

**Item No:** C0521(2) Item 22

**Subject:** NOTICE OF MOTION: 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF CAMP NSW

Council at its meeting on 11 May 2021 resolved that the matter be deferred to the meeting to be held on 24 May 2021.

**From:** The Mayor, Councillor Darcy Byrne

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**MOTION:**

**THAT Council:**

- 1. Notes that this year marks the 50th anniversary the founding of Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP Inc), one of the first gay and lesbian rights organisations in Australia;**
- 2. Notes that the first formal meeting of CAMP Inc was held in St John's church hall in Balmain; and**
- 3. Receives a report on how it can best commemorate the founding of CAMP Inc. This report should look at whether Council can install a commemorative plaque at or close to St John's Church in Balmain or at or close to 393 Darling Street, Balmain.**

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**Background**

Unlike the 1969 New York Stonewall Inn riots, Australia's LGBTQIA+ history of emerging rights, didn't begin at a bar, pub or inn, it began with a small group of courageous women and men. They appeared in two Australian newspaper articles, on 10 and 19 September 1970. John Ware and Christabel Poll announced the founding of the Campaign Against Moral Persecution – known as CAMP Inc, or CAMP NSW.

Fifty years ago, the foundation stone, so to speak, was laid for what today is called the LGBTQIA+ community in Australia when CAMP Inc was founded. The Campaign "lived" its entire life in the then Leichhardt Municipality now the Inner West Council area.

On 9 January 1971 about 90 lesbians, gay men and some heterosexual supporters met in St John's church hall in Balmain for the first meeting of the Campaign Against Moral Persecution or CAMP Inc, Australia's first homosexual rights organisation. Soon after Sydney's CAMP Inc was establishing it became national with branches in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, and Perth. The organisation's name changed to CAMP NSW.

That same year, CAMP established its first clubrooms at 393 Darling Street, Balmain, a grand building, designed by colonial architect, Edmund Blackett, opposite the Balmain Police Station, the then Police Boys' Club (now called PCYC) near the local RSL branch and next door to the Balmain Fire Station.

CAMP had its own journal *CAMP Ink*. The first issue was published in November 1970 and produced at the 393 Darling Street, Balmain clubrooms. The journal was for so many the only link they had with their "hidden" community. It was posted to CAMP members in plain brown wrappers to protect their identity and not "outing" them.

CAMP Inc organised, at its Balmain clubroom, the first ever 6 October 1971 demonstration of lesbians and homosexuals in Australia. At Liberal party headquarters in Ash Street, Sydney. It

was the first “mass” coming out publicly in Australia of about 50-60 lesbians and homosexuals. This was the first time a group (for the time, 1971, a large one) of lesbians and homosexuals who were photographed publicly. And women/lesbians demonstrating about and supporting a male specific issue i.e. homosexual law reform.

In 1972 the ABC national TV’s *Chequerboard* program – today’s *Australian Story* – approached CAMP wanting to televise a social documentary about an openly lesbian and male homosexual couple. Sue Wills and Gaby Antolovich participated along with Peter “Bon” Bonsall-Boone and his partner Peter de Waal. Bon and Peter’s segment was filmed at their Balmain home, and CAMP’s Darling Street Balmain clubrooms. Bon and Peter became the first male couple to kiss on national TV in Australia. Consequently, Bon was sacked for coming out gay publicly and challenging a homophobic society.

On 13 April 1973, the first volunteer homosexual telephone help line – Phone-A-Friend – was officially launched at Bon and Peter’s Balmain home. Over the years, CAMP’s enduring entity has had various incarnations. But, 48 years on, it still exists – now called the Twenty10/Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service – supporting, counselling, assisting, enriching, and empowering the multi-faceted LGBTQIA+ community in many and varied ways.

Bon – who died in 2017, was posthumously – and Peter were awarded, a 2017 Queen’s Birthday Honour for extensive voluntary services to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Over the years CAMP NSW conducted numerous public education sessions, with, to name just a few: First Year Sydney University Medical Students; Police Cadets; Sydney’s Callan Park Psychiatric Nurses; Family Life Movement Counsellors; Family Court Counsellors, and the long list goes on.

From the mid-1970s until 1981 CAMP ran the first not-for-profit volunteer LGBBTQIA+ coffee-shop in Sydney. It was open most weeknights and a heaven for many in a vast commercial exploitative, alienating environment. When open there always was a volunteer on hand to welcome those who were living in their closets or new on the scene. Apart from the coffee-shop, Phone-A-Friend, a meeting room, and library were housed at the CAMP Centre at 33a Glebe Point, Glebe, in the than Leichhardt Municipality.

1975 International Women’s Year brought great joy for CAMP NSW. It prepared a detailed submission at Glebe’s CAMP Centre and applied for a \$30,000 Federal Government funding to conduct seminars and other women’s liberation activities. The overall aim was to highlight women being considered second-class citizens and female homosexuals doubly so. CAMP received a \$4,000 grant – this was the first ever government grant to a lesbian/homosexual organisation – much to the disapproval of organisations such as the Country Women’s Association, but more so from religious institutions, organisations and groups.

The naming of the now world-famous Sydney Mardi Gras came about and was partly organised at a mid-1978 CAMP executive meeting, held at the CAMP Centre in Glebe. Margaret (Marg) McMann (Annandale resident in Leichhardt Municipality at the time) and Ron Austin were both CAMP executive members. Ron suggested: “Let’s have a night street party in Oxford Street.” Marg replied: “Ron, we’ll call it a Mardi Gras!”

During 1975/76 CAMP NSW’s political action group developed, at CAMP Centre, Glebe, a very detailed and far-sighted submission to the Royal Commission on Human Relationships. Michael Clohesy, CAMP’s secretary at the time, did a TV interview about CAMP’s submission. He was sacked from his Catholic teaching job. Subsequently, the NSW Catholic hierarchy attempted to stop CAMP from presenting its oral and written submission. Eventually the Royal Commission ruled that CAMP could and should be heard.

CAMP NSW initiated and held a tribunal on “Homosexuals and Discrimination” during November 1976. The tribunal’s public hearings took place at the Sir John Clancy Auditorium

UNSW. Forty-four varying discrimination cases were presented to the Tribunal. Its findings became a starting point for introduction of anti-discrimination legislation.

I want to also acknowledge the contributions of long-term Balmain resident, Alexander "Lex" Watson, a founding CAMP member, who died in 2014. He was posthumously awarded a Queen's Birthday Honour for his work as part of CAMP, the Gay Rights Lobby, and as the first president of ACON.

Since then, CAMP has had a hand in almost every major step progression for the LGBTQIA+ community in Australia, including the decriminalisation of male acts of homosexuality between consenting adults in 1984, and national marriage equality.

I want to offer my sincere thanks to every member of CAMP Inc. These individuals have made extraordinary personal sacrifices, in their work, their personal life and in the community to propel the LGBTQIA+ movement further, and open doors for others.

CAMP envisaged a future where lesbian and gay people would be able to walk proudly hand in hand in this city, head held high with pride, without fear of violence, discrimination, or hate. While we still have more to do, this vision has been realised.

#### **Officer's Comments:**

#### **Comment from Acting Director City Living:**

It is proposed that the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CAMP NSW be acknowledged by a commemorative heritage plaque to be located between the Balmain Town Hall and the historic green house, which is across the road from 393 Darling Street Balmain.

The proposed location and plaque concept has been discussed with representatives from the Camp NSW who are in support of this plan.

The design, manufacture, and installation of the plaque can be covered by existing operational costs.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

Nil.