

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Anti-LGBTIQA+ Hate Crimes in Victoria

Melbourne – Wednesday 24 June 2026

MEMBERS

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Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

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Rachel Payne

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WITNESSES (*via videoconference*)

Dr Josh Roose, Associate Professor of Politics, Deakin University; and
Geoffrey Steer.

The CHAIR: Hello. Welcome back to the last session for today's hearings into the Inquiry into Anti-LGBTIQ+ Hate Crimes in Victoria. I am Joe McCracken, Chair of this inquiry, and we are going to go through and introduce the rest of our committee members. I will go to my left and my right and then online.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Hello. I am Ann-Marie Hermans, I am a Member for the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Hi. Aiv Puglielli, North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Michael GALEA: Afternoon. Michael Galea, a Member for the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region and Deputy Chair.

The CHAIR: And then I will go Anasina and Sheena.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Good afternoon. Anasina Gray-Barberio, Northern Metro.

The CHAIR: Sheena might just be away from the computer for a quick second. She is a Member for Northern Metro Region. Sheena will be with us in a moment.

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All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript, but it will ultimately be made public because it will be put on the committee's website.

Just for the Hansard record, can I please get you to say your name, title and organisation, if any, that you are appearing on behalf of. I will go Geoff first and then Josh if that is all right.

Geoffrey STEER: Yes. That is fine. Geoff Steer, just a practitioner in hate crimes.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Josh ROOSE: And Dr Josh Roose, Associate Professor of Politics at Deakin University.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Thanks both of you very much for coming along today and appearing before the inquiry. I might hand it over to you, Geoff, to give your opening statement, and then after that I will go to Josh. I have got about 5, 10 minutes for both of you, but if you need longer, that is fine, no dramas at all. But from us, welcome, and we really look forward to hearing from you. So Geoff, over to you.

Geoffrey STEER: Thank you. Thank you for this opportunity. Fairly short. In hate crimes policing risk is governed at the level of beginnings. Pre-incident indicators – small shifts in language, behaviour, grievance or targeting – mark the first turns in an escalation pathway. Attend to them, map their direction and interrupt their momentum. This principle has guided 25 years of my work, most significantly proposing, building and running the New South Wales police hate crime unit for seven years and giving evidence to the Sackar special commission of inquiry in 2023. It has also been the single thing missing from the Australian response to hate crime. Anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crime is not random or episodic. It is predictable in its drivers, identifiable in its escalation and preventable with the right response. But we respond to it with tools built for other problems – general violence risk, counterterrorism, family violence – and we only act after the harm is done. The gap is not money, it is architecture.

There is no hate crime-specific operational doctrine in use anywhere in Australia. My submission offers one and, more importantly, an integrated set of reforms anchored to a single recommendation: a dedicated Victoria Police hate crime unit with the embedded protective intelligence capability, so the work of understanding these patterns and interrupting them finally has a home. If I leave the committee with one idea, it is this: we must shift from counting victims after the fact to identifying escalating hostility before it becomes violence. Victoria is positioned to set the national standard, and I welcome your questions.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much, Geoff. I will hand it over to you now, Josh.

Josh ROOSE: Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to make these opening remarks. I am Josh Roose. I am an Associate Professor at Deakin Uni. I am spending most of my time at the moment working on the royal commission in assisting the Jewish community in their response, but my work over the last couple of decades has examined the evolution of violent extremism in Australia, including the extreme right, Islamist extremism, violent misogyny, sovereign citizen and anti-government movements, and the way that online ecosystems increasingly connect grievance, identity, humiliation and hatred to real-world violence. I am an expert witness in a large number of cases around the country, particularly those involving young men, and an adviser in numerous others. I am drawing upon that evidence base in what I speak to today.

One of the most concerning findings across my work is that LGBTIQ+ people, and particularly trans people, are increasingly positioned as a symbolic enemy within contemporary extremist milieus. This is not simply a matter of prejudice or offensive speech, it is a process through which communities are turned into ideological objects. They are blamed for civilisational decline; cast as threats to children, family, faith, nation or masculinity; and treated as legitimate targets for intimidation, humiliation and violence. On the extreme right, trans people now occupy a very particular place in an architecture of hatred. They are not framed just as individuals whose rights are contested but as evidence of social collapse. In the neo-Nazi, white supremacist and broader anti-LGBTIQ+ spaces, trans people are often depicted as the embodiment of degeneracy, the failure of liberal democracy, the corruption of children and the feminisation or weakening of society. This is a deeply gendered phenomenon. It links hatred of trans people to militant masculinity, demographic anxiety, misogyny and fantasies of restoration. That ideological encirclement is important because it is creating an environment in which LGBTIQ+ people are not merely disliked but narratively surrounded. They are attacked from the far right, as symbols of decay; Islamist extremists, as symbols of moral corruption and religious transgression; elements of the Christian right; as well as broader conspiratorial news online, in particular. They are also attacked within misogynistic online cultures as evidence of a gender disorder. They are attacked in these spaces and being framed as part of a broader elite project to destroy family, nation and childhood.

We have seen this locally. Recent reporting and government responses in New South Wales have identified attacks in which gay and bisexual young men were allegedly lured through apps, assaulted, filmed and humiliated, including in incidents described as Islamic State inspired. I was privy to that material as part of that reporting on the ABC, and personally I have not seen much worse in terms of hate crime in Australia, if anywhere. The New South Wales government has responded with proposed reforms directed at LGBTIQ+ hate crime, including luring offences and stronger penalties for incitement on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

This must be understood in a wider global context. The pulse nightclub attack in Orlando in 2016 killed 49 people and wounded 58, and the FBI concluded that it was an act of terrorism. In Oslo in 2022 a shooting near a gay venue ahead of Pride was treated as a possible terror attack, leading police to recommend the temporary postponement of Pride events. Bratislava, Colorado Springs and other attacks have reinforced the same lesson. These venues and people are increasingly visible targets within the extremist imagination. The point that I want to make here is that we should not wait for a mass casualty attack before we take this seriously. The pathway to terrorist targeting is often preceded by other forms of conduct – dehumanising rhetoric, online glorification, surveillance of venues, threats, harassment, assault, filming and posting and boasting. In some cases this violence is already occurring, but it is treated as youth offending, street violence, hate crime or social media cruelty, rather than as part of a broader extremist threat environment. This is the gap we need to close.

I want to speak in particular to permissive online environments. Extremist actors no longer require formal organisational meetings or manifestos to circulate their hatred. They operate through platforms, group chats,

coded memes, live streams, short-form video and algorithmically amplified outrage. In those spaces anti-LGBTIQA+ hatred can be normalised and gamified. Young men can encounter this material first as humour or transgression, then as grievance and eventually as ideological permission. This is why enforcement matters. The answer to is not to police ordinary debate or disagreement, but where conduct crosses into threats, incitement, harassment, doxxing, targeted intimidation, the luring of victims or the glorification of terrorist and extremist violence, the law must be applied consistently and visibly.

Permissive online environments become dangerous when people learn that targeting vulnerable communities carries no consequence. Taking the security of LGBTIQA+ communities seriously therefore means more than condemning hatred after the fact. It means early identification of extremist narratives, proper reporting pathways, stronger platform accountability, better use of existing hate crime and online safety laws and where necessary law reform to close gaps between online mobilisation and offline violence.

Taking this seriously does not mean securitising identity or treating communities as passive victims. It means recognising that these communities are being named, framed and targeted across ideological movements. It means listening to community organisations when they identify patterns of fear and intimidation. I have attended a number of workshops and been privy to them sharing those fears. It means ensuring police, intelligence, local government, schools, universities, event organisers and venue operators understand the threat picture and it means recognising that trans people in particular are currently at the centre of a sustained ideological campaign that can translate into real-world violence. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I will start off and then we will go through the other committee members. Geoff, my first question is for you. Obviously you have been responsible for setting up an entire unit in New South Wales designed to disrupt these sorts of behaviours. I have a number of different questions, really, about that. How did you go about doing that?

Geoffrey STEER: It was a long, hard battle. Basically the response came out of the Cronulla riots, which was an identification that we were missing something. The indicators for Cronulla had been around for years. Police were responding to the individual crimes but not seeing the broader picture. At the time I was doing my hate crime training through the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers in the States. So I had the basis of it, and I just pushed it up through the chain of command and said, 'This is a thing that we're missing.' It is a capability the organisation did not have. And it is something that is important – if you get hate crimes right at the early stage, you can prevent the escalation to major public order and mass casualty events.

The CHAIR: What is the difference between a hate crime, as opposed to, I think it might have been mentioned before, something like offensive speech or prejudice or even something even lesser like disagreement? What defines a hate crime in your mind?

Geoffrey STEER: The definition that I have always used for hate crime is a criminal offence that is wholly or partially motivated by bias towards a protected category. That is what makes them different, is that motivation factor. It is not just 'I'm assaulting you because I don't like you', it is because I do not like the group that you belong to. So they have a larger footprint than just a normal assault. You assault an individual randomly, the footprint is basically that victim and maybe family members. When you target someone based on a specific characteristic, it is that victim, the family members, the community they belong to, other communities – it is generally referred to as a ripple effect. It spreads out through community, and if they are not dealt with effectively and timely enough, it can impact the wider general community as well, because you just get that feeling of destabilisation in the safety and security of communities in general.

The CHAIR: What were some of the indicators that you would identify that point to something being a hate crime as opposed to something different?

Geoffrey STEER: When I ran the unit, we had 10 indicators that we used. And the important thing to understand is these indicators are not a checklist. They are designed to get investigators to ask deeper questions to actually determine what is going on. So you have got things like the difference between people – is your victim gay and your offender straight, black, white, whatever? Location – is it a known location? Is it a gay nightclub? Is it a beat? Is it something that is out of the ordinary? Did it happen on or around a significant date for that community? Is your offender a member of an organised hate group? Is there evidence of hate activity like graffiti or anything in that area? Have there been previous incidents? Nine of the 10 that I came up with

actually came out of the US. Victims services came up with nine of them. I came up with the 10th one, which was based on my research in regard to the level of violence. Generally hate crimes have a higher level of violence, they are more vicious in the attacks and they generally use improvised weapons. So anything like that is what we would look at as an indicator that it is a potential hate crime.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. That is extremely helpful. You have also talked about platforms having an obligation to essentially de-risk things or identify where risks might be. What things do you think they could implement to identify and then report coordinated hate activity? I think you said before that it is very predictable, some of this activity. What sorts of things do you think could be strengthened in how the dating apps or the websites operate in order to better detect and then report and so forth to make sure that these sorts of things do not happen?

Geoffrey STEER: Basically it comes from victims or members of the community reporting worrying posts, social media comments, websites, anything like that. The websites themselves and the social media providers should have an obligation to report that. The biggest issue that we find is it gets reported from the community or an individual member and they take that site down. Before police know anything about it, before any forensic examination can be done of IP addresses, what was posted and all that, that evidence is lost. There needs to be some requirement that those are retained for use by law enforcement to actually conduct investigations.

They also should have a responsibility in regard to the amplification of hate messages. ISD, which is the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, did research into websites and social media, and they found that out of roughly 3 million social media messages they looked at, there were roughly 420,000-odd which had hateful messages in them. Different websites deal with it differently. The extremist side – your Terrorgram, all that sort of stuff – are the more blatant ideologically driven comments, but sites like TikTok, Facebook and all that allow the low-level dog whistles and coded messages to continue. They allow these messages to go through. There needs to be a better effort to actually screen what is coming out and to be held accountable for the information that they are passing on to the general society.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Geoff. I know my time is up, but I am fascinated by that response, so thank you very much. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you both for joining us. Josh, I might start with you. You spoke about the architecture of hatred and operating in this online ecosystem. Would it be true to say that especially vulnerable, impressionable young people have been drawn into these groups, these online gatherings, based on one particular issue; say, for example, anti-LGBTIQA+ hate, and then being further radicalised into other forms, such as antisemitism or misogyny – or vice versa? Is that how it works?

Josh ROOSE: Thank you for your question. In the academic literature in particular there is a lot of discussion about misogyny, for example, being a gateway into forms of violent extremism. But I think you can extend that more broadly to hatred on the basis of gender. We are seeing it play out in really unique ways, where someone might have a particular grievance or a particular issue that they want to explore. It is almost impossible to go into a number of social media sites just using search terms without immediately being inundated by hatred. We know that algorithms tend to steer people towards similar material, and very quickly these young men in particular can find themselves drawn into new forms of hate. I cannot speak specifically to anti-LGBTIQA+ prejudice or hatred, but we have captured data in 2019 and 2024, and I hope to repeat this in 2029 – so before and after COVID and the pandemic, with people spending a lot more time online in the aftermath of the pandemic, where misogyny, for example, increased exponentially amongst Australian young men. I suspect strongly that that is also the case with anti-LGBTIQA+ prejudice and hate as well.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. So the clearest indicator you are seeing is through misogyny?

Josh ROOSE: Yes. That is the primary that the academic research has uncovered, but I think there is a clear research gap, and we need to explore it more.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. In your opening remarks as well you discussed the attacks in western Sydney that were publicised on 7:30. Are we seeing the same type of offending here, or are we seeing different cohorts commit this offending in Victoria?

Josh ROOSE: I will not pretend to have that inside expertise, but anecdotally and from the conversations that I have had with members of the community in some of the forums that I have attended, it is occurring through dating apps. People are lured, and then obviously they are in a vulnerable position and unlikely to report because that might mean either outing themselves or it might mean a level of scrutiny into their lives that they do not wish to have. And we know that the offenders know this and that they are not doing so. I am not so much an expert in hate crime as I am in violent extremism, but I have heard this anecdotally across a number of different forums.

Michael GALEA: That it is more unknown people on dating apps rather than people that are known to each other through school networks or something else?

Josh ROOSE: As I understand it, but again, I cannot speak with any authority on the wider prevalence.

Michael GALEA: I appreciate that. Thank you. Geoff, your submission details five different offender typologies that you have identified – thrillseeking, defensive, retaliatory, mission and intrafamilial – and you have said that thrillseeking is the characteristic most prevalent in these types of attacks. You went on to say that Victoria, New South Wales and some other jurisdictions do have strong criminal codes in place but these are not effective deterrents. Is that because these provisions in legislation are not being used as effectively, say, by the courts or police, or is it because they are inherently less effective as deterrents?

Geoffrey STEER: Thrillseeking is generally the main typology that targets the LGBTIQ community, and if memory serves me right, it is about 60 to 75 per cent of offenders that fall into that thrillseeker category. Thrillseekers are not ideologically driven. A strong societal response generally changes the behaviour or reduces the behaviour. What I saw in New South Wales was effectively the courts not looking at it from that perspective. But the other problem you have got is there are no diversionary approaches. Basically, you are charged with an assault, and whether the aggravating circumstance is applied or not depends on prosecution and whether the court takes it or not. But what we found in the research around hate crimes is that because these offenders do not have a strong ideological base, sending them to jail actually makes the problem worse, because they end up falling in with people who do have a strong ideological base and can drag them into the organised hate group ideologies – the far-right ideologies and all that sort of stuff. There has to be a strong societal response, but diversion programs are probably the better way to deal with them. What I am currently developing, in the hate crime threat management doctrine that I am building at the moment, is looking at it from that typology response. Thrillseekers need a different response from defensive hate crime offenders, mission offenders and intrafamilial offenders. The current judicial system lumps everybody in the same box, and you do not get an effective response because everyone is being dealt with the same but the motivations are not the same.

Michael GALEA: Thank you very much. I would love to ask you more, but my time has expired.

The CHAIR: Mr Puglielli, over to you.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. With the limited time I have, I would like to start with Josh on violent extremism. I mean, we are talking about some of the attacks that more recently have been reported. It is people being attacked sometimes by a group of people on the basis of who they are or who they love and being targeted often in a tech-facilitated way. To my understanding, this is exactly a violent extremist act. You have touched on the role of misogyny. I believe you said it was a gateway into other kinds of extremist ideology. Can you expand a bit more? You know, we have had the word ‘manosphere’ already mentioned at least once today. What does that pipeline look like where someone perhaps enters through being exposed to misogynistic material and they may end up at this point where we have this targeted hate being expressed against LGBTIQ+ community members through something like a dating app?

Josh ROOSE: Thank you. There are a couple of elements to that question. I think the first was just the ideological orientation, and I think that is an important distinction. Obviously there is hate crime, which is a criminal act. Then there is the ideology that can underpin it. And Geoff has just talked about the thrill-seeking component. But there is also for some in particular a wider ideological underpinning as to why they are doing what they do and their view of the world and the world that they seek to enact long term. So I think there is an important element for further discussion there.

In respect to the manosphere and pathways, I have got an Australian Research Council grant coincidentally looking at pathways and patterns of participation in the manosphere with some leading experts, including Michael Flood and Debbie King. Now, that work is really digging into why men are engaging online, and a lot of that is their vulnerabilities, their insecurities. We know that men in particular are not doing necessarily as well in society and in schools and education and so on. And when they go online, they are looking for companionship. They are looking for a sense of belonging and solidarity. They are looking for people to sort of engage with – again, to validate them and lift them up a bit – and the manosphere and the narratives of the manosphere are really very effective in doing that. ‘It’s not your fault you’re not doing well; it’s feminism. It’s not your fault you’re not doing well; it’s LGBTIQA+ and it’s trans rights. It’s an attack on you as a man and society is crumbling. It’s not your fault; you’re a victim of all this.’ And so the narrative is very powerful and alluring, in particular to young men. So to that extent the pathway in is often through a message that resonates with someone who is looking for someone not only to join and a group to belong to, but also a message that excuses or shapes or frames their struggles. And so it is often not through hate but through vulnerability and insecurity that people are being lured into these spaces, which speaks also then to the need to address that when we are talking about prevention and preventative strategies.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. And Geoff, I might go to you now on your past work and your specialisation in this area of hate crime. Can you point to perhaps other jurisdictions, whether it is within Australia or elsewhere, where this is being responded to well? And importantly, how are we measuring whether a jurisdiction is responding well to this? If we are preventing an act from ever occurring, for example, that is something that has not transpired. It is just because I know, as you highlighted earlier, there are a range of jurisdictions with quite strong criminal responses to some of these things, for example. But is that actually working for them? How are we measuring that success?

Geoffrey STEER: That is always going to be the question. If you prevent something, how do you know that you were successful in preventing it, because nothing actually happened? And that has been the struggle that I have faced in the 15-odd years that I have been trying to build this threat-management approach to hate crimes. That is, once you engage successfully, how do you know you have been successful? So jurisdictions around the world – I spent some time with the NYPD hate crime taskforce, which has a phenomenal response around hate crimes. And it can be seen in their results and convictions, prosecutions – all that sort of stuff.

But as for the preventative side of the house, how do you prove it? And that is probably the big issue. No jurisdiction has successfully come up with a methodology to capture that, because how do you? As I said in my opening statement, the focus has always been a reactive response. Crime happens, we prosecute, and that solves the problem until it happens again. There has not been a lot of focus on the preventative side of the house – on how we prevent these offenders from carrying out the attacks and getting these belief systems that drive them. And how do you divert once you identify somebody who is going down that path? So, yes, I cannot really give you an answer on that one.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will now go to Mrs Hermans. Over to you.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Thank you very much. Thank you for coming in today. Perhaps a segue from belief systems that drive people, Josh, you are an associate professor in religion and mentioned some of the religious groups. I do not have a problem with what we are dealing with in terms of trying to sort out hate crimes, but I feel very strongly that we are constantly touching on a whole lot of things where there are a lot of people not sitting at the table being able to have a voice. You mentioned the Christians, and my ears pricked up. You would be aware, as a person advocating for the Jewish people, that the scriptures say an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. What were the words that Jesus said? Do you remember?

Josh ROOSE: If I may be clear, I am the current president of the Australian Association for the Study of Religion. I have a strong background in the study of religion. I am not a theologian, and I do not necessarily engage in scriptural debate per se.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I think it is important that we understand that the Christian faith itself and the teachings of Jesus are very much about blessing those who persecute you, praying for those people who persecute you, loving your enemies. There is nothing in the scriptures and the words of Jesus that incite

violence. There is nothing in there that actually talks about harming people. It talks about the exact opposite. It talks about love for all people irrespective of who they might be. When I hear that hate crimes are coming from an ideology based on the Christian right, I have a concern with that because to me that is like imposing a crime onto a people group that are not even at the table to speak for themselves and that certainly do not have a teaching anywhere in their theology that says that they are to rise up and start being violent towards people. In fact it is the exact opposite. You mentioned a lot in terms of hate crime and the ripple effect of that. I just wonder then: surely the idea is not that Christians are Nazis, because Christians went to the concentration camp too. I am just trying to define that because I feel we need to start to pull apart some of the things that are being said and slapped together in a thing about hate crime. We are almost trying to isolate people groups without really unpacking what that means. I think we need to be very careful, wouldn't you say, about doing that and actually labelling groups.

Josh ROOSE: I would say you are making a reductivist and disingenuous argument here. This is not about labelling entire groups. Just like we are not saying that the entire Muslim community are responsible for the acts of a small number of radicalised young men, we are not saying that the entire Christian community or faith are responsible for the extreme statements by religious leaders, certain priests and so on or at times the very open hatred expressed towards the LGBTIQ+ community by leaders on the Christian right. It does occur and it is prevalent, particularly in the context of what we are seeing overseas, and it is important to call it out where you see it. My approach to this problem is that it does require nuance. We have to understand that this is a minority of actors within any tradition, but nonetheless the precepts and the track record of violence exist. We need to treat it as not only relevant but cast our full attention towards it.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: This is a question for both of you. Isn't the act of hate and violence, in breaking the law, separate from having an ideological or religious belief that conflicts with what the LGBTIQ community is advocating for? But it does not mean that it is a hate crime if it is a different belief. Surely there is a place at the table for religious people to come and to have their own religions. We are not saying that we have got to throw out religion, are we, and that people cannot have what they believe?

Josh ROOSE: Before I pass to you, Geoff, if you do not mind, I will just add. People are entitled to their religious beliefs and faiths. We are a country in which freedom of religion is protected, and so it should be. I certainly, if anything, advocate for the role of religion and faith in day-to-day life. However, what we see here is again an important balance that we have to strike.

People can hold extreme views in society. We are a democracy. We certainly do not shut down people's engagement or critique with key questions about society, the way it should be ordered or, critically here, people's choice about sexuality or beliefs. But what we do need to do is identify where that is harmful to others, where that deliberately causes harm and where that might incite violence. The threshold here is violence, and if actions and words are inciting violence, then effectively we need to step in and we need to protect those vulnerable communities. Over to you, Geoff.

Geoffrey STEER: The biggest argument against hate crimes has always been that thought policing argument. Hate crimes policing is not about thoughts and beliefs. It is about crossing that line, and as Josh rightly pointed out, it is about violence. You can believe what you want; you are entitled to that, but you do not have the right to cross over from your belief system and to cause harm to another person. And that is where hate crime draws the line in the sand.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I will now go to our members that are online. Ms Gray-Barberio, you are first up. The floor is yours.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you both for being with us this afternoon. I just want to follow up from Mr Puglielli's line of questioning with you, Mr Steer. You spoke about diverting people once factors were identified. Could you give us some examples of what that could look like for us to think about as a committee?

Geoffrey STEER: Yes. Diversion programs – there are a number of different trials that have happened. They generally have not succeeded due to funding. That has been their biggest issue. Examples have been doing the hard work with the individual to work out what their bias is and why they have got it, and to divert

that to the call for it. When you sit down with a lot of hate crime offenders and you talk to them, the ideology or the belief system is just a justification for their behaviour. There is trauma in their life, whether that is substance abuse, child abuse, domestic violence history, low self-esteem or whatever is the driving factor. So a lot of diversion programs have tried to address those core issues to change – instead of blaming others for the problems in your life, to actually work on addressing what is driving that behaviour. Other approaches have been, and I think it was Massachusetts in the States that did it, where they had civil torts similar to AVOs, but they protected the entire community. So you were barred from abusing, assaulting and damaging property of anyone from that entire community, and what they found was it was a non-criminal response, but it had strong criminal sanctions. I believe, from memory, it was a mandatory 10-year sentence for breaching the order. They worked out that they were having about a 98 per cent success rate of no reoffending from those individuals because of those heavy criminal sanctions that were attached to them.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. Dr Roose, can I come to you? Just talking about the rise of far-right extremism and its implication on erosion of trust in democracy and public institutions, I think we heard evidence quite a lot today coming through about the lack of trust in police as well as justice institutions. Do you have any recommendations for us to consider? How can we build, harness and foster trust if right-wing extremism is just being so emboldened right now in the social landscape that we find ourselves in?

Josh ROOSE: Thank you for your question. I think when we are looking at the emergence, in particular historically, of the far right and the extreme right, we have got to look at it in the context of social developments and place it in historical context there. Typically it is when the economy is not necessarily working for people, people feel like they are being left behind and there is a sense of relative deprivation. There are also here issues with the housing affordability crisis. We have had a confluence – a perfect storm, particularly in the context of the pandemic – that has created online ecosystems where conspiracy theories are running amok, but also where key actors are profiting from that. We have seen the emergence of particular politicians. We have seen the emergence of extremist groups who are seeking to grow movements and build movements based on distrust, based on hatred, but also based on fear and anxiety about people's future. And I think ultimately a key part, as I have said on numerous occasions publicly, is keeping it simple: getting the economy working for people again, getting people back into meaningful employment and feeling like they can build a better life for themselves here in Australia.

At a deeper level, and I think this may well emerge in the context of the royal commission, there are deeper questions that have to be asked about what we are doing with young people and social media, pathways to radicalisation as well, and social cohesion generally. And it requires, again, re-engaging with questions of citizenship. It requires engaging with, for example, what our young people are accessing in school. For example, are we moving beyond NAPLAN and metrics-based assessments of our young people's success in school to look more broadly on who we are producing as citizens? I think there is important societal-level and whole-of-government approaches that are required to address these challenges.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you for that. In terms of deradicalisation and disengagement of young people – well, not just young people, but also just men who are perpetuating this violence against the LGBTQI community – there has been a lot of talk about prevention. Do you have any thoughts around that? Mr Steer, feel free to jump in as well.

Josh ROOSE: There is an enormous amount of work on disengagement of young people from extremism that may well be relevant. There may well be too much to discuss in such a finite amount of time. But we do know that, for example, when you are engaging with young people, you cannot tell them they are wrong. Counter narratives do not work. And also, demonising young men when you are engaging with them does not work either. You have to approach them and engage with them with alternative narratives, and to some extent, offer an upward social trajectory – offer some hope in people's lives in terms of moving forward. Obviously where people cross that threshold into violence, people need to be held to account. But when you are looking at someone who might have expressed some statements online expressing hatred towards certain groups, if you police them immediately, often you risk casting them as criminals and also introducing them into a deeper ecosystem. It is a critical challenge finding that balance. But I would say what we need to do with young men in particular is engage them about – and I am not a fan of the term 'healthy masculinity' or many of those other frames, 'positive masculinities'. I think first and foremost we have to engage young men as people – as young people – and offer them basically a chance to discuss their views, engage with them, but also provide them meaningful ways forward. And I think part of the challenge is that there are so many different voices contesting

the terrain and so many different voices seeking the funding that goes with that terrain, that ultimately a lot of it gets lost.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. Mr Steer, do you have anything you would like to add?

Geoffrey STEER: From the thrillseeking perspective, which as I have previously said, the majority of offenders are thrillseekers, there needs to be a strong societal response, which means – society is very siloed at the moment, and when something happens there needs to be one community voice that comes out that says that behaviour is not tolerated. The victim community comes out and states their obvious non-support for that behaviour, but other communities need to come out and express that voice as well. As I said, thrillseekers are generally bored young kids who are looking at finding some fun, some excitement, and they use their grievances to target a group that they think is vulnerable. If all communities came out, both religious and civil, and said this behaviour is not accepted, you will find that that behaviour will slowly change because society is setting the benchmark.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: A really good response. Chair, do I have a couple more minutes or am I done?

The CHAIR: You are done. I think Sheena has had to step out for a quick second, but we are going to do a couple of 2-minute questions. I will start off, but we will try and get through everyone in the time we have got left.

I want to fire off another one at you, Geoff, if that is okay. I was fascinated to hear you say that it is the thrillseeking element that is the predominant causation of a lot of these violent sorts of incidences, as opposed to ideology or other factors. The thrillseeking side of it seems to me a pretty perverse and weird way of getting a kick out of things. Have you done some more research or any study as a bit of a deep dive into how people in those situations get to that point?

Geoffrey STEER: I have not. The research that I have read in all the time that I have studied hate crimes – basically what they are looking for is some form of excitement, some group bonding experience et cetera and so forth. It is like kids who smash windows and things like that; it is that criminal element. You throw in the fact that you want to do that violence – you want, as Josh said, to try and prove to the manosphere and all that sort of stuff that you are a man. You look for what is manly, and that is generally that violent sort of behaviour. So you target those that you believe are less likely to report, who are easy prey. As I said previously, thrillseekers generally actively hunt. They will leave their areas and go to areas where the targeted community is. The gay community, unfortunately, is generally seen to be weak and not likely to report crime because of shame if they are not out and all that sort of stuff. So it creates that sort of perfect storm for the behaviour.

The CHAIR: Just quickly, in the small bit of time I have got left, you talked a little bit before about positive masculinity. I am not necessarily a big fan of that term ‘toxic masculinity’, because I think you are talking to people in difficult positions and that you are pushing them further down as opposed to bringing people up. But in terms of positive masculinity and bringing positive role models into the scene, do you think that might be one way of helping the causation of the whole issue to not happen in the first place?

Geoffrey STEER: It was Josh who actually raised that point. But just on that, yes, you are right. If there is some positive role model for them to say that you can still be a man and have a good life without using violence, without proving your masculinity by aggressive acts, and channelling that behaviour into more positive social activities, whether it is football or soccer or whatever you want to do –

The CHAIR: It might be, yes. I really appreciate that. I am sorry to cut you off. I am just trying to get through everyone with the time, but that is a really valuable piece of evidence. Thank you for that. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thanks, Chair. Geoff, just further to our previous conversation about offender typologies, your submission also states that for intrafamilial offenders there are a lot of issues in data not being accurately captured as a hate crime. Can you talk a little bit further to that?

Geoffrey STEER: Yes. Intrafamilial generally is not that focused. It is more honour based, and in the LGBTIQ community it is generally seen through the lens of either domestic violence or some other sexual crimes or something like that – like the concept of corrective rape for women who are lesbians in families or

who have left their partner. It is not generally identified because it falls into those other general categories. There is a big push, and rightly so, from policing around domestic violence, and so family issues generally are seen as that domestic violence response. When you drill down on what the cause is, family members are trying to correct the behaviour of someone in the family who has broken the norm of the family rules, and that falls into that honour violence space. That is where it gets mixed up. You deal with it as domestic violence, the behaviour is still there. You are not addressing the core issue because you are dealing with that domestic setting, not the honour setting.

Michael GALEA: Thank you very much. Do I have time briefly, Chair? Josh, in public statements you have said that LGBTIQ+ people are among the most likely to be killed by violent extremists, second to Jewish Australians. Can you talk to me about where this interplay is? We have already talked about different cohorts, including people with disabilities. Can you talk to me about those from different religious backgrounds – for example, Jewish LGBTIQ+ people, Islamic LGBTIQ+ people – and the particular threats that they face?

Josh ROOSE: Yes. Thank you. So those observations are based on not only the qualitative work I have done analysing narratives and analysing extremist ideology online, but also the expert witness work that I have done where I am actually engaging with primary source material. And it is very clear the two groups, to me, that I see most identified are the Jewish community and the LGBTIQ+ community, broadly speaking. Where that doubles down and gets more dangerous is obviously that intersection in particular, for example, of people from LGBTIQ+ communities and different faith communities, in particular Muslim communities but also others. And critical questions are: is it racism? Is it anti-LGBTIQ+ violence? There are a lot of dynamics at play. But my main concern when I make that statement is that – I mean, antisemitism absolutely needs to be taken incredibly seriously. We have seen how that has played out at Bondi. But we are seeing a lot of the warning signs in terms of the online rhetoric, the dehumanisation, the hatred – from whatever ideological orientation it is coming – and the fact that there is an encirclement effectively, an ideological encirclement of gay and lesbian men and women and in particular trans people, coming from multiple directions. That to me, with what we know about lone actor extremism and stochastic terrorism, is not necessarily in the Australian context, but it is not a matter of if but when there will be more attacks targeting people from these communities. And so I want to draw attention to that, and I think taking that seriously and taking the community seriously when they express their fears and anxieties is really important.

Michael GALEA: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Mr Puglielli, over to you.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Josh, I will stay with you, just building on that last response you have given. You have spoken about misogyny as a potential gateway. In experiences or perpetration of racism, is racism also in itself a gateway? Where does that fit in? At the moment in the current political environment there is a lot of discussion of things like monoculture as opposed to multicultural communities that we are proud to represent – many of us. Where do these things fit in?

Josh ROOSE: It is a big question. Thank you. We are in an incredibly polarised environment, as Geoff has also identified, where people are adopting binary positions. Populist politicians are very good at exploiting that. I think we are seeing how that is playing out in the political space at the moment. But I also think that extremist groups and highly motivated ideological actors are seeking to grow movements off the basis of racism, anti-LGBTIQ+ attitudes, but also more broadly, questions and issues around migration, for example. The thing is, we need to be able to have these debates openly in a respectful manner. I think all different actors across society have a role to play, and quite frankly, people from different ideological perspectives should be contributing to these debates in a meaningful manner. But what we are not and what we cannot tolerate is where we are using dehumanising language, where we are targeting groups and singling them out for ostracism, for violence and for extremist rhetoric. And I think that requires leadership across all sides of politics, but it also requires religious leadership. It requires our religious leaders to step up. It requires our community leaders to step up. And that is where violent extremism in particular is most dangerous, where it seems to be permissive, where it is almost like people who are out there contemplating it almost feel like it is the right moment that people will back them and support them in doing so, and that is where we see an increased likelihood of an attack.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Mrs Hermans.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Thank you. Josh, I really appreciated what you had to say about how we move forward with this in terms of reform for young men in the way they behave. You made the suggestions which – those of us that are parents know that telling a teenager that what they are doing is wrong is not the way to go, and even when they get a little bit older it still does not work. So it is a matter of allowing them to learn right from wrong, sometimes the hard way. But you also talked about demonising men, which I know that my colleague – and you instead talked about offering hope. So I guess the question I want to give you each just under a minute or actually maybe 30 seconds each on, is how we move forward in terms of hope for these men that have perhaps not understood how to respond appropriately without feeling threatened. What are some of the things we need to engage in that are perhaps – you are looking at overseas a lot. I know that obviously you have both got different backgrounds, but you would have looked at things that are working. What are some of the things that we could take away from that?

Josh ROOSE: Thank you. It is unfortunately again a time constraint, but I think it is a great question, because ultimately we have to do more to engage men without them being seen to be attacked on the basis of being men. That said, we do not want to go down an anti-feminism road either, which has become predominant online and that is why these narratives are so successful. I think ultimately it comes back to the basic precepts of citizenship, respect and recognition, and modelling that at a mentoring level and, at a leadership level in our schools. I think we have got to take a whole-of-society approach to this. When you see extremism, a terrorism attack pop up, hate crimes increase, polarisation increase, it is symptomatic of a much deeper challenge. I think men are at the core of a lot of this, and I think we need to do more to offer men meaningful pathways into employment, education and family life, and a lot of the demographic challenges around that exist. We need to obviously have a serious societal level conversation.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Thank you. Do you mind if I get a response from Geoff?

The CHAIR: I was just going to say, Geoff, do you want to have a quick 15, 20 seconds because I need to get to Anasina as well?

Geoffrey STEER: Yes, not a problem. Just briefly, I think one of the issues is critical thinking skills. We have got a generation of kids who have grown up on the internet who believe the first thing they see; they do not question it. When these groups use their ideology, and they are very good at what they do in getting their message across, it is not challenged. So we need to start teaching kids how to actually question what is given to them on the internet and actually do the research and find an answer, rather than just taking the first thing that is given to them.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Excellent. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Last, but definitely not least, is Ms Gray-Barberio again. Over to you.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you very much, Chair. I will be very quick because I know it has just passed 5 o'clock. Mr Steer, just in relation to the diversion programs that you spoke about earlier, are there any programs that you know of that are doing a good job of deradicalisation in this space?

Geoffrey STEER: I cannot really comment on the deradicalisation side of things because I specialise in hate crimes. So we do not have that deradicalisation issue.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Or hate crimes.

Geoffrey STEER: A lot that I have looked at just have not survived because of funding – because to actually do the job properly, you have got to pay for the psychologist, you have got to pay for staff to manage things and all that sort of stuff. So they get given trial funding. The trial generally comes up as successful, and then they are written off because of the financial cost. So yes, I do not know of any that have really survived.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. I appreciate that. And just quickly, Dr Roose, just in relation to Mr Steer's answer there around sustainable funding to really be able to grapple with this at the roots of it, what is it going to take for governments to be able to realise that if we are not curbing this issue – I think you said it in your presentation – there is a risk of a mass hate attack on the LGBTIQA+ community?

Josh ROOSE: I think that risk is already present. I note that the director-general of ASIO is giving a talk this evening. I do not want to pre-empt either way what he may say, but I think that there is already a significant risk of an attack on a gathering or group or individuals. To speak to your broader point, I think it is a combination of funding. Funding is critical, and you do not see the success when you fund things that are working – because there is no attack. So how do you actually measure that? It is often difficult. But I think it is also an attitudinal shift that has to accompany increased funding and sustainable funding about what our schools are there for. I think we are so focused on NAPLAN, we are so focused on measurement and metrics and so on – ATAR scores. We also have to go back to the basics of citizenship, to speak to what Geoff has just talked about, and I agree entirely: digital literacy, critical thinking and engagement. We have to fund those and, critically here, create the time and space for our students and our young people to actually engage and learn those skills, not only through classroom work, but through designated classes, I would think.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. Thank you, both. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Anasina. That brings an end to this session. Josh and Geoff, I really do appreciate your time and the evidence that you have given today. As I said at the start, you will be given a proof version of the transcript to have a look through and get a chance to look over for any minor errors or typos or anything like that. But from all of us here, thanks very much for your time today. We really appreciate it. So, yes, thank you.

Committee adjourned.
