

Facial Recognition Camera at Fair Day

Last Sunday at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Fair Day in Victoria Park, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras employed a security company to place a facial recognition camera at the event to “measure the amount of visitors in Fair Day” ([quote Mardi Gras spokesperson](#)).



Tomorrow, the company employed by Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras to provide and operate the camera, has stated in a [press interview](#) that their cameras work by assigning “a unique, 16-character ID to (the face of) each person who walks by.”

Mardi Gras maintains that “No facial recognition is being used/stored and the information is not being shared. Crowd numbers are important to obtain as they help us plan effectively for future events.”

According to [pedestrian.tv](#), a spokesperson for the security company said, “I would actually have no idea who went to the event, unless someone provided me an image that they’re interested in finding,” before suggesting that police could provide an image of a suspect in a crowd which the system could then match.

Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association and Sex Workers Outreach Project New South Wales find it extremely concerning that a community organisation such as Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras should employ facial recognition technology at an event attended by members of community who are marginalised and often overpoliced. The LGBTIQ+ community, of which many sex workers are a part, have privacy and security concerns that makes the use of such surveillance a barrier to their safe participation in community events and celebrations. This effect is in direct contradiction to the aims of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, which purports to create safe spaces for the community to gather and celebrate.

Scarlet Alliance and Sex Workers Outreach Project NSW wish to express great concern that a facial recognition camera was deployed at a community event without notification or consultation with community. We also find it disturbing that as yet there have been no clear answers provided by Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras to the key questions being asked by community as to the ownership of the data, the security of the data, the contractual relationship between Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and Tomorrow, bona fides of the security company and plans for future use of such cameras by Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

We are pleased to note that Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras have confirmed that they won't be using facial recognition at the Parade on Saturday 29 February 2020.