

Gays urge change to Act after bashings

By JENI COOPER

THE NSW Government has been urged to become the first State to proscribe vilification based on homosexuality in its Anti-Discrimination Act, following a report that claims gay bashings are on the increase.

The Streetwatch Report, prepared by the NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby Inc, says gay men and lesbians are consistently singled out for abuse and violence.

According to a phone survey of Sydney's gay community, most attacks involve a group of about four assailants, aged between 21 and 25 years.

Most assaults occur before midnight, in 94 per cent of cases the assailants are male and in 74 per cent of incidents the assailants make anti-homosexual taunts.

A total of 52 per cent of attacks occur in the streets, with 28 per cent occurring in identifiable meeting places for gay men.

Up to 30 homosexuals are assaulted in Sydney every week.

The NSW Government was the first State to include a racial vilification provision in its Anti-Discrimination Act.

Although no State addresses the specific problem of discrimination against homosexuals, Victorian anti-discrimination laws proscribe discrimination against people perceived as having AIDS.

The Victorian Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, Ms Fiona McLeod, said last night that if discrimination resulted in a homosexual losing his or her job the employer could be taken to court.

The report says: "The perception in the community that homosexuals are in some way inferior to the rest of society contributes to the belief amongst the perpetrators that gays and lesbians are justifiable targets."

The report claims policing practices must be examined to address this form of hate-motivated violence and the Anti-Discrimination Act should be amended to include a new ground of complaint of vilification based on perceived or actual homosexuality.

A criminal charge should also be created, on the same grounds.

"An alarming aspect of the assaults was the size of the gangs of assailants, an average of four members, and often more," the report says.

Only 56 per cent of those assaulted were satisfied with the service offered by police, with 48 per cent of people bashed not reporting the incident at all.

A spokesman for the NSW Minister for Police, Mr Pickering, said yesterday the report's recommendations would be examined by the Police Department.

The report also recommends the NSW Police Force appoint uniformed gay liaison officers and increase foot patrols.

A State-wide awareness campaign is also recommended.

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