



Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes

Statement of Ulo Klemmer

11 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.

Introduction

1. My name is Ulo Klemmer. I am 72 years of age and live in Sydney.
2. I begin by acknowledging the Gadigal people, the traditional custodians of this Eora nations land on which we meet, I pay my respects to the Elders past, present and future. They are this planet's oldest living/surviving culture and they have cared for the land for over 60,000 years.
3. In all that time there is no record of 'homophobia'. This hate was thrust upon this land in 1788, by the British invasions, laws and culture. The laws pertaining to 'buggery' were introduced, with the penalty being death. This 'law' deprived same sex attracted folk of any sense of belonging, any sense of loving and was mostly the reason that the natural desire for sex, love and companionship was driven underground to what we now still know as 'beats'.
4. The penalties were tweaked but the 'law' was not changed till 1984, when homosexual conduct between consenting males over the age of 18 was decriminalised. The hate has subsided but still exists to this day.
5. In the same period, sex between heterosexual persons in any place outside of the home was not frowned upon with the death penalty. In my time, heterosexual 'parking' and use of 'Lovers' Lanes' etc. were seen as normal and a badge of honour for many.
6. Having successfully driven sex between men underground to beats, the 'law' created a double whammy, and took it upon itself to punish these men even further by entrapment, harassment and ignoring many, many murders inspired by this inflicted hate.

Background and overview of life events

7. I was born in March 1950 at the Bathurst refugee camp for displaced people after World War Two. My parents were escaping the Russian invasion of Estonia. My family moved to Sydney when I was still a baby. I started school in Cabramatta then went to Liverpool High School.

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8. I first became aware of gay beats from a friend at high school who told me about a beat in Liverpool. From that time on I went to beats in Sydney quite regularly, for many years as a beat user, and later in connection with my work.
9. I was a manager at the “Ken’s Karate Klub” in Kensington from my early to mid 20s, from 1973 to 1978. This was a gay sauna. From there I moved to Queensland in 1978, initially the Gold Coast, and ended up living in Noosa Heads. Throughout this period, homosexual conduct was still illegal and frowned upon.
10. I returned to Sydney in around 1986 as my father was unwell. I got a job working as a chef in Woollahra.
11. In 1989 when the restaurant I worked for was shutting down, I saw an ad for a position as a “Beat Outreach Officer” with the Aids Council of NSW (now ACON). I worked in that position from 1989 until 1994.
12. I have been actively involved in volunteer work in connection with Sydney’s LGBTIQ community since the age of 18. This has included work for the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, now known as the Australian Queer Archives, which has now archived many of the records of my time as a manager of Ken’s Karate Klub and as a Beat Outreach Officer. I have also done extensive volunteer work for ACON and other community organisations such as the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation and Mardi Gras, including HIV/AIDS charity collection at events. In 2011, I was nominated for ACON’s Community Hero Award for outstanding achievement within or contributions to NSW’s LGBTI community, in relation to my volunteer work for the community.
13. Most recently, I do volunteer work for ACON at LGBTIQ+ community parties and events as a “Rover”. This involves me looking out for the welfare of people attending events, including trying to assist anyone who may be affected by drugs or alcohol. I have previously done similar volunteer work as a rover for gay men on cruises and tours of South Australia, Queensland islands and Thailand (“navigaytion”).

General observations about my involvement in beats

14. I started going to beats when I still lived at home in Liverpool and was attending high school, at about age 14 or 15. I learned about a local beat by word of mouth from another student who turned out to be gay. After that, I regularly attended that beat. Once I turned 18 I got a car and moved out of home. I was then able to travel to beats in other places.
15. Sex at beats mostly involved either mutual masturbation or oral sex. They were very often public toilets in parks, but could also be bushland and riverbank areas.

Beats in Manly in the late 1960s and 1970s

16. I would sometimes attend beats in the Manly area. I started going to Manly in about 1966-1967. I would catch a train and then a ferry to Manly, often together with a friend. I would often go to the toilet block near the surf club about half-way along the beachfront running between South Steyne and Queenscliff. However, most of the toilet blocks and changerooms along the

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beachfront there were beats. I remember hearing that there was a place along the beach where men would sunbake naked, although I never attended it myself.

17. I can't recall who told me about the beat at North Head. I refer to it as the Fairy Bower beat. It wasn't till the early 1970s that I started to go there.
18. I went to the beats at Manly quite regularly in the 1970s. I would occasionally go to the beachfront area, but I most often visited the Fairy Bower beat. I accessed the beat from the carpark above Shelley Beach. From there you would walk along the bush track that headed south towards North Head. It was a place where you could sunbake while naked, or you could also engage in sexual activity if you wished to.

1989 – 1994: My work as Beat Outreach Officer for ACON

19. In 1989 I started working for ACON as a Beat Outreach officer. This was my first involvement with ACON. The focus of the work involved going to gay beats in the western suburbs of Sydney.
20. Men in that area were not well connected to the broader gay community, and ACON and the NSW Health Department saw an urgent need to get current HIV/AIDS information to them as efficiently as possible. Accordingly, they funded the **Beats Project**. These were new positions for two people to work in a pair. The aim was to initiate conversations with men about HIV/AIDS, to assess their knowledge and needs, to refer them to services as needed and to hand out condoms, lube and pamphlets.
21. We had an office at Parramatta Hospital, though we would also attend meetings at ACON in Surry Hills. We also started an office in Blacktown.
22. Over time we expanded a little bit from just focusing on the western suburbs. This included doing a project in Wollongong aimed at bisexual men, which proved very difficult to implement. Later ACON also opened an office in Newcastle, and I provided training to staff of that office in relation to providing assistance to beat users. I also helped to provide training to people in Melbourne who started up a similar project.
23. It was very challenging work. I would go to beats on most days that I worked, and would keep a written record of my contact with beat users. We would work in pairs in order to support each other and for safety. It can be difficult to initiate contact with beat users, as they are really just there for one reason, to engage in sex, and then they leave.
24. On a typical day I would talk to up to a dozen men. Sometimes we would have a discussion with men in our car, and sometimes we would go to a café with them to have a chat. Often beat users would not want to engage with us, and on some days we would not succeed in speaking to any men at all. In order to reach men who were reluctant to talk to us, we would leave condoms and pamphlets at the beats. We also had stickers and a stencil made with information and phone numbers and were able to get permission from some councils to display these in public toilets.
25. The services we would refer men to would include HIV/AIDS testing, counselling, and the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation, which could provide social and other forms of support.

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26. ACON produced several reports in relation to its HIV/AIDS outreach work, including the “On the Beat” report by Paul van Reyk in 1990 (SCOI.77294), and the “Gangsters, Graffiti and Glory Holes” report by Peter Kerans in 1993 (SCOI.77272).

The concerns that beat users expressed to me during outreach work

27. Although my work was focussed on education in relation to the prevention of HIV/AIDS, men would frequently express concerns to me about their fear of “bashers” and their fear of the police.
28. In the western suburbs of Sydney the level of concern about experiencing violence was huge. This was particularly the case at night. I found that co-workers who came with me were often very concerned about violence. They were scared about potentially being bashed and very wary about initiating conversations with beat users.
29. Beat users did not generally report specific instances of violence to me. Rather, they would tell me that they had heard about others being bashed and were very worried that the same would happen to them.
30. I would say that the level of concern expressed to me by beat users, about fears of being bashed and fears of encountering police, were very high, and were equal to the concerns that were being expressed about HIV/AIDS. The concern was expressed to me at all beats, even those areas that I thought were relatively safe. There had to be a reason for that.

Violence at beats

31. I consider myself one of the lucky ones, as I didn’t encounter much direct violence at beats. I recall that in 1977 I was bashed by several men at a beat in Queens Park. They quickly fled afterwards. A gay man who lived in a unit nearby the beat saw the bashing and came down to help me. He told me that he often stayed up late at night to help gay men who were bashed at the beat, which he said happened regularly.
32. On another occasion at the same beat, after I had finished work at the Sauna, I was attacked from behind by three men just after I arrived. They surrounded me and demanded my car keys, as they had seen me park nearby. They took my keys and drove off in my car.
33. Although I don’t recall being attacked at any other beat, I do recall seeing signs of violence. I remember driving through a beat in the Bass Hill area in about 1991 and finding a piece of wood with nails in it, sticking out of the wood with the sharp ends exposed. It looked like it was someone’s weapon, potentially for attacking beat users.
34. There were also a number of occasions when I was at beats and I would hear what sounded like groups of young men nearby who would be shrieking and yelling out, which I found particularly frightening in the circumstances. I remember on one occasion when I was in South Dowling Street near Moore Park, in around 1987 or 1988, I heard a group of people yelling as I crossed the oval. I immediately dropped to the ground in an attempt not to be seen. Fortunately I did not end up being bashed, but I was certain that was what they were there for.

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35. On another occasion in the late 1990s in Bondi, near where the memorial to gay hate crime deaths now is, I saw 3 or 4 young people heading in my direction and making a racket yelling and screaming. I hid in the bushes for 10-15 minutes until I could no longer see them.
36. The hateful attitude of some members of the public towards beat users was evident at many toilets which would carry abusive graffiti directed towards gay men.

My interactions with police as a gay man

37. My first interaction with police was in the mid-1960s when I was 14 or 15. I went to a gathering of friends one night. I went outside and two police officers came up to me and asked if I was at the party. I said yes. Out of nowhere one of the officers stamped on my foot with his heel and said *“go home fucking poofter”*.
38. In my experience since the 1960s, both in using beats and as a Beat Outreach Officer, police were always well aware of the local beats. From the time I first started going to beats in the late 1960s, there was always a concern that you might encounter the police when going to a beat – any beat. The police were often active around beats, both in the daytime and at night. Sometimes they would be undercover in civilian clothes.
39. When I was working as a manager at the sauna in the 1970s, we had a light switch the sole purpose of which was to turn on very bright house lights throughout the entire building to warn attendees that something was amiss. I was instructed only to use this light if police arrived at the sauna.
40. Beat users encountered very negative attitudes from some police. For example, in a 1992 newspaper article, a police sergeant is quoted as referring to a beat location as being “infested with homosexuals” and making other derogatory remarks (**SCOI.77312**). That article is referred to in the 1993 report by Peter Kerans mentioned above, and was the subject of further media coverage a month later (**SCOI.77311**).
41. In the 1990s I remember a beat in the Bankstown area where police would frequently drive past looking out for beat users and their numberplates. One time I was there working with ACON and someone told me that the night before undercover officers had attended, turned their car lights on, and played the song “Macho Man” very loudly. I think it was their stereotypical way of thinking this would entice gay men to approach them.
42. On another occasion, in about 1990, when doing outreach work I encountered two men trying to entice me into an encounter, who I later learned were undercover police officers. I have provided copies of three photos to the Inquiry showing signage at beat locations in 2013-2014, stating that the locations are subject to patrols by undercover police (**SCOI.77291**).
43. However, my interactions with police were not all negative. On the occasion I refer to above when my car was stolen in Queens Park, I reported it to the local police. The first thing they asked me was ‘what was I doing in the park?’ I told them I was just walking. I was not going to tell them that I was using the beat. They were helpful to me on this occasion, as they located my car and

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the men who stole it (and crashed it) got criminal records. However, I did not feel that I could tell them why I was at the park in the first place, out of fear of the reaction they may have had.

44. From my experience more generally in the gay community I know that there is a lot of mistrust of the police by members of the community. I believe this stems from the attitudes of some, though not all police, that many gay men have encountered going back to previous decades. I still have friends who are reluctant to engage with police, even in unofficial contexts, due to the negative emotions associated with police officers. So many gay men have had bad experiences with police at some point in their lives, so there is still a lot of negative feelings.
45. My personal view is that it is better to work with police rather than push them aside and ignore them. I have had good experiences with police Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers (“GLLOs”). After the murder of Richard Johnson in Alexandria in 1990, Sue Thompson asked me to attend schools with her to try to help address homophobic attitudes of high school students. It was an attempt to challenge young people’s homophobic attitudes by getting them to feel more at ease with members of the LGBTIQ community. More generally I worked with both Fred Miller and then Sue Thompson in their roles as GLLOs with the NSW Police Force, and I know some of the current GLLOs as well.

Changes in relation to beats

46. Police would sometimes act to “close down” a beat. This would occur both before and after the decriminalisation of homosexual conduct in 1984. For example, in about 1992 I visited police in Manly, as they were going to “close down” the beats in the vicinity of the main ocean beach in Manly. They said this was because there were so many tourists coming through the area. I tried to dissuade them, because the beat activities were not obvious and it was an area where we were able to provide a lot of good education and information to beat users. Police still closed the beats in the area.
47. Generally, beats do change and some disappear over time as a result of social changes and changes to the built landscape and areas such as shopping centres. Some beats die natural deaths and some are forced to close.
48. I believe that there are fewer beats these days than there were back when I was an active beat user in the 1970s to 1990s. I think that the availability of dating apps such as ‘Grindr’ helps to explain why this is the case. Prior to this, often there were limited options for gay men to be able to interact with other males. Going to a beat was often the quickest and easiest way to do so.

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Conclusion

49. A point I would like to make in conclusion is that in all the years of my work in the Beats Project, I do not recall actually seeing men engaging in sexual acts at beats. This is usually done in private, even when in public places. The idea that sexual acts are occurring in public at beats is mostly in the minds of people who do not know anything about beats.

Signature:



Name:

ÜLO KLEMMER

Date:

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