

W502 65/2000 MC-K1

NEW SOUTH WALES STATE CORONER'S COURT

STATE CORONER: J B ABERNETHY

MONDAY 13 MARCH 2000

5/98 - EVENT OF THE 1998 SYDNEY TO HOBART YACHT RACE

INQUEST INTO THE DEATHS OF JAMES MICHAEL LAWLER

MICHAEL BANNISTER

BRUCE RAYMOND GUY

PHILLIP RAYMOND CHARLES SKEGGS

JOHN DEAN

GLYNN RODERICK CHARLES

Mr Hill assisting the Coroner

Mr S Wheelhouse for The Cruising Yacht Club of Australia

Mr R Stanley for the Bureau of Meteorology

Mr T J Morahan for Richard Winning

Mr S Dougall for the Lawler family

Mr Allenby appears

Mr T Elsworth for Australian Yachting Federation

Mr Hunt for Richard Purcell

CORONER: I begin my inquests today into the deaths of six who lost their lives in the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, those being John William Dean, Michael Bannister, Bruce Raymond Guy, Phillip Raymond Charles Skeggs, James Michael Lawler and Glynn Roderick Charles. Before I begin I'd like to draw your attention to the size of the brief of evidence, and that is perhaps the reason why over 12 months has elapsed since the deaths of these yachtsmen. In order to assist the families I did make findings of time and place of death on an earlier day.

HILL: Mr Coroner, the inquest will deal with the circumstances that surrounded the deaths of Bruce Guy and Phillip Skeggs who were aboard the yacht Business Post Naiad, also the deaths John Dean, Michael Bannister and James Lawler who were aboard the yacht Winston Churchill, and of the death of Mr Glynn Charles who was on board the yacht Sword of Orion, and though this is set down as one inquest in reality we will be looking at three different factual circumstances. However, the common theme that connects each incident aboard those yachts is that they were all competitive in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race, and as we are all aware that yacht fleet was devastated by heavy wind and seas on the second day of the race. But before dealing with the incidents on each of those three vessels that I have mentioned there is a more fundamental question that needs to be addressed, and that is why did the yacht fleet sail into such a devastating storm? Now in order to answer that question it's necessary to look at the race's organisation, the race plans and the implementation of those plans.

The race was organised, as it always is, by the Cruising