

INQUIRY INTO MISSING SCHOONER

Court Finds Ian Crouch Lost During Tropical Storm

VESSEL SEAWORTHY

A Marine Court inquiring into the disappearance of the 500-ton schooner, Ian Crouch, yesterday found that the vessel was lost with all hands on board during a tropical storm about 100-150 nautical miles south-east of Hongkong between September 27 and 29 last year.

The vessel, built here by the Cheoy Lee Shipyard for the Ian Crouch Ltd. of Port Adelaide, left for Australia on her maiden and delivery voyage on September 26. Except for a brief radio message the following day, there has been no word from her since. On board were three officers and a crew of eight. She also carried one passenger, Mr J. Greig, the owner's representative.

Among the main findings were:

That while there is no direct evidence as to the precise cause of the casualty, there is sufficient evidence to indicate, on the balance of probability, that the vessel was lost, with all persons on board, some time between September 27 and 29, 1958.

That this casualty occurred during a tropical storm about 100-150 nautical miles south-east of Hongkong.

That the stability of the vessel, or her departure from Hongkong, was adequate; and that her construction was up to standard strength.

That the vessel was seaworthy and was manned by competent officers and crew.

That the ballast in the hold and in the forecastle of the vessel would not be likely to shift except under very severe storm conditions.

That the Marine Department were justified in granting the vessel port clearance.

That, taking all existing circumstances into consideration, the owners started search operations as promptly as they could reasonably be expected to do, and that the search, conducted under the direction of Capt. Bull, Director of Navigation, Commonwealth of Australia, was thorough and sufficient.

That, on the evidence adduced, no blame or responsibility for the vessel's loss can attach to any person concerned in her construction, manning and operation, or to the authorities in Hongkong responsible for her clearance.

The Marine Court of Inquiry which sat in the Supreme Court on February 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, comprised Mr Justice J. R. Gregg (President); Capt. J. Perks, RN; Capt. James Wood, Extra Master; Capt. C. W. Ostenfelt, Extra Master; and Mr Odd Erik Fingalsen, Naval Architect.

