

▽ NEWS

# Extra police to combat anti-gay violence

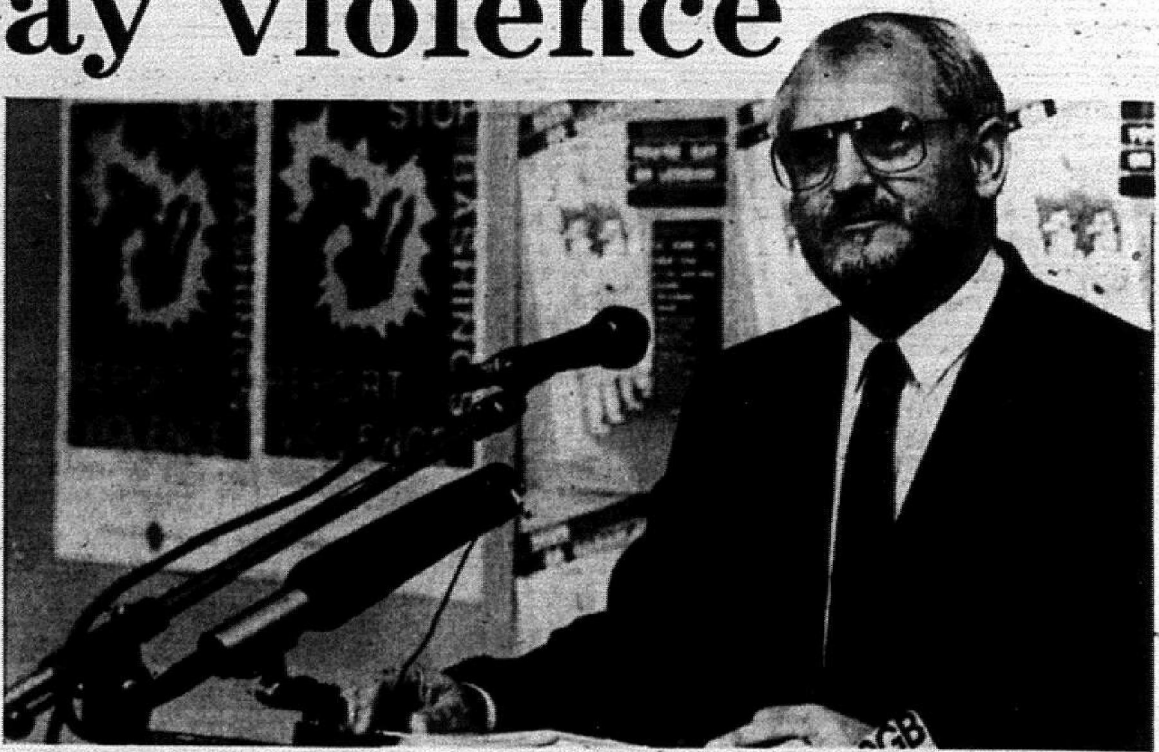
Additional police are to be assigned to combat anti-gay violence in the Darlinghurst area, Police Minister Ted Pickering announced when launching the *Streetwatch Report* at the Pride Club on April 9.

The Streetwatch project was initiated by the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby in November, 1988, because of an "apparent contradiction between the lack of reports to the police of violent assaults and the Lobby's impression of a serious and growing problem of street violence against lesbians and gay men."

Pickering said he was concerned that the Report found that less than 50% of anti-gay attacks were reported to police. Of the 67 gay men and lesbians surveyed for the Report, only 48% said they went to the police. Low clear-up rates were given as a reason by 51% of those not reporting and another 17% doubted that they would be taken seriously.

"I would like to make it absolutely clear to everyone that every person in the community has a right to equal protection under the law," Pickering said.

"It's no coincidence that five of the first 25 extra police designated to this area will be specifically dedicated to the problem until it is fixed."



*Police Minister Pickering*



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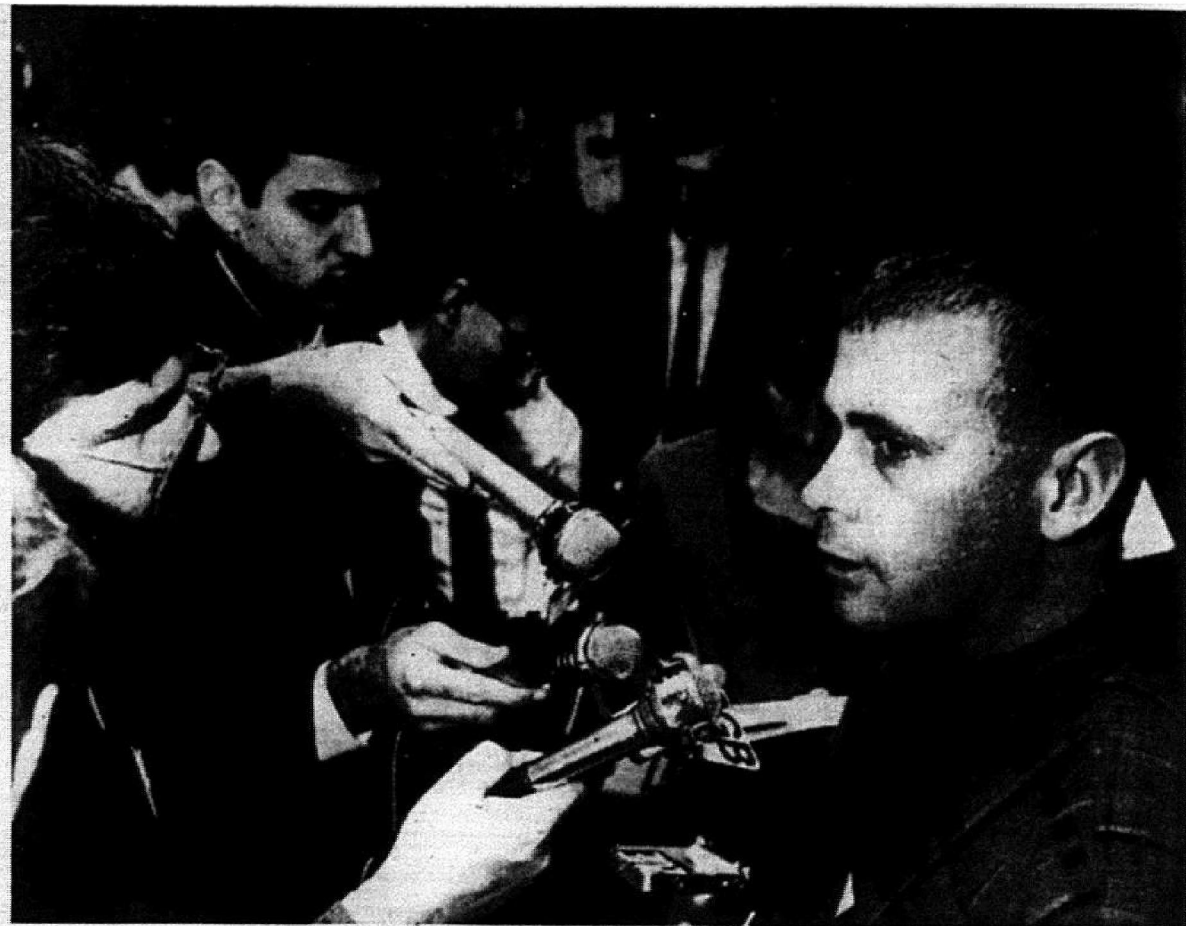
The Independent Member for Bligh, Clover Moore, welcomed the additional police, but stressed the need to be on the beat.

She had earlier told state parliament: "We need them to get out of their cars, we need them not to walk around in twos engaged in conversation with each other, and we need them to not find excuses for not doing the job of protecting people who live and work and visit our city."

### Committee

Pickering admitted that he had not read the Report, and suggested that he would not necessarily agree with everything in it. Even so, he intended setting up a committee chaired by Steve Mark, President of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board, to look at its 31 recommendations and ways of implementing them.

While the committee's membership has not been



*Bruce Grant facing the media following the Streetwatch launch*

decided, Bruce Grant, co-convenor of Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, believes it should include representatives of the Education, Health and the Attorney-General's Departments, as well as the police, if it is to be successful. He points out that the recommendations cover these areas of government.

Grant also believed that community representatives are essential. "I think it will be important to have people from the Lobby, from Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service, and there's definitely a role for ACON," he said.

The police had taken several new initiatives, Pickering said. These included green neighbourhood watch boxes which could be used for anonymous reporting of crimes, preferably on the new neighbourhood watch sheets, and the introduction of a community hotline: (02)265 4122.

Pickering also launched a poster with the message "Stop the violence, report the bashings."

"Until you work closely with the Police Department, you can't expect the Police Department to be as effective as it might be," he told the launch gathering.

### What the Report found

The Streetwatch Report contains the findings of a phone-in survey conducted with the assistance of the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service or Lesbian Line.

Between November, 1988 and April, 1989, 67 people (four lesbians and 63 gay men) provided information on the nature, location and time of assaults, characteristics of attackers, and police response where the incidents were reported. *Some of the findings were:* 73% of people attacked sustained physical injury.

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48% of incidents involved verbal abuse.

52% of attacks took place in the street.

28% of attacks occurred on beats.

95% of attacks on beats involved physical assault, compared to 80% of street incidents.

63% of incidents occurred between 9pm and 3am, with more assaults taking place before midnight than after.

73% of assaults occurred between Thursday and Sunday, with over 10% taking place between 12am and 3am Sunday morning.

Street incidents mainly occurred between 9pm and 3am, and those at beats between 3pm and 6pm and between 9pm and 3am.

*The survey also provided some information about the assailants:*

In 94% of incidents, the assailants were all-male.

43% of assailants were aged between 16 and 20 years, and 40% between 21 and 25.

36% of incidents involved three to five attackers, with the average number being four. The maximum number reported was 15.

79% of persons surveyed believed they were attacked because they were gay or lesbian.

In 81% of incidents, the assailants spoke to the person(s) they attacked, and in 74% of cases this involved anti-gay/lesbian taunts.

*The type of action people*

A call for the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act to be amended to outlaw anti-gay vilification heads the Report's recommendations. This would parallel the 1989 racial vilification amendment, and create a new ground of complaint of "vilification based upon perceived or actual homosexuality" and a new criminal offence of "serious vilification based on perceived or actual homosexuality."

*Several recommendations involve the police, and include:*

- All police stations in NSW to have a gay/lesbian liaison police officer.

- New police education programmes to develop awareness of the needs of gay men and lesbians.

- An outreach programme to encourage gay men and lesbians to report incidents of violence to the police, coupled with changes in police organisation and service delivery.

- Pilot community policing programmes in Surry Hills and Newtown involving full consultation with the gay and lesbian communities.

- Regular uniformed evening and night foot patrols for Oxford St, Darlinghurst and King St, Newtown, monitored by the Police Gay/Lesbian Liaison Group and local Community Consultative Committees.

- Public statements by the

## What the Report recommends

In the summary of the Streetwatch Report, author Gary Cox writes: "The results of the Streetwatch leave no doubt that a major section of the community, are singled out for abuse and violence in a consistent manner. Furthermore, the police response has been shown to be inadequate in tackling these crimes."

It concludes: "The perception in the community, that homosexuals are in some way inferior to the rest of society, contributes to the belief among the perpetrators that gays and lesbians are justifiable targets. The silence on this matter from opinion makers, politicians, the schools, and the police themselves, can only reinforce this view. Hence, to address this particular form of hate-motivated violence both community attitudes to gay men and lesbians and specific policing practices have to be addressed."

- Incorporating positive and relevant information about homosexuality in school personal development courses.

- Providing teaching staff with inservice training to counteract negative attitudes towards gay men and lesbians.

- Schools holding special sessions to address the issues surrounding violence against gay men and lesbians.

The report also recommends that the Attorney-General publicise the Victims Compensation Tribunal to lesbians and gay men, and conduct a gay awareness programme for Tribunal members.

Community-based programmes and further research are also recommended in the report, including a proposal for "a nationwide inquiry into the nature, prevalence and root causes of violence against lesbians and gay men" which would recommend appropriate measures to eradicate this problem.