



Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes

Statement of Gregory Callaghan

17 November 2022

This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I would be prepared, if necessary to give to the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes as a witness. The statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Background

1. My name is Gregory Callaghan.
2. I am 65 years old. My address is known to the Special Commission of Inquiry.
3. I am a journalist and hold two Masters degrees, one in media. I am currently a Senior Writer and Deputy Editor at the *Good Weekend*, where I have worked for the last 10 years.
4. I previously worked at News Limited for 17 years (1996 to 2012), 12 of those in senior writing roles, including as Deputy Editor on *The Weekend Australian Magazine*.
5. Earlier I worked as a freelance journalist, writing for most of the major newspapers and magazines in Australia in the early 1990s, and taught casually at the University of Technology in 1991.
6. I have lived in Sydney all my life. I grew up in the southern suburbs (Brighton, Rockdale, Bexley, Sans Souci) and have lived on the north shore, and in the inner west. I have been active in a number of LGBTQ community and social groups since the 1980s.
7. From 1979, I was going to Oxford Street, the so-called Golden Gay Mile, with its bars and clubs, on an occasional to regular basis, with friends or partners. I regularly attended the Gay Mardi Gras throughout the 1980s.
8. In 2007, my book *Bondi Badlands* was published. In 2021 I hosted the *Bondi Badlands* podcast. I refer below to the circumstances which led to my writing the book and later to the podcast.
9. In the process of researching and producing both the book and the podcast of *Bondi Badlands*, I interviewed 50 or more individuals, including witnesses, family members and survivors of violence. I also perused newspaper articles, court files and other archival material relevant to deaths and acts of violence against the LGBTQ community, the investigation of these deaths and acts of violence by the NSW Police and broader community attitudes towards LGBTQ persons in the 1980s and 1990s.

Statement of Gregory Callaghan – 17 November 2022

Gay culture and violence in Sydney from the 1980s onwards

10. The 1980s were the best of times and the worst of times for the LGBTQ community in Sydney. The best of times because the community overall and many businesses were thriving. A concentration of gay bars popped up on Oxford Street, especially on the Darlinghurst end of the strip, but also in Paddington and in Kings Cross.
11. The Mardi Gras went from attracting tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands in the course of the decade. The Mardi Gras Party at the Showgrounds became the go-to party of the year in Sydney, not just for the LGBTQ community, but many of their heterosexual friends as well. The so-called gay ghetto came into its own.
12. But these were also the worst of times, because the AIDS epidemic took hold of Sydney in the early 1980s, and young men, full of promise, full of life, were suddenly dying. The LGBTQ community sprang to life in support, but from the wider community came much stigma, with gays being labelled disease carriers: the *Grim Reaper* television campaign adding fuel to the fire. This is reflected in an article in the *Sun Herald* on 1 March 1992: 'Fun Conceals Grim Reaper' (SCOI.77374).
13. The increased visibility of the gay community brought with it greater general knowledge of where gay men hung out, where the gay bars were located and where the exits and alleyways were. This meant that, by the mid-1980s, the inner city and the laneways behind Oxford Street were very dangerous places for gay men, who were targets of violence.
14. There were reports and stories that gangs of men – numbering from three to as many as a dozen – were targeting gay and transgender people, and this increased as the decade progressed. So-called 'poofter bashing', which had been a recreational sport among young men since the 1960s or earlier, had now become a blood sport.
15. By the late 1980s, the southern headland at Bondi, topped by a grassy verge known as Marks Park, had also become an epicentre of the violence and killings of gay men. There were a few factors which I think contributed to this:
 - a. The southern headland had been a beat since at least the 1950s;
 - b. The southern headland was a remote location with poor lighting;
 - c. There was no railing around the cliffs at the time. The railing which is there now was only put in ahead of the Sydney Olympics;
 - d. There were gangs of young people operating in the area;
 - e. The demographics of the area were also changing, particularly by the late 1980s. Gentrification was under way, which possibly caused some friction between some of the more working-class folk – and their offspring – and the newcomers. Petty street crime was pretty common in Bondi and gay men were easy targets for robberies and bashings because they were far less likely to go to police.
16. Everyone in the LGBTQ community at the time – or so it seemed – knew what was happening with the bashing and murder of gay men. Missing persons were popping up in the LGBTQ and mainstream newspapers, although many disappearances went unreported by the media unless there was a 'story' around it.

Statement of Gregory Callaghan – 17 November 2022

17. Cases were being dismissed as suicides by police, when friends and family of the victims knew this wasn't the case.
18. I heard anecdotal reports that some of the same gang members were recognised at different bashings, suggesting these were serial offenders. There were a lot of young people who saw "poofter bashing" as a form of entertainment on a Saturday night, especially after they had been out together for a few drinks.
19. Whilst violence was not confined to beats, these were generally known to be especially dangerous places.
20. I have interviewed men who used beats and I would also say that not everyone who attended a beat was always there for sex. Some men, particularly men who did not openly identify as gay, went to a beat just for company and community.
21. Gay men didn't feel confident going to the police in the 1980s, and if they did, they didn't hold out a lot of hope the police would do anything. Yes, there were arrests and convictions, but these represented a small fraction of the murders and assaults that happened.
22. In the 1950s and 1960s, police were regularly engaging in entrapment. As I revealed in my podcast last year when I broke the story of the young police officer at Darlinghurst Police Station, Mark Higginbotham, who was witness to police from his station and others bashing gay men at Centennial Park in the early 1980s, there was a deep historical distrust of the police.
23. At the height of the AIDS crisis, a lot of attackers claimed that they were doing the community a service by killing gay people. They justified the violence by bragging they were getting rid of the disease spreaders. Terms like 'gay cancer' and 'gay plague' were appearing in media articles which created stigma and discrimination against gay men. The '*Grim Reaper*' advertising campaign on television, designed to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS, resulted in a backlash against gay men and people living with HIV.
24. As a young man living through this violence, it was a scary time. In 1989, a friend and I were assaulted by approximately three people a few months before Ross Warren was killed. Ross Warren's disappearance was the subject of a lot of publicity at the time (some of which I refer to below). In my case it was a scuffle outside a pub. I was fortunate as I was able to get the upper hand and throw off the attacker. I put my friend in a taxi and went inside the pub to tell the barman that there were bashers outside and to warn patrons. I didn't hear any announcement. When I wrote a letter of complaint to *The Sydney Star Observer*, the hotel insisted they did issue a warning; this may have happened after I left.
25. In July 1990, a Thai man, Kritchikorn Rattanajurathaporn, was attacked and died at Mackenzie's Point on the Bondi headland. His death was considered a gay hate murder. Again, there was a lot of publicity. This appeared to represent a turning point for the gay community.
26. A full page advertisement was placed in the *Sydney Star Observer* on 5 April 1991 by a group called One in Seven stating, "Our blood runs in the streets, in the parks, in the casualty wards and in the morgue. We're over it. Stop violence against gay men now!" (SCOI.77289). Similar posters were also put up around Sydney.
27. On 8 April 1991, activists splattered red paint over 11 city buildings including the NSW Parliament, the Downing Centre Court Complex, and the headquarters of Channel 10 and the

Statement of Gregory Callaghan – 17 November 2022

Sydney Morning Herald. This was reported on in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 9 April 1991 in articles titled, 'Under siege from the 'gutless' ones' and 'Charge laid over paint attacks' (SCOI.77292). It was also covered in the *Daily Telegraph Mirror* in articles titled, 'City smeared in red paint: protest over gay violence' (8 April 1991) (SCOI.77380) and 'Landmarks hit in paint demo' on 9 April 1991 (SCOI.77277).

28. Sydney had become the 'gay murder capital of Australia'. Whilst suggesting an increased police presence, an article titled, 'Anti-gay crime wave' in the *Sun Herald* on 14 April 1991 stated,

Sydney's gay heartland is in the grip of an unprecedented wave of violent murders and bashings. (SCOI.77265)

29. In May 1991, some 600 gay men and women marched down King Street in Newtown, blocking traffic and waving placards, after the death of Maurice McCarty. This was reported on in an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 23 May 1991 titled 'A March Against Fear' (SCOI.77518).
30. Community groups and inner-city gyms offered self-defence classes, and in early 1991, a lesbian group, Dykes on Bikes, and some gay volunteers began patrols on foot and on motorcycles along Oxford Street and Darlinghurst Road on Friday and Saturday nights. Using two-way radios (as this was the era before mobile phones) and travelling in groups of four, they alerted police to attacks on gay men which led to a number of arrests and possibly prevented many more attacks. These activities were reported on in an article entitled, 'Gays Fight Back' in the *Daily Telegraph Mirror* on 17 April 1991 (SCOI.77517).

Reporting on gay hate crimes

31. In 2003 and 2004, I attended the inquest into the deaths of Ross Warren, John Russell and Gilles Mattaini before then Senior Deputy State Coroner Magistrate Milledge. These deaths were investigated in 2001 and 2002 as part of what I came to know as Operation Taradale, led by Detective Sergeant Stephen Page. This investigation appeared to me to join the dots between the murders of gay men at the Bondi headland.
32. In 2003, I wrote a feature story for *The Weekend Australian Magazine* on gay hate crimes in the Bondi/Tamarama area (SCOI.77290). I felt at the time that the readership was ready for the story, and it received a lot of attention. As part of the preparation of this story, I interviewed Detective Sergeant Page.
33. I was then approached by Allen & Unwin to write the book which became *Bondi Badlands* (published in 2007).
34. In the course of writing the book, I myself looked closely into the murders, violent attacks and mysterious disappearances of gay men that happened on or near the southern headland at Bondi Beach in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As part of that work, I read many articles published in the 1980s and 1990s about these subjects. I refer to some of these below.
35. In the course of my research for my book, in the early 2000s, I observed the following factors to be common to reports and accounts of gay-hate violence:
- a. The protracted nature of the attack;

Statement of Gregory Callaghan – 17 November 2022

- b. The perpetrators' level of contempt for their victims'; and disgust at homosexuality (calling their victims 'dirty fags' while kicking and punching them).
- c. The pleasure taken from cruelly tormenting them. Attacks on gay men tended to be more frenzied and violent.

At times, victims were also robbed, but this appeared to be almost an afterthought, rather than the primary reason for the violence.

- 36. Over the years, I continued to follow the reporting of gay hate violence and deaths.
- 37. In 2017, I was invited by ACON to lead walks around the Bondi headland, for people who wanted to learn more about the history of this area. The younger LGBTQ generations were not aware of the violence and deaths that had occurred on the headland and across Sydney at the time. I felt it was important to remind people that social acceptance does not always move forwards; it can sometimes go into reverse, or more commonly in Australia, a 'two steps forward, one step back' sequence. I talked about the murders, the investigations, the social climate at the time, and the long aftermath: Operation Taradale, the Milledge inquest, the Scott Johnson case, and other murders since.
- 38. In 2021, I started writing more stories and opinion editorials about these issues, and I hosted the *Bondi Badlands* podcast. The podcast covered the deaths of Gilles Mattaini, John Russell and Ross Warren, as well as other deaths around the inner city and Bondi areas that I considered to be gay hate crimes. I also interviewed survivors of gay hate violence, former Detective Sergeant Stephen Page, former Deputy State Coroner Jacqueline Milledge, friends and family of John Russell and Ross Warren, and Mark Higginbotham (referred to above at [22]).
- 39. The podcast got 400,000 downloads and was the number one true crime podcast in Australia for several weeks. It is still available online. This showed me that interest in these issues was not confined to the LGBTIQ community and that there was a much broader part of the Australian community that wanted to understand what had occurred.
- 40. Following the release of the podcast, I wrote a feature piece on Mark Higginbotham, the first police officer to come forward in relation to police violence at the time. This article was published in the Sydney Morning Herald on 29 October 2021: 'Old beats of hate and horror' (SCOI.77379). A further piece I wrote was published on the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald in the 30 – 31 October 2021 edition titled, 'Cop's stark tale of homophobia in NSW force' (SCOI.77515). Some of the many other articles I, and others, have written and published in relation to violent attacks on LGBTIQ people are referred to at [44] below.
- 41. Planning for a second series of the podcast, *Bondi Badlands*, is currently underway.

Media reporting

- 42. As referred to above at [16], by the late 1980s, the media was regularly reporting on violence against gay men and gay men going missing. These stories were published in LGBTIQ publications such as *The Sydney Star Observer* as well as mass media publications such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Illawarra Mercury*.
- 43. In *Bondi Badlands*, I refer to some of the many articles published about violence against gay men and gay men going missing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including the following:

Statement of Gregory Callaghan – 17 November 2022

- a. 'Murder Fears for TV Weatherman', *Daily Telegraph*, 26 July 1989 (SCOI.76851);
 - b. 'Ross Warren Disappears: TV Star Murder Feared', *Illawarra Mercury*, 26 July 1989 (SCOI.77269);
 - c. 'Poofster bashing or first degree murder?', *Sydney Star Observer*, 17 November 1989 (SCOI.76946);
 - d. 'Gang Suspected as Link Found to Murders', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 April 1991 (SCOI.76893); and
 - e. 'Anti-gay Crime Wave Sweeps Sydney', *Sun-Herald*, 14 April 1991 (SCOI.77265).
44. Other media articles which reflect the ongoing and widespread violence perpetrated against the LGBT community in the 1980s and 1990s include:
- a. 'Ninja Gangs Attacking Homosexuals', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 December 1988 (SCOI.76857);
 - b. 'Gay-Bashing', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 April 1989 (SCOI.76916);
 - c. 'Bashed! Gay Assault Rate Soars', *Star Observer*, 12 January 1990 (SCOI.76945);
 - d. 'Teenagers Go on the Prowl to Bash Gays', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 March 1990 (SCOI.76858);
 - e. 'Gays urge change to Act after bashings', *The Australian*, 10 April 1990 (SCOI.77520).
 - f. 'Crime Unit Hunts Gay Bashers', *Daily Telegraph*, 6 April 1991 (SCOI.77288);
 - g. 'Taskforce to probe gay deaths', *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, 11 April 1991 (SCOI.77521);
 - h. 'Gay bashers must be deterred: Crown', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 1991 (SCOI.77263);
 - i. 'Saying no to violence', *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, 18 April 1991 (SCOI.77367);
 - j. 'Menace haunts gay scene', *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, 18 April 1991 (SCOI.77367);
 - k. 'Police unit stalks gay-bashers', *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, 18 April 1991 (SCOI.77367);
 - l. 'Gays start their own city patrol', *Eastern Herald*, 18 June 1992 (SCOI.77377); and
 - m. 'Growth in Sydney Assault Rates', *Star Observer* 7 August 1992 (SCOI.76949).

Signature:

Name: Gregory Callaghan

Date: November 17 2022