



NSW POLICE FORCE

P190B

STATEMENT OF POLICE

In the matter of:	Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes - Supplementary Statement
Place:	Hawkesbury Police Area Command
Date:	19 September 2023

Name:	Geoffrey Robert STEER	Tel. No:	[REDACTED]
Rank:	Sergeant		
Station/Unit:	Hawkesbury Police Area Command		

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 49 years of age.

BACKGROUND

3. In 2006 following the Cronulla Riots, I authored a report proposing a hate crime capability for the NSW Police Force. The intention of this capability was to address a hidden issue that had impact along multiple facets of policing, to strengthen community relationships and to prevent injury/loss of life and community tensions.
4. In 2007 the position of Hate Crimes Coordinator was created as a temporary position for 12 months as a trial. The position was extended for a further 12 months being moved to Policy and Programs Command before the position was de-established in 2009. In 2012 the position was

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re-established in 2012, attached to Operational Programs Command where it continued until 2017 when it was transferred to Fixated Persons Investigations Unit and I left the role.

2009

5. In 2009 I was performing the role of Hate Crime Coordinator, during the swine flu pandemic. Monitoring of international events as well as activities in Australia, identified a trend where racially motivated crimes were being undertaken or planned targeting members of the South American community as the source of the pandemic was identified as originating in South America. In my role I was aware of a large South American community within NSW and as part of the preventative strategy I disseminated a state-wide email advising police of an increased risk of hate crimes towards members of the South American community and advising police to consider the potential for hate motivation during investigations of incidents with members of the South American community. As per the approvals process, I forwarded the message to be disseminated to the Commander of Policy and Programs, Superintendent Adam WHYTE, for approval. Approval was given by Superintendent WHYTE and the messages was sent for state-wide dissemination.

6. The following morning, I received a phone call from Deputy Commissioner OWENS in relation to the state-wide message that had been disseminated, the call was extremely hostile and abusive. Deputy Commissioner OWENS, demanded to know who authorised the message, when I told him it was Superintendent WHYTE, he called me a "fucking liar" and said "don't lie to me". Deputy Commissioner OWENS continued to abuse me for the next 15 minutes before hanging up the phone. Deputy Commissioner OWENS never told me what the issue was or what I had apparently done wrong. Shortly after this call I received a call from Superintendent WHYTE, who wanted to give me a 'heads up' about the call from Deputy Commissioner OWENS.

7. Several weeks later, a meeting with the Cultural Diversity Team was scheduled. The meeting took place in the lounges directly in front of my desk. I was not invited to the meeting as it related to the Cultural Diversity Team. Present at the meeting was Deputy Commissioner OWENS,

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Superintendent WHYTE and the members of the Cultural Diversity. I was seated at my desk, when the meeting commenced. Shortly after the meeting commenced, Deputy Commissioner OWENS commenced to personally attack me to the participants of the meeting, knowing I was able to hear his comments. Deputy Commissioner OWENS, called me "dangerous, incompetent and inept" and that my work performance was unsatisfactory. This tirade lasted about 10 minutes, at a loud volume so all in the office could hear his comments. I was unable to defend myself as I was not a part of the meeting and the only person to come to my defence was Judy SABA, the diversity trainer. The meeting continued for about 30 minutes. At the end of the meeting my Commander, Superintendent WHYTE spoke to me. I expressed my dissatisfaction to my Commander. I pointed out to my Commander, that for 12 months he had told me how happy he was with my work, and never raised any performance issues, and yet he allowed the Deputy Commissioner to character assassinate me in front of my work colleagues and he never said a word.

8. Several weeks after this meeting I was advised by the Manager of the Cultural Diversity Team, David EVANIAN-THOMAS, that his request to make the Hate Crime Coordinator position a permanent Sergeants position had been rejected by Deputy Commissioner OWENS and that I had three months to find a Sergeants position before the position would revert to a Senior Constable role and I would lose all time on rank I had accrued. Following this conversation I had a long conversation with a friend in the Federal Bureau of Investigations, where we discussed my passion for the work verse career. After this conversation and lengthy contemplation about the role, the clear obstacles presented to me by Deputy Commissioner OWENS, the likelihood of any real success for the position given the downgrading, the open hostility to me and the role and my career options if I stayed in the role, I made the decision to take a Sergeants job back in General Duties at Blacktown and left the role. The position was never filled once I left and was de-established with my SAP position returning too my substantive command of Professional Standards Command.

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2015

9. In 2015 following information received regarding planned global anti-Islamic protests, and clear evidence of an increase in anti-Islamic sentiment and organised hate group activity, I made the decision to shift the focus of the unit to a stronger intelligence focus, prioritising work on organised hate groups and their activities. The reason for this was a rise in anti-Islamic hate crimes and the role that organised hate groups had in driving anti-Islamic sentiments.
10. Throughout 2015, the Bias Crimes Unit assisted with intelligence regarding the Reclaim Australia rallies and worked closely with interstate and international law enforcement agencies regarding these events. The Bias Crimes Unit was able to supply high-quality real-time intelligence during the Reclaim Australia rallies in Sydney and were thanked by Assistant Commissioner Alan CLARKE, the commander of the Major Events and Incidents Group for their invaluable assistance during the rallies.
11. Towards the end of 2015, information was received that the Party for Freedom, were planning to hold an event to commemorate the 2005 Cronulla Riots. This event was to coincide with the anniversary of the Cronulla Riots. The Bias Crimes Unit reached out to Miranda Local Area Command, where the protest was to be held and had a meeting with the Commander, Crime Manager and intelligence staff. As a result of this meeting, we agreed to assist with intelligence regarding the event, but no formal 'request for assistance' was submitted to the Bias Crimes Unit.
12. During the meeting with Miranda LAC, the Bias Crimes Unit became aware that the NSW Police Force were opposed to the planned rally, and it was possible that it may end in the Supreme Court. As a result of this information, on the 10th November, 2015, I authored a report outlining the risks of undertaking the proposed action. These risks included a loss of intelligence as the group/s would cease communicating with police, the perceived loss of impartiality of the NSW Police Force (difference response of left wing and right-wing protests), increased risk of violence and a risk of driving radicalisation within groups to name a few. The report was forwarded through the chain of command.

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13. After a couple weeks I checked on the status of the report and reviewed the comments, although not in the original chain of command the report was sent to then Assistant Commissioner Michael FULLER (soon to become Commissioner of Police) as the Region Commander for Central Metropolitan region, which Miranda LAC fell into. On reviewing the comments of Assistant Commissioner FULLER, they were a personal attack on me, accusing me of being incompetent, with no experience in public order events (despite our involvement in four Reclaim Australia rallies) and was out of touch with community expectations. I found the comments by Assistant Commissioner unprofessional and indicated that he had a low opinion of the work of the Bias Crimes Unit. I did not expect that my opinions would be adopted given the political environment, but the personal attack was unwarranted. I raised my concerns with the Commander of Operational Programs, Superintendent Bradley SHEPHERD, and was informed there was nothing that could be done as he was an Assistant Commissioner. I advised Superintendent SHEPHERD that it was clear that the information supplied by the Bias Crimes Unit was being viewed with low credibility and that the units limited resources could be better utilised elsewhere and as no formal request for assistance was submitted, I would redeploy the unit's resources to other priorities until a formal request was received.
14. Later that day I received a call from Superintendent SHEPHERD directing me to supply intelligence support. I complied with this direction. Superintendent SHEPHERD and I then had a heated conversation in relation to the Bias Crimes Unit and my authority to direct its resources where I saw the most benefit. As a result of this conversation, I took approximately four weeks off.
15. On my way home I rang Deputy Commissioner Nick KALDAS and had a conversation with him. I informed him of the comments by Assistant Commissioner FULLER and the actions I had taken, including taking time off. Deputy Commissioner KALDAS informed me he would investigate it and let me know the outcome. Several days later Deputy Commissioner KALDAS contacted me and advised me that he had reprimanded Assistant Commissioner FULLER for his comments.

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16. It is of note that the predictions I made in the report came to fruition, with a loss of intelligence and a radicalisation of the groups. It took six months of hard work to get back the level and quality of intelligence we had.

2016


17. Following my attendance at the Skinhead Intelligence Network Summit in Montgomery, Alabama and my time with the NYPD Hate Crime Taskforce, Nassau County Police Department Community Affairs Unit and the Suffolk County Police Department Hate Crimes Unit, I proposed bringing out several experts with respects to hate crimes and organised hate groups. These experts were:

- Detective Matt Browning (retired), Mesa, Arizona Police Department and President of the Skinhead Intelligence Network
- Laurie Wood, Intelligence Project Deputy Director & Head of Investigations and Training at the Southern Poverty Law Centre
- Tawni BROWNING, Investigative, Field & Casting Producer for RIVR Media and co-founder of the Skinhead Intelligence Network
- Deputy Inspector Gary Shapiro, Commander Community Affairs Unit, Nassau County Police Department – New York

Approval was given and arrangements were made for a 1 week visit with presentations to frontline police, senior officers and culminating in the National Forum on Organised Hate Groups. The National Forum had representatives from all state and territory police agencies, the Australian Federal Police, the Commonwealth Attorney Generals Department and the New Zealand Police Force.

18. As part of the week, a presentation was held at the Sydney Police Centre for senior officers to discuss hate crimes and to share information from the international experts. At this presentation

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was the Commander of the Terrorism Intelligence Unit. After the presentation and Laurie WOOD had a conversation with me. Laurie expressed her observations and the observable hostility that was displayed by the Commander, Terrorism Intelligence Unit and the general disinterest exhibited by other senior officers with respect to hate crimes and organised hate groups.


19. The National Forum was held at the end of the week, however all the international speakers commented to me the hostile and negative attitudes of several representatives to the information being delivered. In the end the forum was cut short by several hours as the negativity of individuals made it unproductive to continue the last session on building a national capability on information sharing around organised hate groups.
20. Just prior to the week visit by the international speakers, Deputy Commissioner KALDAS took time off and latter left the NSW Police Force. Deputy Commissioner KALDAS was a major supporter of the work of the Bias Crimes Unit and extremely influential with respect to embedding the importance of an effective hate crimes response within the NSW Police Force. With the absence of Deputy Commissioner KALDAS, there was no longer an advocate at the higher levels of the NSW Police Force. The Bias Crimes Unit and hate crimes in general always struggled to gain traction within the NSW Police Force and with the absence of Deputy Commissioner KALDAS this issue became even harder.
21. In 2016 a COMPASS forum on Bias Crimes was held with the Senior Executive. The forum was to review the current situation with hate crimes and the NSW Police Force response. One thing that I identified form the forum was the lack of understanding in the senior ranks of what hate crimes were. As an example, Assistant Commissioner MINELLI commented on the need to distinguish between criminality and bias crimes citing the example of tensions between Sunni and Shias and stated that it was not bias it was cultural. Given the definition of a hate crime incidents between different religious sects would be deemed to be bias motivated, dependant on the circumstances.

2017

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22. In 2017 there was a renewed drive with respect to driving hate crimes within the NSW Police Force and 20 projects were developed to raise the capability of not only the NSW Police Force but also build stronger ties to communities around hate crimes. These projects including collaboration with universities with respect to hate crimes, disability hate crimes, gender hate crimes and the development a threat management approach to bias crimes. In addition, there was projects looking at third party reporting, victim impact statements, community facts sheets and engagement templates, school engagement and a media guide. Within the NSW Police Force there was a focus on the development of bias crimes investigation course, bias crimes investigation protocol and COPS enhancements.
23. In May 2017, I was informed that the Bias Crimes Unit was being transferred to the Fixated Persons Investigations Unit. As outlined in my previous evidence, there was no consultation with the Bias Crimes Unit regarding the move. The conference call referred to in document NPL.9000.0030.0006 was only for the purpose of telling me what had already been decided. At no stage was there any consultation as to the opinion of the Bias Crimes Unit or any discussion on the roles or responsibilities, these decisions were made with no consultation with anyone in the unit.
24. In my opinion is showed a lack of understanding on what the unit did. This is clearly shown in the comment from Chief Superintendent CRANER that "Bias Crimes is a no brainer". Whilst it can be argued that members of organised hate groups may fit the definition of a fixated person, the majority of individuals who carry out hate incidents or hate crimes would not fit the definition. The belief was that the unit only looked at organised hate groups and it appears to me the belief is that only members of organised hate groups carry out hate crimes.
25. Given the Bias Crimes Unit were the subject matter experts, I would have expected at some level there would have been a conversation with unit as to what we believe would work best for the NSW Police Force and how to integrate effectively, instead it was a unilateral decision.

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26. The way the news was broken, and the lack of consultation was a shock to the entire unit. Whilst the statement of Superintendent HURST is accurate, and he was supportive and tried to assist in the transition I was told by Superintendent HURST when I raised logistical issues that there was very little he could do as I was no longer under his Command.
27. After processing the news, the staff of the Bias Crimes Unit had a meeting to discuss the impact and what was the best of course of action. A key component of the decision making was the extra 2 to 4 hours of travel a day as all members of the unit resided in the North West of Sydney. Several compromises were proposed, including remaining at Parramatta (there was another Counter Terrorism Unit based at Parramatta) and commuting to Hurstville when required, requesting a vehicle be allocated to unit members could carpool (as there was limited private parking available) and implementing flexible working arrangements (start times, work from other locations as a lot of the work could be done remotely). All proposed compromises were rejected, and we were informed in no uncertain terms that we would be working from Hurstville no matter what.
28. In addressing the comments in my transfer application, I accept what is written, but that does not explain my decision making and only outlines the final straw, the distance. My application also mentions that I had no interest in the new role. As stated in my previous evidence, the unit was told that we were no longer doing hate crimes, only working on left-wing and right-wing groups.

DECISION MAKING

29. I am passionate about hate crimes. It was my initiative; I invested my heart and soul into the work and gave my all to raise the capability of the NSW Police force with respect to hate crimes. In hindsight I was extremely naïve, believing I could change the NSW Police Force. After 7 years of trying to introduce hate crimes to the NSW Police and constant resistance and push back I was tired of fighting.
30. My decision to leave broke down to several key factors. Firstly, it was apparent to me that it was untenable for me to remain in the role. Since the departure of Deputy Commissioner KALDAS,

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it was apparent that I was not popular in the role, the environment I worked in was even more hostile and toxic. I have a strong personality; I was passionate about the work and as such I would stand my ground with senior officers. I was straight forward and would call a spade a spade which did not endear me to senior officers. I was informed by several senior officers that I was not popular with the new regime. It appeared to me that the issues around hate crimes were not about hate crimes anymore but had become a personality conflict between myself and several senior officers within the NSW Police Force. I had been accused of 'empire building', which if any knew me would know it was furthest from the truth, I just wanted to do my job to the best of my ability.

31. Secondly, after the incident with then Assistant Commissioner FULLER in 2015, I felt that whilst I remained in the role, the work of the unit would suffer as any recommendations or initiatives would not find favour and that advice the unit offered would be given minimal consideration. I was warned that I was not in favour with the new Commissioner after he was reprimanded in 2015.
32. Thirdly there was a lack of understanding about hate crimes by the senior management of the NSW Police, as evidenced by the "no brainer" comment by the Commissioner's Chief of Staff, Chief Superintendent CRANER and the direction on what the unit's focus was to be as well as the COMPASS forum in 2016. Given the toxic environment hate crimes had devolved to, I felt that there would be minimal chance of correcting the false assumptions about hate crimes and what the Bias Crimes Unit did and advance the direction of bias crimes within the NSW Police Force.
33. The psychological impact of the work and the toxic environment it had become was impacting my life negatively. It is hard enough working with the most toxic emotion of hatred, but when the additional pressures that were being placed on the unit and myself, having to defend everything we did, it become soul destroying and I did not like who I was becoming.

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34. Leaving the unit was the hardest decision I had to make (both times I left). I am passionate about the work and truly believed that the NSW Police Force could have become world leaders in the response to hate crimes. Prior to making the decision to leave, I had several conversations with friends who worked in the field including Laurie WOOD (Southern Poverty Law Centre) and a friend in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Hate Crime Unit who knew the work, understood the pressures and understood internal politics. The unanimous advice was to look after myself and that the work would destroy me if I was not supported. In addition, concern was raised by Laurie WOOD that working 15 hour days (10 hour shifts and up to 5 hours of travel) would lead to burnout given the nature of the work and the high psychological load in dealing with hatred.
35. I felt that I was not supported, that there was no chance of that situation of changing and that it was a fight that I could not win, so I made the decision to leave.

SPECIAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY POINTS OF CLARIFICATION

POINT 1: the various matters referred to in his oral evidence on 12 December 2022, as noted above;

- that he left the BCU because of "internal politics";
- that he was told (without any consultation) that the BCU "weren't doing hate crimes any more";
- that he had received information that he was "not popular any more doing hate crimes" and that "the intent was to get rid of me"; and
- that he "didn't see the point in remaining in a unit where my work would be undervalued".

36. In relation to the issue of internal politics I believe the above outlines the internal politics with respect to hate crimes.
37. In relation to "weren't doing hate crimes anymore." As per my previous evidence, that conversation was a conversation between Acting Superintendent David LENZO and the Bias Crimes Unit that is subject to paragraph 35 of Superintendent HURT's statement. The direction that we were not doing hate crimes anymore but were to focus on left-wing and right-wing groups was made during that meeting and was made in presence of Senior Constable CORBETT and civilian staff member Aaron GALLAGHER.

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38. In relation to not being popular and the intent was to get rid of me, these conversations were passing comments made to me by numerous person both within and outside the NSW Police Force. I cannot recall the persons as they were passing comments, but they supported the experience that I was having within the NSW Police Force.

39. In relation to not seeing the point in remaining I believe I have addressed in the previous body of this statement.


POINT 2: the matters contained in the Transfer Application (which should be annexed to the statement);

40. I believe I have addressed these in the above body of this statement. Whilst my transfer application does refer to not willing to work at Hurstville it also states that I have no interest in performing the new duties (not doing hate crimes). The transfer application form is not the forum to raise the above issues, nor is it designed to cover 7 years of ongoing issues. The comments on the form reflect the 'last straw' events.


POINT 3: the matters contained in the unsigned statement of Superintendent Hurst dated 12 September 2023

41. In general, I agree with Superintendent HURST's, and it appears to be a accurate representation of the period. The only issue I will raise is paragraph 43 where he states I was not forced out. Superintendent HURST clearly states in paragraph 44 that he is not able to comment on the circumstances of the restructure, therefore Superintendent HURST is not in a position to definitely state what the motivation for the restructure was. Superintendent HURST was an acting Commander for a six-week period and did not have the historical background of the 7 years I worked hate crimes, including the behaviours I had experienced by certain senior officers. Whilst the issues I raised with Superintendent HURST related to working from Hurstville, I did not raise with him the previous history nor my decision-making process. I did not share these factors with him as in my mind it was a done deal, and nothing would change and that he had told me that there was not much he could do as we had been transferred and he was not my Commander. Superintendent HURST is accurate that I thanked him, given the circumstances

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he tried his best to look after the unit in a difficult circumstance and I was thankful for his assistance.

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