

Don't meddle with justice: Parole boss hits back in row over black cab rapist

EXCLUSIVE

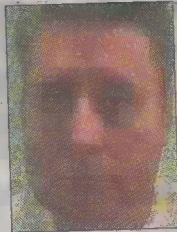
Martin Bentham Home Affairs Editor

MINISTERS were today accused of threatening the independence of the justice system by meddling in the black cab rapist case, as the head of the Parole Board lashed out over the failure to keep victims informed.

Nick Hardwick said it would be a "bad day for us all" if the "rightful abhorrence" over John Worboys' crimes was allowed to overturn the "basic principles of justice", as he vowed to defy "political interference" designed to keep Worboys behind bars.

He said he expected any judicial review – which the Government has said it is considering – would uphold the decision to approve Worboys' release. However, he expressed sympathy for the victims and said the licence conditions imposed could be tightened in response to concerns.

Professor Hardwick blamed the Government for any failure to alert victims of his impending release and called for an independent inquiry. The comments, in an article for the Evening Standard, follow the fierce controversy prompted by the Parole Board's deci-



Drugged victims:
John Worboys
was convicted of
attacking 12
women

sion to approve Worboys' release after nearly 10 years in jail. Worboys was convicted in 2009 of 19 offences against 12 women, including one rape and five sexual assaults, carried out after he drugged drinks he gave them in his cab. The judge imposed an indeterminate sentence for public protection and police later estimated the actual number of victims was more than 100.

However, the Parole Board decided that Worboys, 60, was safe to release after a secret hearing based on evidence which in law must keep secret.

After an outcry, Justice Secretary David Gauke said he was considering applying for a judicial review of the decision and Conservative Party chairman Brandon Lewis said his colleague was "doing everything he can to make sure this man stays behind bars".

Today, Prof Hardwick admitted the

Parole Board could not be certain that Worboys would not commit further crime. However, he hit out at politicians for trying to undermine the independence of his organisation.

"We should be open to legal challenge, but I hope when people think about it, they will agree it is right we resist political interference in our decisions," he said.

"It would be a bad day for us all if people's rightful abhorrence of Worboys' crimes or even justified concern about a Parole Board decision allowed these basic principles of justice to be overturned. Not on my watch."

He said responsibility for contacting victims ultimately lay with the Justice Secretary because the Parole Board had no role in liaising with victims. He said the task was supposed to be performed by the "Victim Contact Service" run by "the National Probation Service on behalf of the Justice Secretary".

Some victims, supported by MPs, have called for Worboys to be banned from London after his release. However, it is expected that he will be free to live in the capital, although under strict conditions. @martinbentham

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