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Tragic Discovery in Snowy Mountains Plane Crash Search

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The body of missing pilot David Stephens has been recovered from the wreckage of his crashed aircraft in New South Wales' Snowy Mountains, ending a days-long search operation. NSW Police located the remains shortly before 3 pm on Friday, and while formal identification is still pending, authorities believe the remains are those of Mr Stephens.

Stephens, a 74-year-old pilot from Bega, had been flying a single-engine 1966 Beechcraft Debonair that disappeared earlier this week during what was expected to be a routine flight from Wangaratta in Victoria to Moruya on the NSW South Coast. Emergency services

searched the rugged, snow-covered terrain before locating the wreckage near Dargals Trail, east of Khancoban.

Recovery teams including NSW Police Rescue, PoAir, Bomb Disposal and Crime Scene units worked carefully to extract the body on Friday afternoon. Investigators are now preparing a report for the coroner.

NSW Police confirmed the crash was “not survivable”, with the wreckage described as completely destroyed due to a high-impact collision. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau has commenced an official investigation, with experts examining aircraft components, weather data, and maintenance records. A preliminary report is expected within two months.



The incident highlights the inherent risks of flying in Australia’s alpine regions, where rapidly changing weather and mountainous terrain can challenge even the most experienced pilots. The Snowy Mountains have claimed several aircraft over the decades, and remote crash sites can significantly delay rescue and recovery operations.

As the aviation community mourns, this tragic loss serves as a reminder of the dangers faced by pilots flying in isolated and unforgiving environments. Our thoughts are with Mr Stephens’ family, and with the emergency personnel who worked tirelessly to bring closure to this heartbreaking case.