

30 July 2020

Commission urges focus on safety, not scapegoating

The Queensland Human Rights Commission is very concerned that the names and photographs of two young women accused of breaching Queensland's coronavirus restrictions were published by media outlets this week.

"Other Queenslanders and people from interstate caught breaching restrictions have not been publicly identified, even when their activities have led to infections or outbreaks – including the Noosa birthday party cluster and many other similar situations," says Queensland Human Rights Commissioner, Scott McDougall.

"Similarly, the guards allegedly at the centre of Melbourne's second wave of infections (still recording record daily increases and multiple fatalities) have not been publicly named or had their photographs released, nor have those working in aged care facilities and meatworks where clusters have now appeared.

"The right to privacy should apply equally to everyone."

The Commissioner says that community anger at the possibility of a new wave of cases is "completely understandable", but that identifying these two young women publicly does nothing to help curb a potential outbreak or to bring the community together to help do that. It does, however, create the potential for harm.

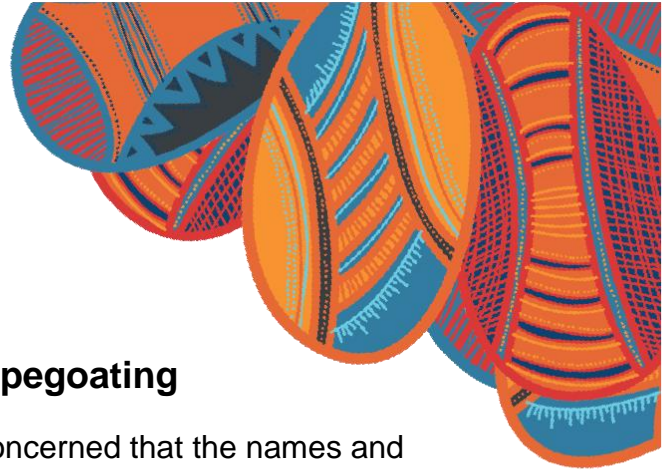
"Already we have seen comments to 'deport them', 'send them back to where they come from', and worse, alongside appallingly hyperbolic coverage from some media outlets branding them with terms usually reserved for people accused of treason and other high-level crimes. Pictures of their homes have allegedly been posted to local residents' groups on social media," says Mr McDougall.

The Commission has already heard from members of the African community in Brisbane who are beginning to experience a backlash.

"Some members of the community are already reporting abusive text messages and social media harassment, others are worried about their children being harassed or abused on their way to and from school.

"I understand that people are frustrated and angry and fearful of another wave of infections. We can be angry at individuals for disregarding the rules, for being dishonest or reckless or putting other people at risk.

"But we cannot allow this to create a second wave of COVID-related racial hostility. The actions of just two people cannot and should not be used as an excuse to harass or



abuse an entire community – the vast majority of which has, like the rest of Queensland, tried to comply with the rules,” says Mr McDougall.

Queensland’s Health Minister confirmed this morning the two 19-year-olds will face court over allegations they lied about their travel and other activities.

“These young women will now face the consequences for breaching restrictions – as they should. But we saw the media commentary blaming migrant communities in part for the second wave of outbreaks in Victoria. We do not want or need a similar commentary here,” says Mr McDougall.

“We need to take care of ourselves and each other and prioritise the safety of our communities. We are stronger together.”

If you have witnessed or experienced racially-motivated abuse or harassment, you can report it to the Queensland Human Rights Commission on their website at www.qhrc.qld.gov.au.

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