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Transcript

Heaven's Angels

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IAN HENSCHKE: The Rann Government has made much of its assault on outlaw bikie gangs, flagging tough new laws.

Tonight one club speaks out, saying not only do the new proposals defy civil liberties, but the war on bikies hasn't cut drugs on the streets.

We will speak to the Attorney General Michael Atkinson after this report.

SIMON ROYAL: On any measure these men look like members of a fully fledged rough and tough lock up your daughters bikie club.

But with the Longriders, the nature of things doesn't match how they appear.

MACK HAYES: We are a Christian motorcycle club, so I guess for a lot of people those two words put together don't make sense. For us they do. We are fair dinkum about our Christian faith, and we are fair dinkum about our motorcycles and our club.

SIMON ROYAL: The Longriders Club first hit the roads 18 years ago. Currently there are about 20 members.

Mack Hayes is one of the founders, and as he explains, while the Longriders' ethos is radically different from the so-called outlaw clubs, some

things are the same.

MACK HAYES: Well in a structure, it is like an outlaw club, in the sense that we have to earn our colours, they are not ... so we are not a social club. You don't rock up and buy your patch or your colours for \$50.

SHAUN MCGRATH: We are an outreach to people who are on the fringes of the outlaw scene or the motorcycle fraternity. A lot of blokes, they are looking for ways to reconcile riding motorbikes, and also maybe they have got an awakening in their Christian faith.

SIMON ROYAL: In the current climate of the Government's war on bikie gangs, the shootings of four people at Tonic nightclub, and the killing of Brendan Keilar in Melbourne, the Longriders are one of the few willing to speak publicly.

They insist they are not apologists for the other clubs. They will not comment on what caused the clash between the Finks and the Hells Angels at Tonic.

MACK HAYES: We are not willing to speak on behalf of those clubs. We can make some comment about our own experiences, but we won't speak on their behalf.

SIMON ROYAL: But their insight into the bikie world is unique. Mack Hayes and Sean McGrath say in the past they have been under surveillance from the police operation Avatar, and to the best of their knowledge, no Longrider has been arrested through it. But both acknowledge that they could have taken very different roads.

SHAUN MCGRATH: Made some bad choices, and paid the price for that.

SIMON ROYAL: When you say you paid the price, what does that mean?

SHAUN MCGRATH: I was imprisoned.

SIMON ROYAL: Were you a member of what would be called an outlaw club?

SHAUN MCGRATH: I was associated with them.

My first wife died of a heroin overdose, and that affected me quite traumatically, and as a result of that I went looking for ... I just went looking, and I found Jesus.

SIMON ROYAL: But could you perhaps have found something else that might have led you to the path of being an outlaw bikie?

SHAUN MCGRATH: Quite easily, yeah.

MACK HAYES: I was a bit of a scallywag, I suppose. I never was a real bad bastard. I do not think that is my nature, you know. But I played up a bit as a young fella. I've loved my motorcycles as much as the next bloke, done as many hard miles as much as the next bloke. Um, but I haven't been locked up ...

SIMON ROYAL: Is that because you were a good boy, or because you didn't get caught?

MACK HAYES: A bit of both, bit of both.

SIMON ROYAL: There are two main points the Longriders make in this debate.

Contrary to some claims, they argue not all outlaw gang members are criminals.

SHAUN MCGRATH: I have got relatives in clubs and they have got jobs, they have got families, so they are just doing normal stuff. Obviously there's guys that are doing things that they shouldn't, but that is on an individual basis.

MACK HAYES: I've been 30 years around the bike scene, and on the fringes of that culture, and at times in and out of that culture, and my experience is that blokes are in bike clubs for other reasons than criminal activities.

I am not saying that there is not blokes that get caught out doing criminal things. Obviously there is. We would be an idiot to say that does not happen.

SIMON ROYAL: If you aren't engaged in criminal behaviour, if you have got a family and you love your bikes, why would you be a member of an outlaw club?

MACK HAYES: Brotherhood, sense of belonging. Everyone wants to belong. The motorcycles.

SIMON ROYAL: Now the State Government has moved to ban outlaw bikie club members from associating at certain public events. Tougher penalties are proposed specifically for club members who commit crimes, and club colours and insignias would be banned in public.

The Government hasn't taken up suggestions by the Director of Public Prosecutions to use the Hong Kong model of dealing with Triads, which would make membership of an outlaw bikie club illegal.

MACK HAYES: This is where we differ considerably from what Mr Rann is saying, from what Mr Polaris is saying, from what Mr Hyde is saying. People aren't guilty by association. I think that is against civil liberties, and I think it is a social justice issue.

SHAUN MCGRATH: If it applies to everybody it means we can't wear our club colours, once again it is just an infringement on people's civil

liberties.

SIMON ROYAL: Some might argue. well, if you lost your colours, so be it, it is a big bad world out there, and sometimes the innocent need to suffer for the greater good.

MACK HAYES: I would say to them how would they like it if somebody dictated to them how they could dress, or dictated to them about what club they chose to be in.

Where is the end of that? Does that mean that if there are three or four members of a local fishing club get found guilty of a particular criminal offence, that then every member of that fishing club is a criminal?

SIMON ROYAL: It is arguable that being bikies, the Longriders would say that, wouldn't they?

But perhaps their most interesting point comes in fact from their working lives. Mack Hayes helps Aboriginal youths overcome drug and alcohol addiction. Sean McGrath runs welfare services at Saint Luke's Church in Whitmore Square.

Despite intensive targeting of bikies' drug businesses, both say they have seen little change on the streets.

SHAUN MCGRATH: I haven't seen any noticeable levels in the absence of drugs out in the community, they are still there. So, what is happening? Obviously they think they are targeting the wrong people.

SIMON ROYAL: The Longriders know there will be some suspicion about what they are saying, and why. It may make some enemies in other clubs or bring unwanted attention from authorities, but they believe is worth it.

SHAUN MCGRATH: I am no intellect. I know, you know, I probably can't debate with the best of the intellects on issues of law and justice. And I think that there is injustice of saying that all blokes in outlaw clubs are criminals.

IAN HENSCHKE: Simon Royal reporting.

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