

**Royal Commission  
into the Management of Police Informants**

**STATEMENT OF Officer Esplanade**

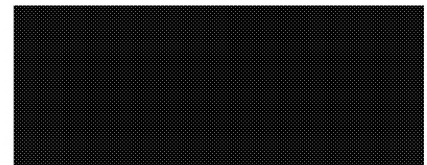
1. My full name is Officer Esplanade I am Inspector of Police and am currently the [REDACTED] of the [REDACTED].
2. I make this statement in response to a request from the Royal Commission into the Management of Police informants dated 23 May 2019. This statement is produced to the Royal Commission in response to a Notice to Produce.
3. I have prepared this statement without access to my official police diaries and contemporaneous notes. I am informed that extensive searches have been made for my diaries and contemporaneous notes from the relevant period but that in spite of those searches, my diaries have not been found.

**Educational background and employment history (question 1)**

4. My educational background and employment history are set out in the annexure to my statement.

**Investigations I was involved in which had dealings with Ms Gobbo (question 2)**

5. Between 2001 and 2005, I was a Detective Senior Constable at [REDACTED] CIB. During that period, I was involved in many investigations and frequently attended the courts as a police informant or to give evidence. Ms Gobbo acted for a number of accused persons in relation to those investigations.
6. Between around 2005 and 2012, I was a Detective Sergeant at the State Surveillance Unit (SSU) and was in charge of a surveillance team. I have set out in my answer to question 3 my role in an investigation that was conducted by the Purana Taskforce which had dealings with Ms Gobbo.



7. The SSU is a specialised unit, which provides surveillance for the whole of Victoria Police. It is possible that Ms Gobbo had dealings in other investigations in which I was involved, however, I have no knowledge of this.

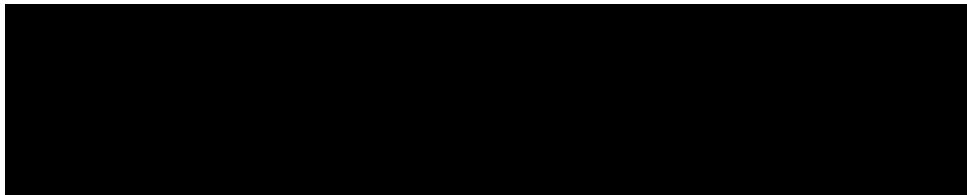
**Use of Ms Gobbo as a human source (questions 3-8)**

Question 3

8. In around 2008, I was leading a surveillance team that had been tasked with surveillance of a high profile target on behalf of the Purana Taskforce. The target was under surveillance for a number of months, although I do not recall precisely when my team started or concluded on this job.
9. At some point in early 2008, I recall conducting surveillance on the target and a number of his associates at a restaurant in Carlton. Ms Gobbo was present. As I describe in my answer to question 6 below, I knew Ms Gobbo by this point because I had met her on numerous occasions when I was a Detective Senior Constable at [REDACTED] CIB.
10. As Ms Gobbo sat down to lunch, I did not know that she was providing information or assistance to Victoria Police. I was surprised to see her there with this target and his associates because from our observations it appeared to be a social lunch, not a business lunch. While I was surprised about Ms Gobbo's attendance, I gave it little thought. Surveillance is high risk and I was responsible for a team of officers. There was no time to reflect on why Ms Gobbo was dining with this target and his associates and I do not believe that I did so.
11. As the operation unfolded, my team and I exchanged frequent updates over radio. I have a specific recollection receiving a report from a team member that Nicola Gobbo had left the dining table, gone outside and made a short phone call, before returning to the restaurant.
12. Almost immediately after I received that report, I received a phone call from Detective Senior Sergeant Gutske of the Purana Taskforce in which he provided me with intelligence to the effect that one of the associates was about to leave the

restaurant and head to another location. DSS Gutske requested that my team switch surveillance to provide physical surveillance of that associate.

13. Within minutes, I received a report from my team over the radio that an associate of our target was leaving the restaurant.
14. These three events took place in a very short space of time and as they unfolded, it became obvious to me and to my crew that it was Ms Gobbo who had provided the information to Victoria Police that led us to change target. I directed my team to conduct physical surveillance of that associate, as instructed by DSS Gutske. We followed him to a restaurant in East Brunswick.
15. I have a vivid memory of these events because they were so extraordinary. I distinctly recall discussion among my crew on the radio about Ms Gobbo and the fact that she was potentially a source. My team and I had no knowledge of the kind of information or assistance Ms Gobbo had provided to Victoria Police, or who from within Victoria Police was handling her. But there was no plausible explanation for how DSS Gutske could have learned that the associate was about to leave the table, other than from someone present at the restaurant, and the only person we had observed leaving the restaurant to make a phone call was Ms Gobbo.
16. As this surveillance operation unfolded, I identified risks both to Ms Gobbo and to Victoria Police because surveillance operatives on my team had worked out that she was a source. I considered that the officers who were handling her — who I did not know — had either not considered this risk, or had no mitigation strategy to appropriately deal with it. I raised these concerns on the day, through my discussions with DSS Gutske. I believe that I may also have discussed this issue with my superior officers within the SSU, although I have no specific recollection of such discussions.
17. One of my concerns was the integrity of the surveillance [REDACTED] It was standard practice in the SSU to [REDACTED] each surveillance activity, which was [REDACTED] at the end of each shift. [REDACTED]

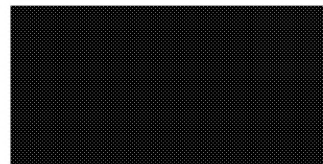


█ I do not recall whether this was resolved during the shift.

18. In the course of preparing this statement, I have been shown an entry from the Source Management Log dated 14 March 2008, which relates to surveillance my crew was conducting on the same high profile target referred to above.<sup>1</sup> While I cannot be certain without access to my diary or the relevant surveillance █ I believe that the surveillance referred to in the 14 March 2008 Source Management Log occurred after the surveillance activity that I have set out in detail above. I believe this to be the case for a number of reasons:
19. *First*, the Source Management Log entry is referring to surveillance that took place during the evening, whereas the surveillance that I referred to above took place at lunch time.
20. *Second*, the Source Management Log entry refers to our crew as having “lost” our target. This did not occur during the surveillance referred to above. Rather, we were instructed to change target.
21. *Third*, the Source Management Log entry refers to the surveillance as an “*intell run*”. This is not how I would describe the surveillance we undertook of the lunch in Carlton.
22. Without access to my diary or the surveillance █ I cannot comment on the accuracy of the Source Management Log, save than to say that while the events recorded in the log may have occurred, they appear to be out of order.
23. It is probable that we did lose contact with the high profile target and I have no reason to doubt that I would have called DSC Niblett (presuming that he was the allocated Purana contact for that shift) to ask him to contact Ms Gobbo’s source

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<sup>1</sup> VPL.2000.0001.9236.



handler to try to get the target's location. It is unlikely that I would have contacted DSC Niblett to make such a request if I had already had a discussion with DI Gutske in which I had been told to cease surveillance.

24. It is only through reading the Source Management Log entry for the purpose of this statement that I have learned that DSC Niblett did not know that Ms Gobbo was a human source until this conversation. I would not have asked him to contact Ms Gobbo's handlers if I thought that he did not know of her status. This is exactly the kind of risk that I had identified when I first learned that Ms Gobbo was a human source and I expected that Ms Gobbo's handlers would have had protocols in place to prevent her status being inadvertently revealed in this way.
25. Regrettably, the series of questions that I had asked during and immediately after this surveillance about Ms Gobbo's status were either misinterpreted, not fully understood or even discounted. I was criticised by Inspector Glenn Woolfe for seeking this information, and was asked to explain why I was asking so many questions about Ms Gobbo's registration status. I recall discussing the matter with Superintendent Biggin sometime after these events took place and I have given it no further thought until preparing this statement.

#### Question 4

26. Save than in the context of the surveillance I have referred to in my answer to question 3 above, I have no specific knowledge of who within Victoria Police or any other agency was aware that Ms Gobbo was providing information or assistance to Victoria Police. To the best of my knowledge, none of my crew knew anything more of the information or assistance provided to Victoria Police by Ms Gobbo.

#### Question 5

27. I do not know who authorised Ms Gobbo's use as a human source. I do not know who continued to authorise the use of Ms Gobbo as a human source.

#### Question 6

28. Between 2001 and 2005, I was a Detective Senior Constable at [REDACTED] CIB. During that period, I frequently attended the court precinct as an informant during



the committal or trial process. I came to know Ms Gobbo as a defence barrister and saw her on numerous occasions connected with my official duties.

29. On a number of occasions, Ms Gobbo was acting for the accused person in cases in which I was the informant. On other occasions, I would simply run into her in the court precinct. In those interactions, I always found Ms Gobbo to be professional and pleasant. My recollection was that she was pragmatic and always acted in the best interests of her clients but was reasonable to deal with in all my interactions with her.
30. In the same time period, I would run into Ms Gobbo from time to time in a social setting. These interactions occurred in the context of me meeting with friends and simply bumping into her in the same venue. I always found her to be friendly. Our conversations were never more detailed than small talk.

Questions 7 and 8

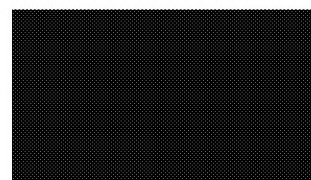
31. Save than for the single piece of information that I refer to in my answer to question 3, above, I had no knowledge of any information or assistance provided to Victoria Police where the source of the information or assistance was Ms Gobbo.

**Concerns as to the use of Ms Gobbo as a human source (questions 9 to 11)**

32. I am not aware of any concerns being raised as to the use of a legal practitioner or specifically, Ms Gobbo, as a human source. I am not aware of any discussions within Victoria Police about the obligation of disclosure in relation to material concerning the use of Ms Gobbo as a human source.

**Other relevant matters (questions 12-14)**

33. I am not aware of any other human sources who provided information or assistance to Victoria Police who were the subject of legal obligations of confidentiality or privilege.
34. I have received training on the topics set out in question 13 from time to time. Detail of the training I have received is set out in the annexure.



35. For the purpose of preparing this statement, I have been shown a contact report between Detective Acting Inspector O'Connell, <sup>Lloyd-DS</sup> and Ms Gobbo dated 26 June 2009 in which Ms Gobbo refers to a journalist as having me "in his pocket".<sup>2</sup> In fact, the opposite was true. My recollection is that another police officer had leaked false and misleading information to the journalist about me and the events that I describe in response to question 3, above. No article was published and the matter went no further although it was extremely upsetting and caused my family and I great harm.

16 December 2019

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature area. At the bottom left of this box, the text "Officer Esplanade" is printed in white.

**Officer Esplanade**

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<sup>2</sup> VPL.0005.0038.0263.

### Annexure

1. I joined Victoria Police in 1989 after completing an apprenticeship as [REDACTED]
2. A summary of the major roles I have undertaken and my progression through the ranks is as follows:
  - 1990 – 1997: Constable, [REDACTED] General duties;
  - 1997 – 2001: Surveillance Operative Intelligence & Covert Support Unit;
  - 2001 – 2005: Detective Senior Constable, [REDACTED] CIU;
  - 2005 – 2012: Sergeant, Operational Supervision [REDACTED] Officer in Charge [REDACTED] Surveillance Team Leader and Senior Supervisor Intelligence & Covert Support Unit;
  - 2013 – 2014: Senior Sergeant, Placement in [REDACTED]
  - 2014 – 2019: Inspector, [REDACTED] Investigation & Response, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
3. I have undertaken Victoria Police qualifications and training including:
  - Advanced Traffic Studies (1993);
  - Surveillance Training School (1998);
  - Field Investigation (2000);
  - Detective Training School (2002);
  - Investigation Management Program (2010);
  - Senior Sergeant Qualifying Program (2014);
  - Inspector Qualifying Program (2017);
  - Diploma in Business Management.