

Part A - State Coroner's opening remarks

This is the resumption of the inquest into the deaths of Katrina Dawson, Tori Johnson and Man Haron Monis.

Over 5 months have now passed since the terrible events that cause us to be here today. Much evidence has been gathered since then that has given us a better understanding of how that incident unfolded, the background to it and whether there were opportunities to prevent the deaths that are the subject of this inquest. Today we will embark on an examination of some of that evidence relevant to understanding the motivation of the principle aggressor, the perpetrator of the atrocities, Man Monis. We will look deeply into his background in an endeavour to identify how he was diverted down such a destructive pathway. Absent that knowledge the danger that others might follow undetected is increased.

Mr Gormly and Ms Callan, counsel assisting, will provide more detail of that in their opening and various witnesses will be called over the next two weeks who will expand upon those remarks and better equip the inquest to assess whether these deaths could have been avoided and/or whether changes are needed to prevent a similar incident or to respond more effectively should that be necessary.

However, before going any further I wish to once again convey my sincere sympathy to the relatives and friends of Katrina Dawson and Tori Johnson. No doubt, in the lives of many of us much has occurred since 16 December 2014, and mostly, normality has returned. However, I'm sure that in the lives of those who loved Katrina and Tori their deaths remain a dominant feature of every day and will continue to do so.

Of course we have taken that into account when considering how these proceedings should unfold. I know that inevitably these hearings can add to the pain of some of those directly impacted by the despicable actions of Man Haron Monis. The media coverage and the need to examine the events in precise detail can force focus on matters family members and others are struggling to come to terms with, or trying to forget.

I deeply regret that but we have no choice: the law requires an inquest be held so that the families of those who died can learn whether the deaths could have been avoided. Further, the public and the authorities need to be informed as to whether any improvements in the procedures or processes connected to the terrible events that unfolded in the Lindt Café could reduce the likelihood of similar incidents occurring in future or better equip those charged with the onerous duty of responding to such outrages if they do. Was there evidence that should have caused Monis to have been deported, detained or diverted? Once the siege commenced could it have been curtailed without the loss of innocent lives?

I understand that some of those directly affected by the events of the siege might feel that this hearing has been brought on too quickly while their feelings are still too raw. While I respect their views, I can't accept that these hearing should be delayed any longer than is absolutely necessary for the evidence to be collected and collated – speed is of the essence. It would be unforgivable if we delayed and another similar incident were to occur before we had learnt lessons of the last.

While all courts in this country are committed to the principle that proceedings should be open to the public, having regard to the national security ramifications, it will be necessary to hear some of the evidence in this case in closed court. Mr Gormly will say more about that.

I acknowledge the approach we have taken has amplified the pressure on the police investigators. *Normally*, in an inquest or a homicide investigation they would have as much time as they determined necessary to complete the brief but this is not a *normal* investigation: it is grappling with questions of national significance – was Monis a so called “lone wolf” prosecuting an ISIS inspired terrorist act, or was he a deranged individual pursuing some personal private grievance in a public manner? They are the real questions we must try and answer if an explanation for the siege is to be forthcoming and strategies to avoid a repeat are to be developed. They are desperately difficult questions of immense import. Pursuit of answers can't be delayed; shortcuts can't be taken.

The urgency of this inquiry has meant that the teams of detectives led by Detective Inspector Angelo Memmolo have had to accept more intervention and direction than might usually be the case. They have accepted that with good grace and I thank them for that and for the huge amount of work that they have done since we were last in court.

I understand why, in theory, some object to police officers investigating the actions of their colleagues. However, the expertise and dedication already demonstrated by the men and women working under Mr Memmolo's direction demonstrate that in practice there is no alternative and no basis for concern. They are part of a civilian led interdisciplinary team.

The legal team has identified and interviewed world class experts in diverse fields who will examine the factual matrix developed by combining the product of the detectives' endeavours with the evidence given in this court. Any opinions the court reaches will be informed by the best evidence available.

We are engaged in an intensely complex forensic process but that does not mean we have forgotten the deeply personal pain of the families of those who died and those who were caught up in the siege. Some of the latter object to being referred to as "the hostages", not wishing to be forever defined by one man's crime. We will try and respect that view. As well as striving to give all of those affected answers to what happened and, if possible, why, their emotional needs have not been neglected. Mr Memmolo and members of his team, grief counsellors from Victims Services Support and the Glebe Coroners Court have been available throughout and have done their best to explain what is to most a foreign process. Court Support officers will be on hand throughout the hearing.

We understand there will be news media coverage of these proceedings. That is appropriate so that those who can't be here can nonetheless be informed. However, as already indicated some of the evidence is sensitive from a security perspective and much of it may be alarming and distressing. Non publication orders will be made when necessary. I exhort the journalist covering the proceedings to do so with care and sensitivity. The court staff and the department's media officers will assist you to gain access to documents

tendered in evidence and make available to you copies of the non-publication orders if necessary.

I will now call on Mr Gormly and Ms Callan to open the evidence.