

OPENING STATEMENT

Key points/Summary of Submission

- Qualifications/Experience of Coroners: What is the appropriate length of qualification? Should Coroners be legally qualified only?
- Coroner's Jury: The Jury pool for Coroner's juries should be drawn from the Registrar of Electors and properly/randomly selected, and an uneven number picked.
- There should be clarification on what a majority verdict is and there should be consideration given to smaller jury numbers e.g. 7.
- Coroner's Rules need to be introduced in relation to what the key issues are between the respective representatives so that there are no surprises on the day. This may be achieved through the drafting of issue papers, and pre-inquest hearings.
- We should follow England and Wales in having a statutory system of Prevention of Future Death Reports.
- There should be a statutory obligation on Coroners to file a report identifying dangerous practices or areas to be addressed with that entity or person to whom the letter is to be addressed made to respond within a certain timeframe outlining what changes have been made with appropriate follow up and publicity thereafter e.g. a further report every six months.
- Prevention of Future Death Reports should be clear, brief, focused, meaningful and designed to have practical effect.
- The recommendations of the Coroner's Working Group from 2000 (See page 12 of Roger Murray's Submission) should ensure that there is a Review Board capable of reviewing Coroner's decisions to consist of (potentially) the Attorney General, a member of the Coroner's Association, a lay person and a qualified lawyer with the power of appeal and/or direct that a first Inquest or Inquiry should be held or a fresh Inquest held.
- A clear set of Coroner's Rules and Guidelines similar to the Chief Coroner for England Wales needs to be adopted so that Guidelines regarding the reaching and wording of verdicts, can be introduced to ensure uniformity of approach.
- Concerning the release of documents, a Coroner's discretion should be exercised in favour of release rather than retention (page 12 of Roger Murray's Submission).
- In relation to the *in-camera* rule, guidance needs to be given to set out in what circumstances, the requirement that justice should be administered in public and should be seen to be administered in public may be sacrificed. Key considerations might be matters of National Security or Private Security. Guidance needs to be given.

- There should be re-drawn Coroner's Districts with a new Chief Coroner's Office and assistants at Regional and National level
- The Coronial Service should be attached to the Courts Service and a new statutory agency established known as the Central Coronial Service; the new agency should have a Director with overall responsibility.
- Coroner's Rules (page 15 of Roger Murray's Submission) are required to deal with the judicial aspects of a Coroner's function including jury, documentary evidence, witnesses, verdicts, findings and review.
- Regarding venues, Coroner's Courts should not have to play second fiddle to other courts and it is inappropriate that they take place in dance halls, ball rooms or theatres.
- There should be training and certification in respect of medicine for lawyers and law for medics