

Fearless OMCG prosecutor wins award in US

NSW prosecutor wins global recognition for helping to bring down OMCGs.

Sgt Belinda Hughes was presented with the 2018 Outstanding Prosecution Award by the International Outlaw Motorcycle Gang (OMCG) Investigators Association in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina last month.

Sgt Hughes, who works with her team alongside Criminal Groups Squad investigators, has been recognised for using the law to help stop the violence between the Finks and Nomads OMCGs in Newcastle earlier this year, including applying for Australia's first serious crime prevention orders (SCPOs), and streamlining brief presentations to the Supreme Court.

Strike Force Raptor's Det Ch Insp Dave Adney said his team had used almost every operational tool available, yet the violence continued.

"Sgt Hughes suggested the use of SCPOs to target both gangs, and then did all the legal liaison between our team, the Office of the General Counsel and our representative at the Supreme Court," he said.

"Sgt Hughes also came up with the idea of using affidavits prepared by internal experts to support the 10 SCPO applications, and with the help of her team, she identified the appropriate conditions to get them successfully approved for the first time in Australia.

"I believe this was the final straw

for the two gangs – there has been no violence between them since the SCPOs were granted."

Manager of the Operational Legal Advice Unit, Insp Duane Carey said another part of Sgt Hughes' strategy is to attend OMCG clubhouse search warrants to provide on-the-spot legal advice and observation.

"Sgt Hughes rearranged her family life and her shifts at short notice to make sure she was there when Raptor went into the Nomads clubhouse in the Hunter area," he said.

"Sgt Hughes put in a massive effort to help investigators and internal experts prepare their affidavits, which described how the OMCG structure works, what investigators observed during their search and what they saw during previous attendances at the clubhouse. She liaised with and responded to all legal enquiries and attended the Supreme Court with the squad commanders when the applications were made.

"All 10 SCPOs and the restricted premises order were granted. This was a major legal achievement for the NSWPF," he said.

Sgt Hughes, who has a long history with Police Prosecutions, was nominated for the international OMCG prosecutions award by Det Supt Deb Wallace, Commander of the Criminal



Groups Squad.

"I can't overstate the value of our prosecution team to our day-to-day operations. They're integrated with our team and have taken the proactive targeting of OMCG and other criminal groups to a new level," she said.

"We now have a team of three prosecutors with a unique, specialist understanding of the OMCG environment, and who use the law to contribute to our operational strategies.

"This award is one of the highest accolades available, and it was our way of showing Sgt Hughes how much her efforts have contributed to the success of our operations," she said.

Ch Insp Adney said the Criminal Groups prosecution team carries

ABOVE: Sgt Belinda Hughes (right) and Commander of the Criminal Groups Squad, Det Supt Deb Wallace attended the 44th Annual Training Institute of the International OMCG Investigators Association last month, just before it was hit by Hurricane Florence

a significantly high workload.

"This team is under significant pressure from the sheer volume of work, the seriousness and complexity of some of the matters, the nature of the accused and their potential threat, the high-profile nature of the prosecutions, as well as the attitude of the defence barristers who represent OMCG members" he said.

"As well as providing on-site legal advice during OMCG police operations, this team conducts specialist prosecutions of OMCG-related matters for our squad,



which has more than 200 staff, and prosecutes high-profile matters for other commands across the state.

"They prepare and coordinate applications to the Supreme Court, and have significantly increased the use of non-association orders, which I believe significantly contributes to breaking up these gangs," he said.

"Sgt Hughes also revised the

OMCG expert statement format, which is now applied to other applications such as for restricted premises and habitual criminal applications. This has reduced the significant workload of our experts, as well as improved court outcomes and our relations with the Office of Public Prosecutions and the courts.

"The team also reviews magistrate's or judge's comments

on sentencing to highlight aggravating features and ensures they're included in future briefs."

Commander of Police Prosecutions, Ch Supt Tony Trichter said Sgt Hughes is passionate about her work.

"Sgt Hughes has prosecuted OMCG cases fearlessly and given legal advice to investigators throughout the state at all hours of the day and night and on

ABOVE Sgt Belinda Hughes at the Finks Clubhouse at Musswellbrook

weekends," he said.

"Sgt Hughes and her colleagues in the Operational Legal Advice Unit are instrumental in helping to advance police efforts to disrupt, prevent and respond to high-end crime and identify the range of legal risks associated with this area of police work."