Top marine biologist dies on South Coast dive

ZAINUL DAWOOD

FUNERAL arrangements for the renowned marine biologist, Dr Allan Connell, 73, are under way following the conclusion of the post-mortem to ascertain the exact cause of his death. The autopsy was in Durban on Thursday.

The results were not yet available, since it was Easter weekend. Connell died on Friday, March 18, while diving off the KwaZulu-Natal south coast.

He was diving at a depth of 45 meters off Scottburgh.

Mike Fraser, 60, who was diving with him, said at the end of the dive Connell did not surface alongside him.

Fraser wrote on his Facebook page that diving was something they had done and loved so many blessed times.

“When I surfaced at the end of the dive he was still down there, and I knew something had gone horribly wrong. I called for help, re-kitted and descended down his buoy line with dread in my heart. I found Allan sitting, peacefully on the sand. I brought him to the surface,” Fraser said.

The loss to marine biology and to his family was profound, said Fraser. He sent his heartfelt condolences to Dawn, Garth, Tracy and the mongoose family in his garden that he loved.

DR ALLAN CONNELL

“Fin on, my mate, past the timeless reefs where new specimens lurk in every crevice. Connell was a stalwart of scuba diving and marine biology,” added Fraser.

His wife, Dawn Connell, and son, Garth, said yesterday at their Bluff home that they were still coming to terms with the death. They described him as a fit and healthy person.

The family were busy making funeral arrangements. Connell would most likely be cremated, said Dawn.

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research was shocked to hear of Connell’s death, and sent condolences to the family, said Aubrey Matsila, spokesman for the CSIR.

“Dr Connell was a Natural Resources and the Environment (NRE) employee who retired on April 1, 2004. I am not certain if he continued doing any work with CSIR after his retirement,” Matsila said.

The results of the autopsy had not yet been released, said police spokesman, Major Thulani Zwane. Scottburgh SAPS had opened an inquest docket.

Connell was a South African Institute of Aquatic Biodiversity honorary research associate.

He had been collecting sardine eggs for 25 years at Park Rynie on the South Coast. Part of Connell’s research was to prove that the KwaZulu-Natal sardine was a different population from that of the West Coast sardine. Connell thought that if he did find a match, it would help implement stricter fishing laws.