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NY Jehovah's boss won't appear at inquiry



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A member of the Jehovah's Witness governing body in New York, who is in Australia, declined to be a witness at the royal commission into child sexual abuse.

On Tuesday the commission was told by lawyers for the church that Geoffrey Jackson who is in Australia for "private, compassionate matters" would not be able to give relevant evidence.

Angus Stewart, SC, counsel advising said the commission wrote a second time to the



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church lawyers asking if they would accept service of a summons on Mr Jackson because his evidence would be useful in relation to the formulation of policies and procedures by the governing body and the possibility of changing those laws.

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Mr Stewart said it was decided not to summon Mr Jackson because lawyers outlined the compassionate reasons for his visit to the country, however the commission would need to hear more evidence from the church's governing body Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Australia - possibly by video conferencing.

Chief Commissioner Peter McClellan said the commission was concerned whether the Jehovah's Witnesses process of

investigation of allegations was "safe and effective".

He said he was particularly concerned that the way scriptures were being interpreted was creating additional trauma for victims of sex abuse.

And, as he understood, the New York body interpreted scriptures.

Under church rules abuse victims are required to face their abusers and tell their story in front of three men - church elders who make up a judicial panel.

Justice McClellan said while he had not issued a summons on Mr Jackson the commission faced a serious issue "that only the church can help us with".

Andrew Tokley SC representing the Watchtower Society of Australia said they would make every effort to assist the commission and local witnesses could provide the information.

As Mr Jackson's role in the church was translation it was unlikely he could help anyway, Mr Tokley said.

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