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AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE
GAY AND LESBIAN LIAISON OFFICERS' NETWORK
TENTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS
TUESDAY 29 AUGUST 2006
BARTON POLICE COLLEGE, CANBERRA
LAW, POLICE & JUSTICE FOR ALL
The Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG

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I am honoured to take part in the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers' Network (GLLO) of the Australian Federal Police (AFP).

* Justice of the High Court of Australia.

My link with federal policing goes back to before the creation of the AFP. In fact, the first task assigned to the Australian Law Reform Commission, to which I was appointed early in 1975, was concerned with aspects of federal policing in the then Commonwealth Police. I knew the Commonwealth Police Commissioner, Jack Davis. When the AFP was established, I knew its first Commissioner, Sir Colin Woods. Through the early project of the Australian Law Reform Commission, and in other law reform projects, I got to know, work with, admire and understand the fine officers who have brought the AFP through to its present position of great importance in our country. As a judge and as a citizen, I honour the work of the AFP both in Australia and overseas. Its rise has been a phenomenon.

When I was growing up, it was difficult for gay people (by which I include the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, inter-sex and queer minorities) to feel anything for police except fear and suspicion. My first recollection of a police commissioner was of Commissioner Colin Delaney of the New South Wales Police. He may have been a good policeman. In 1960 he was chosen as Australian Father of the Year. But he had something of an obsession about homosexuals. In 1958 he said that homosexuality was "Australia's greatest menace and fastest growing crime. Rounding them up; entrapping them; putting them on the front pages of the papers; shaming them and punishing them was all he seemed to talk

about. That was the atmosphere of Australia in those days. As we can see in this celebration, we have come a long way since that time.

How did this happen? At about the time that I was reading about Commissioner Delaney, a scientific researcher in the United States, Dr Alfred Kinsey, was undertaking his trail-blazing research into human sexuality. He did so in a conservative State of the United States, Indiana. His Institute was at Indiana University where his original research was about the gall wasp. His investigations showed that a significant proportion of men and women had, at some stage of their lives, intensive sexual contact with a person of the same sex. It also showed that a small but steady percentage of people were exclusively homosexual throughout life. This was part of the reality of society. Indeed, according to Kinsey, it was probably part of the reality everywhere in the world, not just in America.

Subsequent research has varied and clarified some of Kinsey's findings. But his basic discovery has been reinforced. Moreover, a genetic foundation for most instances of sexual diversity now seems very likely. In the face of such science, it became impossible to stigmatize gay people as evil doers who were defiantly choosing a different "lifestyle" to offend society. Most of them were just ordinary, boring fellow citizens who got on with their lives, paid taxes and formed relationships like everyone else. They worked at

every level. In all occupations. They were not just hairdressers and ballet dancers. Some were garbage collectors. Some were judges. Some were even police officers.

Now, by one of those twists of fate, I serve on the Board of the Kinsey Institute in Bloomington, Indiana. It still exists there in the University where Dr Kinsey worked. I will be attending its next Board Meeting in October 2006. For me, the wheel has come full circle. For policing, the same wheel has turned. Kinsey's research led to inquiries and demands for the reform of the law about sexual minorities. Eventually, the reform spread throughout Australia. The legal changes removed some of the stigma. But prejudice, ignorance and fear remain. They remain in the law. They remain in police forces. This, we have to change by example and persuasion.

That is why, tonight, I am here with my partner, Johan van Vloten. We have been together for 37 years. By today's standards, that is a pretty stable relationship. Certainly, it has been a great blessing in my life. Why it should be seen by anyone as a threat to them or to society, I cannot fathom. But things are changing, as this celebration indicates.

I honour the police officers who, in 1996, established the first Gay Liaison Scheme in the AFP. Not all of them were gay or gay identifying. But they were proponents of equality and service for all citizens, regardless of their sexuality, including in the police service

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itself. They made a difference. By 1997, the GLLO network was established by that name. It has reached out to the GLBTI community ever since. I am even getting used to using the word "queer" - such an insult in my early youth. By taking over the words of hate, such as "queer", perhaps we will devalue them in the mouths of others.

It would not have been all that easy ten years ago to take this leadership role. Yet it was done by brave, honest and dedicated officers of the AFP. And it was supported from the top and throughout the service. I do not pretend that all the prejudice and discrimination has been eliminated. We see too much evidence that the opposite is the case. But we can be sure that a start has been made. In the AFP and everywhere else, there will be no turning back.

It is important for gay people to acknowledge the support of their heterosexual friends. None of the big changes that have been made in the last decade and more could have happened without the insight, compassion, kindness and strength of straight friends. So let us acknowledge them. And also realise that different people are at different stages of their journey of understanding about this issue. In Australia, the changes are coming because science and truth will always, ultimately, trump ignorance and prejudice. We have made progress in this country. However, beyond its shores, there is still

much to be done. Australians should be in the vanguard of efforts to spread human rights and respect for human dignity in every land.

I often walk to work at the High Court, passing this College. Early in the morning, I see the gathering numbers of new recruits and of long-serving officers in training here, at the cutting edge of policing in Australia. I am glad that this celebration coincides with a function to welcome new recruits who begin their lives of service to the community in the AFP. Some of them, entering this room, will probably have wondered where they were. Certainly, fifteen and twenty years ago, and more, there would have been nothing like this.

We have to admit that people who go into law and policing sometimes have elements in their personality that make them a little more conservative than others in society. Sometimes, dare I say it, there may be an element of rigidity - a thirst for order and authority. But there is one redeeming quality of law and policing that shines through it all. This is an ultimate dedication to the rule of law and to upholding the individual worth of each human being. In law and policing we are there to serve our fellow citizens. We are dedicated to doing so without prejudice or discrimination. No one gets a fee kick, in court or anywhere else, because they are gay. But no one should suffer any discrimination or disadvantage on that ground either. We have the privilege of serving in professions committed to the principle of equal justice under law. That means equal justice to

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all. Men and women. Christian, Islamic and no religion at all. Tall and short. Young and old. White and black. Straight and gay.