

STATEMENT

In the matter of: Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes

Place: Paris

Date: 5 September 2023

Name: Strath Gordon
Chief of Public Affairs & Communications
Australian Olympic Committee

Tel. No: [REDACTED]

STATES:

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I would be prepared, if necessary, to give in court as a witness. The statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I will be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything that I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.
2. I am 66 years of age.
3. I make this statement in respect of a letter I received from the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes dated 21 August 2023 (**Letter**). The Letter noted that the second public hearing of the Inquiry (**Public Hearing 2**) is examining the ways in which the New South Wales Police Force (**NSWPF**) has approached issues relating to 'bias crime' and 'hate crime' from 1970 to present, including the investigations conducted by Strike Forces Parrabell, Macnamir, and Neiwand. The Letter further noted that sections of the submissions of Counsel Assisting the Inquiry, the Commissioner of NSW Police, and Mr Michael Willing concern my involvement in the matters currently being examined by the Inquiry in Public Hearing 2.
4. In this statement, I outline my recollection of former Chief Inspector Pamela Young's involvement in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (**ABC**) Lateline program episode 'A Third inquest ordered into cliff fall death of a young man' which aired on 13 April 2015 (**Lateline Interview**).

Witness: [REDACTED]

Julie Dunstan
Head of Media Operations
Australian Olympic Committee
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Signature: [REDACTED]

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5. At the time of signing this statement, I have been shown a zip file of electronic documents marked with electronic document IDs in the format '**NPL.XXXX.XXXX.XXXX**'. Where I refer to a document in this statement, I refer to it by its electronic document ID.

ROLE AND EXPERIENCE

6. I am currently the Chief of Public Affairs & Communications at the Australian Olympic Committee, a position I have held since January 2018.
7. Prior to this, I was employed by the New South Wales Police Force (**NSWPF**) as the Director of Public Affairs from 25 September 2006 to 12 January 2018.
8. As part of my role as the Director of Public Affairs, I was responsible for media and corporate communications, including social and digital media, marketing, internal communications, film and television and corporate branding.


QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING

9. I attained a Bachelor of Arts from the NSW Institute of Technology in 1979.


MEDIA STRATEGY

10. I was not involved in the day-to-day management of media for the NSWPF Unsolved Homicide Team or the Homicide Squad more generally. As noted above, my role as Director of Public Affairs required me to manage and oversee a team of staff, some of whom worked directly with particular teams or squads within the NSWPF. I would rely on the members of my team to escalate issues to me as they saw appropriate. Additionally, senior police officers (Inspector and above) would contact me directly from time to time in relation to sensitive or important issues for advice and discussion in respect of media strategy.
11. I recall that in around late March or early April 2015, I had a discussion with Georgina Wells, the Media Officer for the Homicide Squad, in which Ms Wells sought my approval for Detective Chief Inspector Young to conduct 'backgrounders' with journalists from different publications in relation to a third coronial inquest into the death of Scott Johnson. 'Backgrounders' is the term we use to describe 'off the record' conversations with journalists.

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Such conversations or briefings are often used to provide greater context to the journalist about a particular story, or to provide them with facts which they can use in their reporting, but which cannot be attributed to the NSWPF. In my experience, 'backgrounders' are commonly employed by public sector agencies, non-governmental organisations and businesses of all kinds.

12. My understanding is that the NSWPF's purpose (much like that of other organisations or businesses) when giving 'backgrounders' is to provide information efficiently to the general public via the media. Backgrounders were commonly arranged in circumstances where the NSWPF wanted to disseminate particular information, for example, in order to raise awareness about an issue or seek assistance in securing an arrest. They were always 'off the record' and quotes and other information provided during the course of a backgrounder would not be attributed to anyone within the NSWPF. Backgrounders are an important tool for providing context to facilitate more accurate reportage.
13. I recall that I approved two backgrounders to be conducted by Detective Chief Inspector Young; one with Daniel Box from *The Australian* newspaper and one with Lorna Knowles from the ABC. At the time, I recall Dan Box was highly regarded for the accuracy and fairness of his reporting and was respected within the journalism profession. Lorna Knowles was one of the reporters with which NSWPF generally dealt on policing matters at that time. I understand the NSWPF was her portfolio responsibility at the ABC. I do not presently recall whether approval for any additional backgrounders was sought. However, I do recall that I only approved the two backgrounders discussed above.
14. I do not recall a formal 'media strategy' being produced in relation to the third Coronial Inquest into Scott Johnson. I did not regard it as necessary for a formal 'media strategy' to be developed and recorded in a document for the purposes of these 'backgrounder' briefings. I recall that the Scott Johnson matter was a long-standing matter and there had been significant engagement with the media over a prolonged period of time. Given the number of significant matters with which the NSWPF deals, it is not possible, nor was it necessary, to produce formal media strategies for all matters.

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LATELINE INTERVIEW

15. On 13 April 2015, the ABC aired the Lateline Interview with Detective Chief Inspector Young regarding the investigation into the death of Scott Johnson. That was the first time that I became aware that Detective Chief Inspector Young was planning to appear on Lateline. At no time was I asked to approve an interview with Lateline, nor was I aware that Detective Chief Inspector Young intended to participate in one.
16. At the time I approved the backgrounder with the ABC, there was nothing to indicate to me that it would involve a sit-down interview with Emma Alberici for the Lateline program or any other on the record sit-down interview for that matter. I was aware that the matter was highly sensitive and before the Coroner and in those circumstances I would not have approved a sit down interview. Furthermore, it would have been very unusual to approve a sit-down interview with Ms Alberici for any significant NSWPF matter. At the time, Ms Alberici was the host of a later evening national news program that had little to no interaction with our media staff in any regular way.
17. I recall being made aware by Siobhan McMahon (a media liaison officer who at the time job shared with Ms Wells) that Detective Chief Inspector Young had told Ms McMahon that she did not want a member of my team to attend the backgrounders with her. While this was not usual practice, following a discussion with then Detective Superintendent Michael Willing, I reluctantly accepted that Detective Chief Inspector Young could conduct the backgrounders without attendance from someone in my team if that was her preference. I reluctantly agreed to allow the backgrounder to go ahead in the absence of Ms McMahon on the basis that I understood the interview was by way of background only and because of Detective Chief Inspector Young's reputation as an experienced officer who knew the purpose of the backgrounder was to provide further context to her statement to the third coronial inquest. A copy of a note which I wrote to myself on 22 April 2015 recording the events noted above is at **NPL.0138.0004.7119**.
18. It was usual practice for a media officer to be present when a NSWPF officer provided an interview or had any other interaction with the media. The attendance of a media officer is, in

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my view, always preferable and was required by the NSWPF media policy. The attendance of a media officer provides a third party who offers protection to both the officer and the journalist about what is discussed and potentially where a journalist may stray from the agreed arrangements.

19. As part of my role as Director of Public Affairs, it was my responsibility to authorise the content of sit-down interviews between NSWPF officers and journalists. As part of the approval process, consideration would be given to who would be the appropriate person to give the interview.
20. As a general rule, either myself or a Media Liaison Officer would attend any interviews given by NSWPF officers. Any agreed sit-down interviews on a television show would also have some element of preparation. The type of preparation would often depend on a number of factors such as the subject matter, the interviewer, the time available, and the controversy likely to be generated by the interview. The preparation would range from a general discussion of topics to be covered, to very precise and rigorous question and answer rehearsal. As discussed above, I would not have authorised the Lateline Interview had I been asked, however, even if I had authorised an interview like that, it would have been accompanied by robust preparation. No preparation occurred prior to the Lateline Interview.
21. Having regard to the content of the Lateline Interview, it is my belief that an interview of that nature would never have been authorised either by me or any other senior member of the NSWPF corporate affairs and media teams.

ASHURST INTERVIEW

22. On or around 22 April 2015, I met with Sophie Dawson and Nick Perkins of Ashurst Australia (**Ashurst**) for the purpose of discussing my recollection of events arising from the Lateline Interview. I recall that I was asked to attend the interview because Ashurst were acting for the NSWPF in relation to allegations of contempt and defamation made by the Johnson family against the NSWPF.

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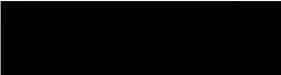
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23. For the purposes of making this statement, I was provided with a record of the interview with Ashurst (**Record of Interview**). A copy of the Record of Interview is at **NPL.0147.0001.0015**.
24. Having read the Record of Interview for the purposes of making this statement, to the best of my recollection and belief I consider that the Record of Interview is accurate.

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