

Coroners and Justice Bill

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Second Reading

18 May 2009

3.09 pm

Moved By Lord Bach

That the Bill be read a second time.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord Bach): My Lords, I will be the first to admit that this is a wide-ranging Bill, but I make no apology for that. The Ministry of Justice and its partner agencies face many challenges. There are, quite rightly, increasing demands for more effective, transparent and responsive public services, enhanced public protection, improved access to justice and a strengthening of rights and responsibilities. The Bill will contribute to each of these outcomes.

I want to give your Lordships notice of some government amendments that I intend to bring forward in Committee which will introduce a further element to this national structure.

Aside from their heavy responsibilities for the investigation of certain deaths, coroners retain one residual function dating back to their 12th century origins; namely, the investigation of treasure finds.

Following the debates in the other place, we are persuaded of the case for establishing a national coroner for treasure so that in future local coroners can devote all their time to their core responsibilities. I hope this decision will be particularly welcomed by the noble Lord, Lord Redesdale, my noble friend Lord Howarth of Newport and other noble Lords who have played an important role in this field and by their colleagues on the All-Party Group on Archaeology.

(Source Hansard) *“My Lords, the Bill raises momentous constitutional, judicial and ethical issues which are being debated with your Lordships' customary incisiveness. I shall just consider one item from the extensive menu that the Bill presents, and that is the issue of treasure. The Minister reminded the House earlier that, since the 12th century, coroners have had responsibility in relation to treasure. It is therefore perhaps not unreasonable that, in the 21st century, we should update the legislation. We should not be impetuous in these matters, but we should not be dilatory either..... today my noble friend told the House that the Government would reinstate in the legislation the provision for a single national coroner for treasure for England and Wales..... The draft provisions on treasure were widely supported when they were presented, as certainly will be the Government's change of heart announced today. Already, it has been generously welcomed by the noble Lord, Lord Kingsland, from the opposition Benches. It will be very much welcomed by the all-party group and the Society of Antiquaries, and by the British Museum ... It will be welcomed as well by the National Council for Metal Detecting, which represents the vast majority of people who actually make finds of treasure.”*