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New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

Apology to the Participants of the 1978 Mardi Gras

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All the way from the Blue Mountains or, as some have renamed them, the Pink Mountains, I add my voice to the many today who have said sorry to those people arrested by the State of New South Wales in 1978 for fighting for equality, acceptance and the right to have pride in themselves.

It is long overdue that this Parliament apologises for its part in a long history of oppression and marginalisation of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning [LGBTIQ] communities.

Not only are we sorry that the arrests of the 1978 marchers occurred, we are sorry that this Parliament took so long to abolish the bigoted legislation that criminalised homosexuality.

Often politicians style themselves as leaders—of government, community or society. And yet, rather than being the work of politicians, in the first place it took the leadership of brave campaigners from amongst the Sydney community to push for legislative change that would ultimately decriminalise homosexuality in New South Wales in 1984.

The arrest of those campaigners on 24 June 1978 was wrong.

It was wrong that they were persecuted socially, in their workplaces and in the media.

It was wrong that the Sydney Morning Herald, an organ of this city's establishment, published the names of those arrested that night.

So too it remains wrong that people in the LGBTIQ community remain the target of vilification and violence in the city, in our regions and in the bush.

It remains wrong that young LGBTIQ people in our schools are disproportionately bullied and harassed.

It remains wrong that some politicians, self-styled leaders, continue to undermine the safety and mental health of LGBTIQ youths in our schools.

It remains wrong that members of our LGBTIQ community are overrepresented in suicide and mental health statistics.

I stand in this place as an ally of the LGBTIQ community against any politician who thinks that there is a place in our Parliament for homophobia and bigotry.

I acknowledge the work of my colleagues in the other place, Penny Sharpe and former member of the Legislative Council Helen Westwood.

Today not only do I apologise for the unjust and immoral arrests of the 78ers—social justice campaigners fighting for equality and for what was right then and what is right now—but I call upon politicians in this place as well as those in the Federal Parliament to finish the job the 78ers started.

I thank the 78ers.

You broke ground on this issue and wore the consequences imposed upon you by a Parliament, a society and a city establishment which did not see that yours was a just and long-overdue fight.

Not only do I apologise to you alongside my parliamentary colleagues today, but I congratulate and I thank you.