

THE CRANSTON INQUIRY

This release is under strict embargo until 11am on Wednesday 6 March 2024.

Chair of the Cranston Inquiry urges 'full participation' at Opening Hearing as first call for evidence launches

The Cranston Inquiry formally launched its first call for evidence today in an opening statement from Inquiry Chair Sir Ross Cranston. Sir Ross urged 'full co-operation' with the Inquiry on the part of all those involved with the Inquiry's work and called for those who have evidence about the events of the Channel crossing tragedy to contact the Inquiry.

The independent Inquiry was set up to investigate the events of 24 November 2021, when at least 27 people lost their lives crossing the Channel. It will look into who the deceased were, and when, where and in what circumstances they came by their deaths. It will also explore what further lessons can be learned and consider recommendations for the future.

In his first public address as Chair of the Inquiry, Sir Ross Cranston, outlined the background to the Inquiry, its focus, and its plans for the remainder of the investigation.

The Opening Hearing also heard brief statements from representatives of some of the key parties involved.

In his opening statement, Sir Ross said:

"That evening, an inflatable craft carrying men, women and children, attempted to make the crossing. It appears that there were at least 30 individuals on board. However, the boat, which seems to have been wholly unsuited to the planned voyage, took on water and was swamped. Although, remarkably, there were 2 survivors, at least 27 people lost their lives. It was and remains the single greatest loss of life occasioned by any of the small boat crossings."

"...in all of our work, we will not lose sight of the fact that for those who lost their lives that day and for their friends and loved ones this was, above all, an immeasurable human tragedy."

"The bodies of those who had died were recovered to France. The result was that, as a matter of law, there was no obligation to hold an Inquest."

“The first set of questions which I am required to answer - who the deceased were and when, where and in what circumstances they died - resemble those with which coronial inquests are usually concerned”.

Sir Ross went on to encourage everyone to co-operate fully with the Inquiry,

“It should be emphasised that the Inquiry’s process is inquisitorial and not adversarial...All those who engage with our work must do so on the clear understanding that there is but one purpose to the whole exercise: to find out the truth. Their task is to assist the Inquiry in its investigation and in getting to the truth of what happened”.

“To that end, I hope and expect to receive full co-operation from all of those involved in our work. There will be no place for, nor tolerance of, obstruction or foot-dragging on the part of those whose involvement in the events of 24 November 2021 will be scrutinised. This is of vital importance...”

In relation to other areas which the Inquiry intends to investigate, Sir Ross said that they included:

“...whether further recommendations as to improvements in search and rescue practice ought to be made, for the benefit of all those who use these commercially important waters between France and the United Kingdom.”

The statement can be viewed here: <https://cranston.independent-inquiry.uk/hearing/opening-hearing/>. Anyone wishing to assist us should, please, get in touch with the Solicitor to the Inquiry. Full contact details are available on our website.

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