

Submission for current and emerging threats to TGD human rights

Who is the Victorian Pride Lobby?

The Victorian Pride Lobby was formed in 1997 as the Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby. In 2020, we were renamed the Victorian Pride Lobby to better reflect the scope of our advocacy and membership as representative of the whole LGBTIQ+ community.

We work toward equality and social justice for all LGBTIQ+ Victorians. To do this, we work constructively, cooperatively, and respectfully with trans and gender diverse, intersex, asexual, and other communities and organisations that support our mission and vision.

The vision of the Lobby is that LGBTIQ+ people no longer face discrimination in law or practice in Victoria, and that the diversity of Victoria's LGBTIQ+ communities is valued and celebrated.

We are a non-partisan organisation that is not affiliated with any political party. We are a non-profit, mission-driven community-based lobbying organisation that collaborates with community organisations, advocates, and representatives to effect positive change in the areas of human rights, equality, and policy development.

We are governed by a volunteer Committee of Management, made up of LGBTIQ+ people who are elected by Victorian Pride Lobby members.

The Lobby auspices the Rainbow Local Government Campaign, which works with local government officers, councillors and staff to boost LGBTIQ+ inclusion at a local government level.

Scope of submission

Far-right targeting of the LGBTIQ+ community in Victoria is a long running issue, the root of which can be traced back to the campaign against the Safe Schools Coalition in 2016, and far-right activity during the same-sex marriage plebiscite in 2017¹.

This submission will focus on incidents of anti-transgender hatred in targeting local councils and library services from October 2022 by emerging extremist groups in Victoria. While the vilification experienced by local councils and libraries could be described as broadly 'anti-LGBTIQ+' rather than explicitly 'anti-transgender', there is a

¹ D. Tran, 'Antipodean Resistance Neo-Nazi group trying to sway Australia's same-sex marriage postal vote', *ABC News*, 5 September 2017.
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-05/neo-nazi-group-antipodean-resistance/8852682>.

clear undercurrent of transphobia being the driving motivator of extremist groups in this space. Furthermore, the targeting of drag performers specifically stems from an underlying desire to police gender norms, which is inherently tied to anti-transgender rhetoric.

Finally, we will outline recent incidents of high profile anti-transgender campaigning in Victoria, and the impact of this campaigning on increasing incidents of anti-transgender harassment, vilification, and violence.

Anti-LGBTIQA+ extremist targeting of local government

The first high profile incident of an LGBTIQA+ youth event being targeted by far-right extremists in person since the end of Covid restrictions occurred in 2022 at Moonee Valley Council. A group of around a dozen men attended the "Youth Fest" event held at Queen's Park while holding a banner that said "drag pedos groom kids", before allegedly chanting transphobic slogans at performers. High profile Neo-Nazi Thomas Sewell was among the group, who were suspected to be members of the Nationalist Socialist Network.²

In December of 2022, Stonnington City Council, Victoria Police, the Victorian Pride Centre and Minus 18 were forced to cancel their "Glitter Nova" event, an end of year LGBTIQA+ youth celebration. The cancellation came after a counter-protest threat was identified online by far-right group The Proud Boys; at the subsequent protest and counter-protester, one person wearing a Proud Boys jacket was arrested by police.³

In the lead up to International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), over a dozen councils cancelled LGBTIQA+ youth events due to organised protest threats from far-right groups.⁴ Less than a month later, the City of Wangaratta cancelled their "Rainbow Ball", after threats from far-right groups were spotted online.⁵

² S. Thomas, 'Melbourne Neo-Nazis target drag performer at family-friendly youth fest', *Star Observer*, 3 October 2022, <https://www.starobserver.com.au/news/melbourne-neo-nazis-target-drag-performer-at-family-friendly-youth-fest/217074>

³ M. Chwasta, 'Glitter Nova youth pride celebration postponed due to safety concerns after protest threat', *ABC News*, 8 December 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-08/glitter-nova-youth-pride-celebration-postponed-protest-threat/101751478>

⁴ C. Kelly, 'Councils call off drag storytime and LGBTIQA+ events in Victoria after far-right threats', *The Guardian Australia*, 13 May 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/13/councils-call-off-drag-storytime-and-lgbtq-events-in-victoria-after-far-right-threats>

⁵ E. Summerville & A. Chisholm, 'Wangaratta's Rainbow Ball delayed amid safety concerns for participants targeted by radical groups', *ABC News*, 2 June 2023,

As advocates in the local government space, we have seen a significant reduction in LGBTIQ+ programming since these coordinated threats began. While council staff have consistently expressed a desire to keep LGBTIQ+ programming in place, CEOs and Managers have expressed concerns about the level of anti-LGBTIQ+ vilification being directed at staff and councillors. Many Councils have also opted to reduce their advertising of LGBTIQ+ programming, meaning that it is more difficult to access less connected members of the community.

Despite this issue reaching crisis levels in mid-2023, there are still very few legal tools at councils' disposal to protect staff against coordinated hate campaigns, as LGBTIQ+ community members are not protected from vilification and hate speech at a state or federal level in Victoria. There have also been few resources allocated to investigating the issue of rising anti-LGBTIQ+ extremism, and how it can be combated at a community level.

Extremism in mainstream anti-trans demonstrations

On the 18th of March 2023, Kellie-Jay King-Minshull, more commonly known as Posie Parker, held a "Let Women Speak" rally outside the Victorian Parliament. Posie Parker has an extensive history campaigning against transgender rights in the United Kingdom⁶, and toured Australia and New Zealand in 2023 to campaign on the premise that transgender rights were encroaching upon the rights of cisgender women⁷. The rally in Melbourne drew significant backlash, after members of the Nationalist Socialist Network attended in support of Parker, and were seen using Sieg Heil hand gestures on the Parliament steps⁸. It is important to note that the Nationalist Socialist Network were the same group who had disrupted a Moonee Valley Council LGBTIQ+ youth event several months earlier. Posie Parker, and all other rally organisers maintain that they have no connection to the Neo-Nazi group that attended the rally, nor any connections to other Neo-Nazi groups.

On Saturday the 23rd of March 2024, a group of anti-trans campaigners organised a "Women Will Speak" rally on the steps of the Victorian Parliament, to mark one year

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-06-02/wangaratta-rainbow-ball-delayed-over-safety-fears/102421876>

⁶ X. Elliards, 'Who is Posie Parker? The controversial anti-trans activist heading for Scotland', *The National*, 5 February 2023,

<https://www.thenational.scot/news/23299549.posie-parker-anti-trans-founder-standing-women/>

⁷ P. Karvelas, 'Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull's anti-trans rights campaign has become a headache for the Liberal Party. But the issue runs deeper than one MP', *ABC Radio National*, 26 March 2023,

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-26/kellie-jay-keen-minshullanti-trans-rights-liberal-party-debate/102142130>

⁸ 'Victorian government may consider amending laws after Nazi salutes at Parliament rallies', *ABC News*, 19 March 2023,

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-19/victoria-nazi-salute-peformed-parliament-government-response/102116672>

since the Posie Parker rally. Self-described Nationalist and former member of The Lads Society, Mathew Trihey opened the speaking⁹.

There is no suggestion from this submission that the organisers of these anti-trans demonstrations are actively collaborating with Neo-Nazi groups. However, while Neo-Nazis and far-right extremists are organising against the transgender community, they will continue to be attracted to more mainstream anti-trans demonstrations. It is incumbent on Organisers of any political demonstration, regardless of the issue, to prevent demonstrations of extremism and hatred that were seen at the Let Women Speak rallies.

How fringe extremism fuels every day anti-trans hatred

In April of 2023, the Victorian Pride Lobby and the Trans Justice Project collected survey responses for a collaborative research project documenting the rise of anti-transgender hatred in Australia. In the nine days that the survey was open, 3099 responses were collected, 42% of which identified as trans or gender diverse, making this one of the largest research projects on transgender experience in Australian history.

The key findings, which are also lined out on the Trans Justice Project website, were:

-49.20% of trans participants experienced online anti-trans hate (abuse, harassment or vilification) in the last 12 months and 31.12% experienced more or significantly more anti-trans hate in the two months prior to the survey when compared to the beginning of the year.

-47.9% of trans participants experienced anti-trans hate (abuse, harassment, or violence) within the previous year and 23.61% experienced more or significantly more in the two months prior to the survey.

The survey also found that 1 in 6 trans people have experienced anti-trans violence in the last year.

The uptick in anti-trans hatred in the two months leading up to the survey is important, as this is the exact period of time that Posie Parker was touring around Australia and New Zealand. At this point, there was heightened coverage of anti-transgender campaigning, and according to survey respondents, this had a tangibly negative impact on the lives of transgender people by fuelling increased incidents of hatred.

⁹ B. Kolovos, 'Self-described 'nationalist' speaks at anti-trans rights rally on Victoria Parliament steps', *The Guardian Australia*, 26 March 2024.
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/mar/26/victoria-anti-trans-rally-parliament-neo-nazi-allegations-matthew-trihey-organiser-michelle-uriarau-ntwnfb>

Recommendations

The Victorian Pride Lobby supports the implementation of all recommendations from the Fuelling Hate Report as follows:

- Introduce Federal and State anti-vilification laws to protect the entire LGBTQIA+ community from abuse, harassment, vilification and violence
- Work together with social media companies to stop the spread of anti-trans disinformation and anti-LGBTQIA+ hate groups
- Strengthen media regulations to ensure greater accountability for news outlets that promote anti-trans disinformation
- Investigate community-led interventions to curb anti-LGBTQIA+ extremism and de-radicalisation approaches
- Provide funding for further research into the causes and impacts of anti-trans abuse, harassment, vilification and violence and strategies for addressing them

Contact

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<https://www.vicpridelobby.org/>

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