

'Beats'

The term 'beat' is used to describe a public location such as a park, beach or public toilet where men meet to negotiate and/or engage in social or sexual contact with other men.

Men using beats do not necessarily identify as homosexual. Available research and descriptive evidence suggests that many beat users identify as bisexual or heterosexual despite the homosexual nature of their activities.

How is a Beat Identified?

Beats are public areas where a range of activities are undertaken. It is often difficult to identify whether an area is a beat. In addition, beat users tend to be discreet whilst at a beat to avoid unwarranted attention from those using the area for more traditional purposes. Beats are often identified by members of the public or members of certain occupations such as security guards and rangers who then contact police to report the matter.

Purpose of Policing Beats

A range of illegal activity occurs at beats. Crimes range in seriousness from wilful exposure and theft from motor vehicle through to homophobic assault and murder, robbery and drug possession and/or supply. The seriousness of the activity being policed should dictate the response.

Local Area Commanders

Be aware of beats in your area; ensure an appropriate level of police response is provided. Crime prevention strategies should be employed to promote safety for all users of the area.

Crime Managers and Crime Coordinators

Consider the number and nature of complaints received in relation to a beat before making a decision to instigate a police response.

Guidelines for the Effective Policing of Beats can be obtained from the Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Issues intranet site > Knowledge Maps > Gay, Lesbian & Transgender Issues > 'Beats'

These can be used to guide operational responses which will vary considerably depending on the seriousness of offences occurring at the location, the nature of the geographical location and complaints received about the use of the location as a beat and/or in relation to assaults in the area.

Minor offences including wilful exposure

For minor crimes such as wilful exposure the aim of policing beats is the deterrence of anti-social and inappropriate behaviour. Crime prevention through High Visibility Policing is the preferred policing strategy. Consequently, priority should be given to using marked vehicles and uniformed officers when patrolling beats.

It is not recommended that plain clothes officers and covert operations be used in relation to investigating complaints of obscene exposure. Where covert operations in relation to obscene exposure are required, they are not to be conducted without prior written approval from the Local Area Commander.

More serious offences

More serious and/or ongoing offences such as assaults and theft from motor vehicle may require a more significant policing response. If this is the case the Local Area Commander may authorise a covert operation. Where a covert operation involves gay, lesbian or transgender issues, such as homophobic assaults, the Senior Programs Officer (Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Issues), Policy and Programs, is available to provide advice and can be contacted on [REDACTED]

In response to all offences officers must be advised, either verbally or through operational orders, of the following:

- they are not to incite or encourage unlawful conduct or behaviours
- evidence obtained via entrapment/agent provocateur may be excluded by the courts and so these strategies are not to be employed
- due to the sensitive nature of policing beats the integrity of officers' conduct is paramount
- homophobic language or behaviour is not to be used.

Increased reporting of crimes

Professional effective policing of beats may lead to an increase in reporting of crimes including violent crimes in these locations and the subsequent apprehension of otherwise undetected assailants.

Partnership approach

There are a number of examples of good practice projects involving a partnership approach to managing beats with the overall aim of harm reduction and safety. Police working in partnership with local council officers, staff from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, area health staff and officers from key non government organisations such as ACON (formerly AIDS Council of NSW) have demonstrated that collaboration can produce effective strategies to manage beats.

Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer

Should be consulted in the planning and implementation of strategies to manage beats, especially where gay, lesbian or transgender issues are involved such as homophobic assaults and/or a partnership approach is being considered. The Senior Programs Officer (Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Issues), Policy and Programs, is also available to provide advice and suggest examples of good practice.

The Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Issues intranet site > Knowledge Maps > Gay, Lesbian & Transgender Issues should also be consulted.

(Updated 17 September 2008)
