

STATEMENT

In the matter of:	Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes
Place:	Sydney
Date:	4 September 2023

Name:	Georgina Wells
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Tel. No:	
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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 46 years of age.
3. I make this statement in respect of the letter I received from the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes (**Inquiry**) dated 22 August 2023 (**Letter**). I understand from the Letter that certain 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.
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**) and the events leading up to the Lateline Interview.
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.

Witness: 

Emma Langlands
Solicitor
Corrs Chambers Westgarth
4 September 2023

Signature: 

Georgina Wells
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ROLE AND EXPERIENCE

6. I am a communications and engagement professional.
7. I was employed by the New South Wales Police Force (**NSWPF**) from 2003 to 2008 and 2010 to 2018. During my employment with the NSWPF, I held the following positions:
 - a. Media Supervisor in the Police Media Unit from April 2016 to March 2018;
 - b. Media Supervisor for State Crime Command from October 2011 to April 2016 (including a period of maternity leave from December 2013 to November 2014); and
 - c. Media Liaison Officer in the Police Media Unit from May 2010 to October 2011 and November 2003 to December 2008.
8. In my role with the NSWPF as Media Supervisor for State Crime Command, I was responsible for liaising with the media on State Crime Command matters, developing media strategies, developing media statements and media releases, facilitating media conferences and interviews, and providing media advice to senior police officers.

QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING

9. I attained a Bachelor of Arts majoring in media communications from Southern Cross University in 1997.

MEDIA STRATEGY

10. On or around 1 April 2015, I recall discussions with Pamela Young and former Detective Superintendent Michael Willing (as he then was) regarding the third coronial inquest into the death of Scott Johnson. I recall that during the conversation, Pamela Young proposed to conduct 'backgrounders' with journalists from different publications. During this conversation, Pamela Young did not give any indication that she had already had 'backgrounder' discussions with journalists. I recall I nominated Daniel Box from *The Australian* newspaper and Lorna Knowles from the ABC as appropriate journalists to give the 'backgrounders' to, given their ongoing interest in the matter.

Witness:



 Emma Langlands
 Solicitor
 Corrs Chambers Westgarth
 4 September 2023

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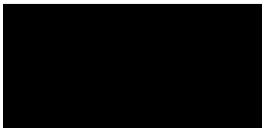
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11. The purpose of the 'backgrounders' was to provide an understanding to the reporters of what information was contained in Pamela Young's statement to the Coroner (given its size and the detail contained therein). We understood that the Coroner had released the statement to the family of Scott Johnson and anticipated that it may be provided to journalists who were reporting on the story. It was agreed that these 'backgrounders' would be 'off the record' which means that no quotes would be attributed to Pamela Young or anyone else within the NSWPF and that no information about the statement could be published unless it was made public by the Coroner. The release of the statement was not discussed or considered as it was the Coroner's decision to release the statement to the public and, in any event, the statement was at the time subject to a non-publication order. No 'sit-down' studio interviews were ever discussed between me and anyone else in the NSWPF, including Pamela Young, nor, to my knowledge, were any 'on-the-record' interviews with any media representatives approved. I had no authority to authorise an 'on-the-record' interview.
12. It is usual practice that the NSWPF media unit arrange these 'backgrounders' rather than individual officers within the NSWPF selecting journalists and arranging 'backgrounders' themselves. I recall at the time having a discussion with Strath Gordon, Director of Public Affairs at the NSWPF, for the purposes of seeking approval from him for the 'backgrounders'.
13. At no point in time, do I recall writing any formal 'media strategy' document for the purposes of the third Inquest. As the matter was before the court, the 'media strategy' was minimal and generally reactive and did not require a comprehensive 'media strategy' with key messages and talking points, engagement channels and spokespeople. Formal 'media strategy' documents would generally be prepared for large operations and matters with sustained media engagement where police were regularly speaking with the media rather than one off media engagements such as the approval of 'backgrounders'.
14. The 'media strategy', as it was, is recorded in the email I sent to John Kerlatec (Detective Chief Superintendent) and Kenneth Finch (Detective Chief Superintendent), copying others on 7 April 2015 setting out my reasoning for the need for 'backgrounders'. A copy of this email is at **NPL.0138.0001.0037**.

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15. On or around 9 April 2015, Pamela Young advised that she had contacted Emma Alberici from the ABC to conduct a 'backgrounder', instead of Lorna Knowles. I am not aware how Pamela Young contacted Emma Alberici. I was unaware of any previous dealings between Pamela Young and Emma Alberici. I was not aware that the 'backgrounder' with Emma Alberici would be in the studio and understood that the 'backgrounder' would be similar to the 'backgrounder' with Daniel Box, that is, a private discussion that was not recorded (in either audio or video form).

LATELINE INTERVIEW

16. On the morning of 13 April 2015, Mr Willing informed me that he had discussions with Pamela Young regarding a brief statement that could be made by Pamela Young to media representatives outside the Coroner's Court, following the directions hearing. Based on my conversation with Mr Willing, I understood that Mr Willing authorised Pamela Young to provide a 'doorstop' statement to media representatives indicating that the NSWPF welcomed the inquest, should another inquest be ordered. This was to be in the form of 'grabs': a short statement to the media that can be recorded and where questions are not generally taken.
17. To the best of my recollection, I recall Pamela Young called me and confirmed that there were no media present for a doorstep interview.
18. In the early evening of 13 April 2015, I first became aware that Pamela Young would feature on Lateline when I received a phone call from Mr Willing prior to the airing of the Lateline Interview. Upon receiving the call, I subsequently advised Strath Gordon and others regarding Pamela Young's expected appearance on Lateline. At this point in time, the Coroner's decision to order a third inquest into the death of Scott Johnson was considered a high profile matter so it would not be unusual for Lateline to feature a 'doorstop' interview if this was the only kind of media engagement available. Accordingly, I considered the approved media strategy was being followed and Lateline would only feature the authorised 'doorstop' interview. I did not anticipate that a 'sit-down' studio interview would have taken place, as that had never been discussed with me.

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19. While it was not uncommon at the time for someone in Pamela Young's position to be authorised to give a 'sit-down' interview for the purposes of seeking public assistance for an investigation, the content would need to be considered by the senior police executive and approved by the Director of Public Affairs. Further, a Media Liaison Officer would be required to attend any 'sit-down' interview and there would be a preparation session to discuss key messages, potential questions and what was not suitable for discussion. I understand that these requirements were well known to police officers at the time. To my knowledge, their approvals were not sought nor obtained for the Lateline Interview.
20. Based on my experience and standard practices at the time, it is my view that the content of Pamela Young's interview would never have been authorised by anyone within the NSWPF. The views that Pamela Young expressed in that interview were not duly considered or approved by the NSWPF. Additionally, any police comment ahead of, or during, an inquest would be extremely limited, as per the NSW Police Media Unit Policy.
21. I refer to paragraph [459] of Counsel Assisting's submissions filed on 7 June 2023. Whilst I do not have a specific recollection of this text message, I understood the reference to 'glad we went with the ABC' was in reference to the information provided during the 'backgrounder' with Emma Alberici. Pamela Young's reference to 'hair and lippy look good too' I understood at the time to it being a reference to the 'grabs' which I had assumed were provided outside the court after Pamela Young had indicated there were no media representatives at Court following the directions hearing. I held this belief because, as noted at paragraph 20, any police comment ahead of during an inquest was extremely limited and therefore, the thought of Pamela Young having a 'sit-down' studio interview did not cross my mind.

INTERVIEW WITH ASHURST

22. On or around 27 April 2015, I met with Sophie Dawson and Nick Perkins, lawyers from Ashurst Australia (**Ashurst**), as part of the NSWPF's engagement with Ashurst arising from the allegations of contempt of court following the Lateline Interview.

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23. In making this statement, I have been provided with a record of interview prepared by Ashurst (**Record of Interview**). A copy of the Record of Interview is at **NPL.0138.0009.0020**.
24. For the purposes of this statement, I have reviewed the Record of Interview and confirm that the contents of the Record of Interview are accurate.

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Emma Langlands
Solicitor
Corrs Chambers Westgarth
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