**Royal Commission
into Family Violence**

# WITNESS STATEMENT OF DR MICHAEL FLOOD

I, Michael Flood, Sociologist, of Northfields Avenue, Wollongong, in the State of New South Wales, say as follows:

1.      I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.

## Current role

2.      I am a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Australian Research Council Future Fellow at the University of Wollongong. My current research focus is interpersonal violence and its prevention, particularly with reference to men and masculinities.

## Background and qualifications

3.      I hold a Doctorate of Philosophy in Gender and Sexuality Studies from the Australian National University. I have published widely on matters related to gender, sexuality and interpersonal violence, including on topics such as men's engagement in violence prevention, fathering, pornography, anti-feminist men's groups, and homophobia. Attached to this statement and marked "**MF1**" is a copy of my curriculum vitae which includes my publication record.

4.      I have an extensive record of community and professional engagement. I have given 52 keynote or invited addresses to professional, advocacy, and academic audiences, including 11 to international gatherings. I have made a significant contribution to the prevention of men's violence against women. This includes the following:

4.1.    I wrote the report which informed VicHealth's influential prevention framework *Preventing Violence Before It Occurs* (2007);

4.2. I co-authored significant reports on national standards for the primary prevention of sexual assault and on respectful relationships education in school; and

4.3. I have provided expert advice to the NRL, AFL, and the Australia Defence Forces.

5. In 2006, I was awarded a NSW Violence Against Women Prevention Award in recognition of my efforts in raising community and professional awareness of the issue of violence prevention.

6. I was recently engaged by Our Watch to co-contribute to the development of the National Framework for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children.

7. I have an extensive record of scholarly publication, with a total of 30 journal articles, 20 book chapters, two edited collections, and 22 research monographs, as well as over 80 other publications. My research has attracted close to $1.5 million of external funding, including a recent prestigious ARC Future Fellowship (4 years of full-time funding, awarded to "outstanding researchers") for research on men's roles in violence prevention.

8. My research has documented growing efforts to engage men and boys in the prevention of violence against women, assessed the shortcomings and challenges of this work, and identified directions for effective practice. I have made further, significant contributions to scholarship on domestic and sexual violence by examining the factors which shape attitudes to these forms of violence, assessing particular strategies including bystander intervention and settings-based prevention, and contributing to debates regarding violence's prevalence and patterning. These contributions sit in the context of my wider work on the social organisation of gender and sexuality, in which I have advanced scholarly knowledge regarding men and masculinities.

**Engaging men and boys in prevention of violence against women**

9. The field of violence prevention has seen a shift in the last decade towards primary prevention activities which explicitly engage men and boys. There is a compelling argument for the need to engage men in prevention of men's violence against women. Prevention activities need to address attitudes, relations and behaviours of men and boys in general.

10.     Effective prevention activities require both *universal* and *targeted* strategies.

    10.1.   *Universal strategies* try to shift pervasive social norms about masculinities and physical and sexual violence. These social norms can be shifted through social marketing campaigns and programs such as respectful relationships programs in schools.

    10.2.   *Targeted strategies* need to focus on the domains we know to be particularly dangerous in terms of family and sexual violence, such as sporting codes, university residences and workplaces where we know that tolerance for violence is particularly strong and perpetration of violence is particularly high.

11.     There is a growing body of robust empirical evidence about what strategies are effective in preventing men's violence against women and children. A series of systematic reviews published in the last five years documents that particular strategies can lower rates of violence perpetration and victimisation and can have a positive impact on the risk and protective factors associated with violence. Several elements are seen as features of good practice in violence prevention. Interventions should be:

    11.1.  *informed:* based on both an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding violence and a theory of change;

    11.2.  *comprehensive:* they use multiple strategies, in multiple settings, and at multiple levels;

    11.3.  *engaged:* they involve effective forms of delivery which engage participants; and

    11.4.  *relevant:* to the communities and contexts in which they are delivered.

12.     There have been three international reviews of the effectiveness of men's violence prevention interventions in the past decade. There is a growing body of evidence from various countries that interventions amongst men and boys in particular, and interventions in general, are more effective if they explicitly address gender, that is, if they address the meaning and norms attached to gender and explicitly seek to transform gender relations between men and women and between men. The research indicates that interventions which address and seek to transform gender are more effective than those interventions which do not (whether because they reinforce traditional constructions of gender, are gender-neutral, or recognise

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women's and men's different needs but do not go beyond this). This is supported by two recent reviews, one of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls and the other of interventions to reduce HIV risks and violence with heterosexually-active men.

13. In my view, interventions need to address gender inequalities as they are at the root of family violence. Family violence is not reducible to gender inequalities, but gender inequalities are foundational, and addressing these inequalities is a key prevention strategy.

14. This means that whether it is a face to face program, a social marketing campaign or a community mobilisation campaign, interventions need to involve men and boys in critical reflection on what it means to be a man and shift some of the meanings and practices which are traditionally associated with masculinity. We need to create safe spaces in schools, sporting clubs, university residences and elsewhere in the community where men can discuss and reflect on these things.

15. By masculinity, I mean the meanings attached to being a man and the social organisation of men's lives and relations. This does not just include attitudes and values, but men's practices and interactions with others – how men's lives are actually organized, how they learn to treat each other and to treat women.

16. In my view, one of the problems in the violence prevention field is that the focus so far has been on attitudes. Attitudes are influential, but not the only determinant. Violence prevention efforts must seek to change not only individual attitudes and community norms, but also behaviours, social and sexual relations, and the structural conditions that perpetuate violence. Interventions aimed at attitudinal and cultural change must be accompanied by changes in social practices and structural relations if violence in relationships and families is to be undermined and prevented. For example, various forms of gender inequality – such as women's economic dependence on men – are risk factors for family violence. They are related to attitudes but not reducible to attitudes.

17. Aside from the need to be gender transformative, there are key learnings from other primary prevention initiatives which apply equally to interventions designed specifically to engage men and boys.

18. For example, duration and intensity of programs makes a difference. We know that one-off, short duration programs are ineffective in changing attitudes and behaviour.

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Similarly, stand-alone social marketing and communications campaigns which don't have community development input are also ineffective. Multi component programs which combine multiple prevention strategies are more likely to generate change, according to recent international reviews, although it is challenging to figure out what components are most important or what the most desirable package of interventions is.

19. As the 'engaging men' field develops, some assumptions have become influential even though they are not necessarily supported by evidence. One is that the best people to engage and work with men are other men. Some reviews find that separate-sex programs are more effective than mixed-sex programs, while others report more mixed patterns of change. When it comes to the educators or facilitators, the use of male educators has particular benefits. But there is limited evidence about whether the sex of the program facilitator makes a difference to program outcomes. Men may listen more readily to other men, but it's also the case that many men's initial sensitisation to the issue of violence against women came from listening to women and women's experience.

**Strategies of prevention**

20. The most common strategy for delivering prevention initiatives is face to face education. If done well (and this is a big 'if'), face-to-face educational interventions are an effective strategy of violence prevention and reduction. The evaluation evidence shows that a range of programs have produced declines in factors associated with violence such as attitudes and beliefs, and a much smaller number show evidence of reductions in violence perpetration and/or victimisation.

21. Communication and social marketing is a second important form of prevention activity. There is a small body of evidence that social marketing campaigns can produce positive change in the attitudes associated with men's perpetration of violence against women, and evidence that such interventions have greater impact if they are more intensive, involve exposure to messaging through more than one component, and/or are complemented by on-the-ground strategies.

22. Community development and community mobilisation are important but under-utilised strategies. There is good evidence of the effectiveness among women and girls of economic empowerment efforts and social empowerment interventions with vulnerable groups. Community mobilisation shows increasing promise, with a recent

review documenting that well-designed interventions of this kind (such as SASA! and Raising Voices) can have a positive impact upon violence perpetration or victimisation. In relation to men and boys, mobilising them as advocates in networks and groups, in partnership with women and women's groups, therefore is a vital strategy.

23. Another important prevention strategy is changing organisations and institutions. One form of this for which there is good evidence is whole-of-school approaches in schools, with a recent review finding good evidence of positive impact on risk factors for violence. Whole-of-organisation approaches are applicable to a wide variety of other organisations, from workplaces to sporting codes.

24. Sometimes the popularity of particular prevention strategies is out of step with the actual evidence base regarding their effectiveness. One example is bystander intervention. Bystander intervention programs aim to engage individuals as bystanders to other people's violence or violence-supportive comments or jokes, and may use face to face education strategies and social marketing strategies to do so. However, of 13 or so published evaluations, only one showed a positive impact on perpetration (of the studies which included measures of behaviour) and there was mixed impact on the risk factors for violence. In my view, bystander intervention does have merit, but it doesn't have a substantial body of evidence behind it yet.

25. One of the key challenges in delivering primary prevention initiatives is minimizing hostile and defensive reactions from men. Often men feel they are being stereotyped as batterers or rapists. In my view, we need to minimize hostile and defensive reactions by emphasising men's positive role in stopping family violence, by acknowledging their own victimization (which is largely at the hands of other men), and by creating safe spaces for men to reflect and learn. I am in favour of acknowledging that men and boys are sometimes the victims of family violence perpetrated by women, and that men are also subject to victimization at the hands of other men. However, I do not subscribe to the view that one in three men is a victim of family violence, as espoused by Men's Health Australia, amongst others.

**Male victims of family violence**

26. Men and boys can be victims of family violence, and they deserve the same sympathy and support as female victims. But we do not have to pretend that men

are one-third or one-quarter of the adult victims of intimate partner violence to offer such support.

27. The evidence, from both Australia and overseas, is that the victims of intimate partner violence overwhelmingly are female. Policy and programming therefore should reflect this.

28. Groups who claim that men are '1 in 3' of the victims of family violence do so by drawing only on a particular body of studies which largely use a much-debated method for measuring violence, the Conflict Tactics Scale. This basically focuses on 'counting the blows', and it is widely criticised for neglecting the impact, meaning, history, and context of violence in relationships and families. These groups also cherry-pick from or misrepresent existing data.

29. If we compare adult male and female victims of any form of violence by a partner or ex-partner, women are more likely than men to experience frequent, prolonged, and extreme violence. They are far more likely to be sexually assaulted. They are more likely to be injured, to live in fear, and to suffer other negative impacts for example to do with psychological and emotional harm. Basically, if we think of domestic violence as involving a situation where one partner is subjecting the other partner to a range of tactics of power and control – what I'd call 'domestic violence proper' – then far more women than men are its victims and far more men than women are its perpetrators.

30. Some say that the problem is to do with reporting biases. But the studies among domestic violence victims find that women show higher levels of fear because the violence they're facing is worse, not because they're more willing to report. Both women and men underreport their DV victimisation, and the evidence on whether male victims are less likely than female victims to report being abused is mixed.

31. When it comes to perpetrators, women can be perpetrators of domestic and family violence. And, again, there are gender contrasts. The research shows that women's violence against male partners is far more likely than men's to be in self-defence. Women's violence is more likely than men's to be associated with mental health issues and drug abuse. That doesn't mean it's okay, but it does show that women are less likely than men to be deliberately using power, control, and violence as a way to get power or use power in their relationships.

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32.　　There is more I could say here about the harmful impact of campaigns like "One in Three", but one thing I will say is that it's doing *male* victims of domestic violence a real disservice.

**Respectful relationships programs in schools**

33.　　One widespread strategy of violence prevention is respectful or healthy relationships education in schools. In 2009, I was engaged by VicHealth together with Lara Fergus and Melanie Heenan to write a report for the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (as it then was) entitled "Respectful Relationships Education: Violence Prevention and Respectful Relationships Education in Victorian Secondary Schools" (**Respectful Relationships Report**). Attached to this statement and marked "**MF2**" is a copy of the Respectful Relationships Report.

34.　　In the Respectful Relationships Report, we mapped violence prevention education around Australia and identified best practice principles in violence prevention, intervention and respectful relationships education in schools. The five criteria we identified for good practice in violence prevention and respectful relationships education in schools are:

34.1.　a whole-school approach;

34.2.　a program framework and logic;

34.3.　effective curriculum delivery;

34.4.　relevant, inclusive and culturally sensitive practice; and

34.5.　impact evaluation.

35.　　These good practice criteria apply equally today as they did in 2009. In my view, respectful relationships curricula needs to be embedded in schools around the country and delivered by teachers. While engaging community educators to come in from external organisations and deliver programs may help to build the capacity of teachers in the short-term, it is not going to be as sustainable or effective as a longer-term strategy. Really we want respectful relationships education to be a routine part of the school curriculum, as routine, say, as mathematics. The evidence is that effective programs – particularly those shown to have an impact on actual perpetration and victimisation – have a long duration. I'm thinking, for example, of

Safe Dates, which involved over seven hours of classroom sessions plus some complementary community activities, and the Youth Relationships Project, which involved 18 two-hour sessions over four months. In the same way, among adults, programs with robust evidence of impact include Stepping Stones, a small groups intervention based on something like 12 training sessions with 50 hours of education.

36. One of the challenges to embedding respectful relationships curricula is that there is very little institutional space in schools for new curricula. The curriculum is already very crowded. In this context, it is desirable to embed respectful relationships programs in the existing personal health and development curricula. I think it is possible to have a broader program or strategy about violence prevention, and then at different age levels draw attention to specific forms of violence such as dating violence, racial violence and homophobic violence. For example, programs for primary school age children could focus more generally on violence and bodily autonomy and then in secondary school more content could be built in for teenagers on intimate and sexual relationships. The advantage of this approach is that it teaches young people attitudes, values and skills which encourages them to reject all forms of violence whilst at the same time allowing space to discuss the particular dynamics and risk factors of specific forms of violence. There are differences for example in what factors shape violence in a 16-year-old's relationship, bullying, and homophobic violence.

37. Schools are not the only places where respectful relationships education can take place. One area that has been remarkably underdeveloped in Australia in terms of violence prevention education is universities. It is standard at many American universities to have sexual violence prevention programs as part of the induction for first year students. But in Australia, I know of only one university-based intervention, a relatively weak one, which is now defunct. The various systematic reviews produced in recent years show that well-designed sexual assault prevention education programs in universities can produce positive change, and we should be contemplating a systematic rollout in Australia.

M. Flood

Dr Michael Flood

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