

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

PRESS NOTICE

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY: UPDATE

The Commission of Inquiry (“the COI”) was issued on 19 January 2021 to look into whether corruption, abuse of office or other serious dishonesty may have taken place amongst public, elected and statutory officials in recent years; and to make appropriate recommendations as to governance and the operation of the law enforcement and justice systems in the BVI. The Rt Hon Sir Gary Hickinbottom is the sole Commissioner.

As the Commissioner has confirmed, the COI will not hold hearings in August; and, as it is not possible to arrange hearings in respect of Statutory Boards and Crown Land prior to the August break as the Commissioner had hoped, the hearings earlier this week will be the last this month.

In his statement on 2 June 2021, the Commissioner explained that, given the history of inadequate and incomplete disclosure of documents and to ensure properly focused hearings, he was making requests for corporate witness statements in relation to these topics. These requests were largely addressed to Ministers, but the Commissioner was content for a Minister to decide if a public officer should provide the statement in his or her stead. The Commissioner expected the Inquiry Response Unit (IRU) to assist in the preparation of these statements. Despite requests having been made weeks before the recent rise in Covid 19 cases and multiple extensions of deadlines, in substantial part these statements are still awaited. Whilst the Commissioner is sensitive to the fact that the current Covid 19 situation in the BVI now makes it more difficult for some Government departments, it is vital that the material outstanding be provided as soon as possible to enable focused hearings to resume.

The Commissioner and his team will be returning to the UK to continue the task of preparing for the forthcoming hearings. They will return to the BVI in late August to complete the hearings. It is hoped that it will be possible by then for witnesses to appear in person at our hearing room at the International Arbitration Centre. The COI however has arrangements in place to allow for remote hearings should these become necessary. The COI will continue to keep the BVI public informed through its website.

The Commissioner reiterates his gratitude to the people of the BVI for their continuing help and support, and to the public officers upon whom the main burden has fallen to provide the documentation and evidence that is vital to enable the COI to carry out its work and fulfil its Terms of Reference.

Steven Chandler
Secretary to the Commission

21 July 2021