

Resolution of Council

23 March 2026

Item 13.8

Concerns Regarding Governance and Political Censorship by Mardi Gras Board

The original motion was moved by Councillor Thompson and seconded by Councillor Ellsmore.

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

- (i) the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras is one of the world's most longstanding celebrations of pride, grounded in a rich history as a political protest for queer rights;
- (ii) the first Mardi Gras in 1978 began as a street festival with the aim of attracting non-politically engaged lesbians and gay men and with participants being encouraged to dress colourfully in fancy dress, "the more outrageous the better";
- (iii) this festival commenced at Taylor Square at around 10pm on Saturday 24 June 1978 and proceeded peacefully down Oxford Street with people in bars being encouraged to join the procession and several people doing so;
- (iv) when this street festival arrived at Whitlam Square, police refused to allow participants to enter Hyde Park, where organisers planned to hold a rally before people peacefully dispersed;
- (v) at this point many participants proceeded down College Street, up William Street into Kings Cross, with some participants describing this as taking on the character of a protest march;
- (vi) once in Kings Cross, following a march for queer civil rights, NSW police descended upon rally-goers, hemmed in marchers, violently arresting 53 people, and beating some of them, dozens of people with the names of those arrested being published prominently on page 3 of the Sydney Morning Herald on 26 June 1978, effectively outing many of them;

- (vii) the following year, thousands of people took part in a second Mardi Gras; marched in solidarity, a tradition since memorialised each year;
- (viii) in 1980, following three well attended community meetings and extensive and robust debate, lesbians and gay men voted to move Mardi Gras to the end of summer as a “celebration of gay lifestyles”, with one aim being to broaden participation in the Parade from all sections of an emerging community;
- (ix) in the years that followed, Mardi Gras grew in size and support, successfully combining celebration with advocacy for significant reform, include repeal of anti-gay laws and marriage equality;
- (x) during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, Mardi Gras played a major role in the community’s response, including inspiring resilience, resolve, hope and optimism;
- (xi) however, throughout the decades since 1978 tensions between NSW Police and the LGBTIQ+ community have persisted through a series of homicides, homophobic and transphobic attacks, often at gay cruising spots and on queer and trans sex workers, and the NSW Police’s inadequate response. Many of these crimes remain unsolved to this day;
- (xii) Police handling of these crimes was exposed in 2022 Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crime by Justice John Sackar which found that “...the magnitude of the historical problem, and the harm it has done to the LGBTIQ community, has not been adequately understood and acknowledged by the NSWPF...” Justice Sackar also noted that Police participation in the Inquiry was “adversarial and unnecessarily defensive”. This reaffirms the continued need for Mardi Gras as a platform for both protest and dialogue;
- (xiii) in 1994, the then Mardi Gras president said of the annual Mardi Gras Parade and Festival “It’s ours, we own it and we use it to celebrate who we are.”
- (xiv) the City of Sydney has a long history of supporting Mardi Gras as a principal funder, as a friend and supporter of the LGBTIQ+ community recognising the political, cultural and historical significance of the parade;
- (xv) this is in line with the City’s longstanding position of standing in solidarity with the queer community and protecting the right to protest;
- (xvi) in 2026 a float in the parade, Pride In Protest, was banned from marching under the parade participants terms and conditions. They were the only float banned under this policy, resulting in a dispute within Mardi Gras;
- (xvii) in providing support, the City has long respected the LGBTIQ+ community’s autonomy and recognised that the community should govern its own affairs, set its own priorities and resolve its internal debates, and that this respect for its autonomy extends to the community’s organisations;
- (xviii) the City also understands that there are varying views within the LGBTIQ+ community about its governance and priorities and that these varying views have long been the subject of robust and sometimes heated debate; and

- (xix) in keeping with the City and Council being a friend and supporter of the LGBTIQ+ community, rather than being of the LGBTIQ+ community, Council should not take sides in these debates or support a particular view about the community's governance and priorities.

The amended motion was carried unanimously.

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