providers, help the local communities, collect and manage trekking fees and permits and to oversee and regulate the conduct of tour operators.²
6. The KTA has introduced a system of Commercial Operations Licences (COL) for any business being operated on the Kokoda Track Corridor. This licensing currently applies to all Kokoda Track tour operators. Trek permits are required by Licensed Tour Operators (LTO) and individuals who are not operating a commercial business who intend to use the Kokoda Track. This licensing system was created to set minimum standards for the Kokoda tourism industry.

Kokoda Track Safety Package

7. The Papua New Guinean and Australian governments have jointly funded an initiative to develop a Kokoda Track Safety Package (KTSP), which includes a number of projects to address infrastructure and safety issues along the Kokoda Track. Mr Brian Boon, Project Manager, advised that information kits are being developed for prospective trekkers as part of the health and safety initiative of the KTSP. He advised that the information kits will include advice on how trekkers can better prepare themselves for the journey; and information regarding fluid intake and quantity. Mr Boon advised that the KTA was endeavoring to provide all information for trekkers in one document.

Acclimatisation and trekker safety

8. Whilst there is a large volume of information available to trekkers in regards to developing adequate physical fitness before walking the Kokoda Track, the issue of acclimatisation to this remote and demanding terrain also requires consideration.
9. The need to acclimatise before undertaking exercise in hot, humid conditions has long been understood and is now an increasing focus of the sports medicine community. Acclimatisation produces physiological changes to the body to optimise performance in hot, humid conditions, such as improvements to sweating and cooling; electrolyte balances and reduces stress on the body.

¹ <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/1104637/at-a-glance-australian-deaths-on-kokoda-track>

² http://kokodatrackauthority.org/Kokoda-Track-Authority/About-the-Kokoda-Track-Authority_IDL=1_IDT=1256_ID=5665_.html