

## **INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Woollahra Council

**Date Received:** 1 April 2025

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31 March 2025

The Hon Robert Borsak, MLC  
Chair of Antisemitism in NSW Inquiry  
Parliament House  
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SYDNEY NSW 2000  
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Dear Chair

At the meeting of Woollahra Council held on 24 March 2025, it was resolved that Council make the following submission to the NSW Parliament's Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Justice and Communities Inquiry into antisemitism in New South Wales (NSW).

In the 2021 census, 14% (7,509) of local Woollahra residents indicated that they were Jewish. This represents 17.17% of the 47,099 NSW residents who identified as being Jewish. Of these, 43,738 (95%) individuals reside in Sydney with a particularly high concentration in the eastern suburbs.<sup>1</sup>

This contrasts sharply with the broader NSW Jewish population, estimated at 0.62% of the total state population, highlighting the unique demographic landscape of Woollahra and the disproportionate impact of antisemitic incidents in the Woollahra Local Government Area (LGA) and Eastern suburbs.

Woollahra Council has been proactive in promoting social cohesion, diversity, inclusion and harmony through the wide range of services and programs we deliver. Council's annual Placemaking and Community & Cultural grants and Outgoing Sponsorship programs have supported initiatives and celebrations which bring together people of different backgrounds and faiths. Today, more than a third of our residents were born overseas, reflecting trends evident across Greater Sydney.

In accordance with the Inquiry's terms of reference and questions posed by the Inquiry, Council will respond to parts – part a); part c); part d); part e) and part g) as follows:

**(a) the causes underlying the increasing prevalence and severity of antisemitic incidents across the state.**

Following the 7 October 2023 attacks in Israel, and the resulting war in Gaza, there has been an unprecedented rise in antisemitism globally and locally. These actions and community fear have prompted Council to move several motions to address these rising incidents of vilification and hatred directed to the Jewish community. On 22 July 2024, Woollahra Council formally adopted in full the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of Antisemitism including each of its examples of contemporary antisemitism and the 'Mayors of Sydney Joint Statement on Social Cohesion' on 24 February 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures, derived from self-identification data in the Australian Census and supported by analyses from sources like the ABS, profile.id, and the Jewish Communal Affairs (JCA): The Jewish population of Australia: Key Findings from the 2021 Census, provide a detailed understanding of the Jewish community's distribution within Sydney and NSW

The 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation in January 2025 also served as a stark reminder of the dangers of unchecked hatred. This commemoration gains relevance amidst the resurgence of the types of antisemitic incidents seen in Woollahra. Echoing the graffiti that prefaced Nazi persecution, slogans like "Kill Israel," and "Jew Dogs" have appeared on homes, businesses, vehicles and places of worship in Woollahra, and other surrounding Sydney suburbs including Queens Park, Dover Heights, Maroubra and Newtown. This has created a climate of fear, with Jewish residents reporting feeling unsafe and taking heightened security measures.

Local Councils, through initiatives like the "Mayors of Sydney Joint Statement on Social Cohesion", endorsed by Woollahra Council on 24 February 2025, are actively trying to combat this trend. The participating Councils are also collaborating with Multicultural NSW and the community resilience program of COMPACT and COMPLAN as well as with Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism and local schools to provide education on the issue.

Ultimately, it is acknowledged that a concerted effort involving strong leadership from Local, State and Federal governments is essential to uphold Australian values and ensure the safety of all communities.

The potential causes for the increase in violence, hatred and extremism may be derived from:

- The current state of the world, where there is war, and violence being undertaken, which encourages division and tribal thinking - pitting one culture against another. This then becomes a more pervasive way of thinking in all societies.
- Disaffected young people and/or cultural groups who may not see a clear future or feel isolated within Australian society.
- Australian society's passiveness '*She'll be right mate*' or the '*larrikin lie*' often results in a denial that we must be proactive in addressing the increasing need for inclusion and harmony. Allowing people / communities to make inappropriate, minor antisemitic comments, without fear of penalties, which then gives permission for wider racism to occur.

## **Recommendations to NSW Government**

### **Recommendation 1**

To effectively address this issue, a robust response from all levels of government is necessary. This includes increased funding across NSW to introduce community-based programs and events designed to combat antisemitism, celebrate diversity and harmony and promote social cohesion, acknowledging that the NSW Government already has Social Cohesion grants available.

Increased grant funding for Local Government is needed to provide:

- educational initiatives like workshops, inter-school forums and youth led programs that empower young people to actively participate in creating a more inclusive society and allowing them to become agents of change
- Events that bring people together across Sydney and NSW to celebrate diversity and promote harmony and social cohesion; and
- community led lecture series across Sydney and NSW that provide education on the history of antisemitism, and current issue.

### **Recommendation 2**

Funding to specialised NSW and National organisations to establish and maintain community-based workshops focused on antisemitism awareness and counter-narrative education. We recommend that these initiatives partner with local councils to better understand place-based dynamics of our communities and neighbourhoods.

### **(c) the threat to social cohesion in NSW presented by antisemitism**

On 6 February 2025, at the Mayor's Round Table on Social Cohesion, 21 Sydney Mayors shared experiences of rising religious and racial discrimination within Sydney communities and were united in calling out violence, hatred and extremism.

Beyond the alarming rise in antisemitism, concerns were raised about the broader escalation of racism and violence against all racial and faith-based communities. It was strongly acknowledged that Sydney is a vibrant and proudly multicultural and multifaith city. Its diverse population is reflected right across the city, creating an inclusive community of which we are all proud.

Global conflicts can trigger localised racism. Personal biases, fuelled by religious or national affiliations, can lead individuals to take sides without fully understanding the complexities of a situation.

In addition, the anonymity offered by social media exacerbates this issue. Online platforms allow individuals to spread hateful rhetoric and targets others based on their religion or national background, often without facing consequences. This creates a dangerous environment where misinformation and prejudice can thrive.

All Australians must actively combat this trend within our communities. Allowing unchecked racist rhetoric to become normalised desensitises all communities and encourages individuals with prejudiced beliefs to express those beliefs more openly.

Also, by dehumanising different groups, further justifies discriminatory behaviour and violence, creating a climate of fear and distrust that fractures societal bonds. Systemic inequalities reinforce these divisions, and online echo chambers accelerate the spread of hateful ideologies, leading to real-world consequences. We need to actively work to ensure that our online and offline communities are safe for everyone.

The IHRA definition of antisemitism provides a crucial framework for understanding and combating contemporary manifestations of antisemitism.

When antisemitism, as defined by the IHRA, is left unchallenged, it sends a message that hatred and discrimination are acceptable, undermining the fundamental principles of equality and respect necessary for a cohesive society. The sense of fear and isolation experienced by Jewish communities when faced with antisemitic threats erodes trust in public institutions and the broader community. Moreover, the rise of antisemitism emboldens other forms of hate, creating a climate of intolerance that affects all marginalised groups, fracturing the social fabric and leaving it vulnerable to exploitation.

In NSW, the documented increase in antisemitic incidents continues to erode social cohesion. These incidents, including hate speech, vandalism and threats of violence generate a climate of fear and insecurity within the Jewish and wider community.

Addressing this complex issue necessitates a multi-faceted approach to challenge all forms of racism, including antisemitism and to actively promote a culture of respect and inclusion, encompassing:

- comprehensive education
- robust law enforcement; and
- active community engagement.

Young people, as our future leaders, need to be given additional education, resources and encouraged to lead within their schools to become agents of change.

### **Recommendation 3**

Education is a critical tool for combating prejudice, but NSW schools and organisations need access to high-quality resources and expertise. Woollahra Council calls for the NSW Government to provide increased access to educational resources and support for schools and community organisations.

This includes:

- Development and provision of curriculum-aligned educational materials on community harmony, social cohesion, anti-racism and Holocaust education, tailored to local demographics.
- Funding for professional development workshops for teachers and community leaders, equipping them with the skills to effectively address the above.
- Facilitation of partnerships between schools, community organisations, and experts on the above.
- Provision of funding for educational resources to be available in multiple languages and be introduced across NSW.

### **(d) how community safety might be enhanced, on behalf of the Jewish community of NSW**

Council has sought to identify the number of antisemitic incidents across the Woollahra LGA since October 2023, but this information is not available without a GIPA submission to the local area command, which was not available for this submission date. It is recommended that this information be freely available to local councils.

Nonetheless Council can report that Since October 2023 Council has seen an increase in graffiti/stickers/posters related to the Middle East conflict, it is estimated that approximately 10 stickers and posters are removed and approximately 6 items of graffiti are responded to each week.

NSW Police have a dedicated section on hate crimes and hate incidents on their website and a dedicated Engagement + Hate Crime Unit which oversees and works with all Police Area Commands and Police Districts. This team acknowledges that antisemitic incidents are under reported. To encourage the reporting of all antisemitism, even those which may be considered minor, the NSW Government needs to continue to actively promote and simplify the process of reporting, which would then allow a better understanding of antisemitism and racism across NSW. It is also believed that further consideration should be given to the level of punishments for antisemitism and asking the question whether they are seen as a deterrent for this criminal behaviour.

Both the Mayor and Woollahra Councillors and staff would like to acknowledge the excellent efforts of Jodi Radmore, Local Area Commander of the Eastern Suburbs Police Area Command and her police team in extra policing and support to the community during these times of heightened tension.

### **Recommendation 4**

The NSW and the Australian Federal Police need to continue to actively promote and simplify the process of hate crime reporting.

### **Recommendation 5**

Further consideration should be given to the level of punishments for antisemitism and asking the question whether they are seen as a deterrent for criminal behaviour.

### **Recommendation 6**

Effective collaboration requires clear lines of communication and access to relevant information and expertise. Woollahra Council requires streamlined access to government information and data as well as expertise to effectively address antisemitism.

This includes:

- Designated liaison officers within relevant government agencies to provide ongoing support and guidance to Woollahra Council
- Regular forums for information sharing and collaboration between local councils and government agencies
- Access to data and research on antisemitism and hate crimes for councils to be able to undertake appropriate responses within its sphere of control
- Public statements from government officials that clearly denounce antisemitism
- Government led campaigns that promote social cohesion; and
- Consistent application of hate speech laws.

#### **(e) ways to improve security arrangements around synagogues**

Woollahra Council has for a long period of time worked closely with the local Jewish community and their specialist safety consultants to facilitate improved safety around synagogues and other sites associated with the Jewish community. Council's primary role has been to facilitate consent for safety infrastructure on private property (CCTV, lighting, security walls) and to provide landowners consent for required safety infrastructure on public land (bollards, vehicle barriers). Council has also provided support in the preparation of grant applications for security infrastructure.

Council also manages a proactive graffiti removal service whereby offensive graffiti is removed from public infrastructure and public facing private infrastructure within 24 hours as a maximum, with the reality being that antisemitic graffiti is typically removed within a few hours of being reported.

Council will continue to work closely with the local community and their advisors on these issues and will facilitate and support installation of safety infrastructure where required.

A significant gap which Council has identified is funding for the provision of enhanced security across the Woollahra LGA, and beyond. Currently Federal Government grant funding is available for Enhancing Security for Jewish Communities. The purpose of this grant is to provide additional funding for the one-off, ad hoc funding to the Jewish community to rapidly implement additional security measures. This has been introduced within the context of the Hamas-Israel conflict, with a focus on Jewish places of worship, schools and pre-schools. The total funding pool for Round 2 is \$32.5 million with the grant closing on 19 March 2025.

It would be greatly beneficial if this type of funding was available to all local governments for implementing enhanced security in public places and spaces, including streets where Jewish facilities are based.

#### **Recommendation 7**

Funding to be provided to Local Government for the provision of enhanced security in streets / parks and other public amenities surrounding Jewish institutions.

#### **(g) privacy arrangements around public information that may identify an individual or their address, such as land title records and electoral roll information**

It is agreed that changes to the details published when planning and development applications are lodged and then made publicly available, similar to the provisions of the GIPA and PIPA Act, in relation to the redacting of personal information, would assist in ensuring that personal names are not released along with addresses. Currently Planning and Development Applications are published with the names and addresses of the applicants/owners.

**Recommendation 8**

For planning and development matters, where personal details are released in relation to development applications and other planning matters, noting of course that the address for the development is relevant, the names should not be required, or in the very least only the use of the initials, as this would prevent the release of both the address and personal information (names) of those involved.

Please do not hesitate to contact Patricia Occelli, Director, Community & Customer Experience via email at [patricia.occelli@woollahra.nsw.gov.au](mailto:patricia.occelli@woollahra.nsw.gov.au) if you need further information or clarification of these contents.

On behalf of Woollahra Council, thank you for considering these recommendations as part of the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Cr Sarah Swan  
Mayor

Craig Swift-McNair  
General Manager