

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

**Organisation:** Waverley Council

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# **Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Justice and Communities Waverley Council Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism in New South Wales**

April 2025



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## 1. Introduction

Waverley Council welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the parliamentary inquiry into antisemitism in New South Wales. As a local government body committed to fostering an inclusive and harmonious community, we are deeply concerned by the increasing incidents of antisemitism affecting the Jewish population in our LGA, Sydney and New South Wales.

Antisemitism, in all its forms, poses a direct threat to the safety, well-being, and social cohesion of our diverse community. Over recent years, there has been a marked increase in reported antisemitic incidents, ranging from verbal abuse and online harassment to physical attacks and vandalism. These acts of hate undermine the fundamental values of multiculturalism and tolerance that define Australian society.

This submission outlines the prevalence of antisemitism within our council area, the challenges faced by Jewish residents, Council's leadership role in response to antisemitic threats, and our recommendations for stronger and better coordinated government action at all levels.

Our insights are based on

- Direct reports from Jewish community leaders, schools, places of worship, and residents who have experienced antisemitism firsthand,
- Feedback received from Council's Multicultural Advisory Committee,
- Information from key response agencies
- Comments we have received from targeted stakeholders during consultation activities.

## 2. The causes underlying the increasing prevalence and severity of antisemitic incidents across the state

Following the events of 7 October 2023, which saw a surge in incidences of antisemitism, Waverley Council has witnessed increases in both frequency and severity of antisemitic actions in the local area.

### *Incidents and Trends*

Recent data from Jewish community organisations, including the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) and the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies (NSWJBD), indicate a significant increase in antisemitic incidents. Key trends observed within our council area include:

- Graffiti and vandalism: Synagogues, Jewish schools, community centres, and businesses have been defaced with swastikas and antisemitic slurs.
- Harassment and intimidation: Jewish individuals, particularly those wearing identifiable religious attire (such as kippahs or Star of David necklaces), have reported being subjected to verbal abuse and physical threats in public places.

- Online hate speech: The spread of antisemitic rhetoric, conspiracy theories, and Holocaust denial has increased across social media platforms globally, with Jewish residents being targeted with hateful messages.

Several key factors have contributed to the increasing levels of antisemitism in Sydney:

#### *Political and Global Influences*

- Geopolitical tensions, particularly in the Middle East, have led to a rise in antisemitic rhetoric, targeting local Jewish individuals unfairly.
- Certain political protests have included explicitly antisemitic chants and slogans.

#### *Extremist Ideologies*

- The rise of extremist groups promoting white supremacist ideologies has contributed to violent and hateful rhetoric against Jewish Australians.
- Some extremist elements have engaged in rhetoric that, while ostensibly political, veers into antisemitic territory by demonising Jewish identity.

#### *Lack of Legal and Institutional Action*

- Underreporting and misclassification of antisemitic crimes mean that many incidents are not adequately addressed.
- Schools, universities, and workplaces often lack clear policies for addressing antisemitism.

### 3. Record levels of antisemitism on university campuses and in schools undermining student safety

Concerns about racism in schools and higher education have been growing, particularly in relation to antisemitism following the events of 7 October 2023. At the Waverley Youth Summit in 2024, Jewish students expressed concerns around their safety outside of their school grounds, as they have experienced verbal abuse on several occasions.

We are aware that the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights was tasked to inquire into and make recommendations about policies, frameworks and regulations preventing antisemitism at universities. This response clearly indicates the Government's commitment to implementing a multipronged approach to addressing antisemitism at universities and broader issues relating to racism in Australia.

The Waverley LGA is close to major tertiary education facilities and campuses with many international and domestic students accessing local accommodation and visiting our retail precincts, beaches, recreational, social and cultural opportunities. Council's cultural diversity officer has initiated a support network for international students and, at a recent Jewish stakeholder meeting, connected with the Jewish national university liaison officer. These contacts and networks present opportunities for Council facilitated and coordinated social cohesion strategies with a focus on creating welcoming, inclusive and resilient environments.

## 4. The threat to social cohesion in New South Wales presented by antisemitism

These incidents have contributed to a growing sense of fear and insecurity within the Jewish community, affecting their participation in public life and their overall quality of life. Antisemitism weakens us all and as such presents a significant threat to social cohesion. Antisemitism, like other forms of discrimination or racial vilification, impacts on people's emotional, physical and psychological wellbeing, firstly on the victim, but secondly, on people witnessing or hearing about the violence perpetrated in their 'safe' communities.

In recent consultations with community and Jewish stakeholders, everyone has agreed that by isolating and harming one segment of the community, everyone is impacted as the principles of Australia's foundations as a culturally diverse, safe and inclusive society, are being threatened. When people feel singled out and attacked, when their sense of safety and inclusion is being eroded while bearing witness to a dramatically changing landscape, social cohesion suffers. Bystander/Upstander training and support has been discussed as a strategy to empower people in the community to respond to incidents of vilification or hatred they observe in public places, their workplaces or while moving around in their social circles.

Waverley Council has been proudly supporting policies and strategies to create and maintain a connected and cohesive community, ranging from access to affordable housing to proactive cultural diversity policies, reconciliation efforts and support for vulnerable and socially marginalised people in the community.

A long history of investment in community safety, both in terms of community capacity building, policy implementation and compliance related actions has paid off. We can build on these foundations of strong community connections in the fight against antisemitism, united in our efforts and commitment to protecting community members and preserving community cohesion.

Several antisemitic incidents threatening Waverley's social cohesion in recent times have raised concerns within our council and the broader community:

- A synagogue defaced with Nazi symbols: One of the most distressing incidents involved the defacement of a synagogue with swastikas and antisemitic slogans, causing fear and anxiety within our community.
- Jewish students targeted in schools: Some people have reported that Jewish children were bullied or taunted either at school or while travelling to and from school. This can result in students feeling pressured to hide their religious identity in schools and public places.
- Public demonstrations featuring antisemitic rhetoric: Certain protests and public gatherings have included overtly antisemitic slogans, chants, and banners, creating an intimidating environment for Jewish people. In its submission to Inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities, the Human Rights Law Centre, concerned about the rise of religious hatred, recommends amending section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, consolidating laws, and



developing guidelines to distinguish permissible expression from incitement to hatred and prohibited hate speech.

## 5. The Challenges Faced by the Jewish Community

The rise in antisemitism has led to several pressing challenges that require urgent attention. These challenges impact the daily lives, safety, and mental well-being of Jewish residents in Sydney.

### 5.1 Safety and Security Concerns

The Jewish community faces unique security challenges due to the persistent threat of antisemitic attacks. Specific concerns include:

- Threats against synagogues and Jewish schools: Many Jewish institutions have been forced to invest heavily in security measures, including surveillance cameras, security personnel, and reinforced infrastructure.
- Public safety fears: Jewish residents report feeling unsafe wearing religious symbols in public, with many choosing to avoid certain areas or conceal their identity to reduce the risk of harassment.
- Increased fear among elderly and vulnerable community members: Holocaust survivors and elderly Jewish residents, many of whom have already experienced historical antisemitism, are particularly affected by the rise in hate incidents.

### 5.2 Antisemitism in Schools and Universities

Educational institutions play a critical role in fostering an inclusive society, yet antisemitism persists in schools and universities. Challenges include:

- Bullying and exclusion: Jewish students have reported being targeted with antisemitic slurs, Nazi salutes, and Holocaust jokes.

### 5.3 Online Hate and Social Media Incitement as a global threat with local impacts

Social media platforms have become a primary vehicle for the spread of antisemitic propaganda, leading to:

- The spread of conspiracy theories: False claims about Jewish people controlling governments, banks, or the media continue to circulate widely.
- Cyber harassment: Jewish individuals, including community leaders, journalists, and students, have received threats and abusive messages online.
- Radicalisation of extremist groups: Online forums have provided a platform for extremist groups to recruit and spread antisemitic ideology.
- Doxing has been reported as a concern for Jewish people with fears their privacy is being breached, in turn threatening their security.

## 6. How community safety might be enhanced, on behalf of the Jewish community of New South Wales

### 6.1 Council's leadership position and response to antisemitic threats

Waverley's strong social cohesion strategies and commitment to cultural diversity and anti racism has provided a sound framework for initiatives and actions in response to antisemitic threats. Since at least 2023, Council has been working solidly on a series of initiatives culminating in March 2025 with the endorsement of the 'Strategy to Combat Antisemitism'.

Being clear of the responsibilities local government has in relation to community safety and demonstrating leadership and willingness to act has ensured the Jewish community feels supported, in turn increasing trust in government and a positive change in perceptions of safety. Whilst it is clearly impossible for Waverley Council to guarantee everyone's safety, inviting dialogue, sending signals of collaboration and support, visible statements of commitment, and proactively addressing safety concerns mean Jewish people know they no longer need to feel alone or abandoned.

In October 2021, Council formally adopted in full the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, including all IHRA examples of antisemitic behaviour in contemporary life, as an important tool in recognising and combating manifestations of antisemitism.

Extensive research was conducted in early 2024 to:

7. Review community activities conducted by private organisations and public institutions based in Australia and overseas to combat antisemitism.
8. Develop a gap analysis specifically for Waverley based on the above.
9. Seek to clarify and improve our understanding how organisations/institutions have implemented the IHRA working definition of antisemitism in a practical way.

Since then, Council has:

1. Endorsed in March 2025, the Strategy to Combat Antisemitism, a toolkit of strategic partnerships and practical actions
2. Hosted a social cohesion forum, attended by over 20 mayors of Sydney, committing to urgent actions in the fight against antisemitism.
3. Initiated a social cohesion project 'Culture Waves' assisted by the NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government funding and supported by trained mentors to help young people have open dialogue about issues of identity and culture.
4. Consistently condemned the dramatic and unprecedented increase in antisemitism occurring in Australia.
5. Continued to commit to removing any antisemitic graffiti and/or posters immediately upon it being reported.
6. Provided cash and in-kind support to community services organisations to assist in providing social services to those individuals affected by the recent attacks on Israel, the ongoing hostage situation and the rising antisemitism in Australia



7. Held a Mayoral Roundtable with Jewish Organisations and representatives on the formulation of Council's antisemitism strategy.
8. Written to the Sydney Jewish Museum to identify opportunities to partner with the Museum and to raise awareness of the increase in antisemitism.
9. Continued to facilitate regular meetings between the Mayor and General Manager and the Local Area Command on the state of community relations, including updates on any antisemitic behaviour within the Waverley LGA since the start of the terrorist attack by Hamas in Israel. The Local Area Command has been proactive in keeping our community safe and is responsive to any harassment and antisemitic behaviour.
10. Congratulated the NSW Premier, the Hon. Chris Minns MP, for strengthening laws in section 93Z of the Crimes Act originally introduced in 2018 against hate speech, threats and incitement to violence through a public act based on race, religion, sexual orientation or other characteristics.
11. Written to the NSW Premier, the State Members for Vaucluse and Coogee, the NSW Opposition Leader and the Member for Wentworth, calling for further actions at State and Federal levels against rising antisemitism.
12. Prepared a report in 2024 that updated the community about actions Council has already taken to combat antisemitism, outlining plans to address the matter.
13. Consultation with the Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC) on further actions that Council can take to combat antisemitism and its physical and emotional impacts in our community and our schools.
14. Continued to support Jewish organisations and events with grants and support for Jewish culture to be celebrated in the LGA.

## *6.2 Safety and surveillance*

An audit of CCTV was undertaken to assess current capabilities and potential gaps in the existing network to strengthen surveillance. High level this audit summarised the rise of antisemitic graffiti in the LGA as below. Subject to the sourcing of funding, a plan has been developed to increase and strengthen community safety and CCTV capability across the LGA.

# Existing Network

## CCTV Review – Graffiti

- Graffiti on bus shelters, public bins and other metallic surfaces surrounding bus shelters make up over 60% (107 of 175) of reported antisemitic graffiti in the Waverley LGA.
- The remaining graffiti was reported on electricity boxes, public furniture, toilet blocks and an assortment of other surface types.
- The bus shelter locations that saw a prevalence of graffiti are:
  - Bondi Road
  - Tamarama Marine Drive/ Tamarama Beach
  - Bronte
- Other high-risk graffiti locations included:

|  |                                    |                                   |   |
|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Fletcher Street<br><b>Bondi</b>                | Notts Avenue<br><b>Bondi Beach</b> | Murray Street<br><b>Bronte</b>    | Macpherson &<br>Hewlett Street<br><b>Bronte</b> |
| Bondi Beach<br>Promenade<br><b>Bondi Beach</b> | Bronte Road<br><b>Bronte</b>       | Birrell Street<br><b>Tamarama</b> | Pacific Avenue<br><b>Tamarama</b>               |

Reported graffiti locations



### 6.3 Building Social Cohesion

Fighting antisemitism and building social cohesion is everyone's business – to be successful, responding to antisemitism must take a whole of government and whole of community approach. Focusing on improvements to physical security infrastructure, surveillance and Police enforcement is important but more is needed to achieve sustained positive change in people's hearts, minds and attitudes.

Antisemitism is not a static phenomenon, it's dynamic and manifests itself differently at various times and in different locations. Discriminatory attitudes and behaviours or racial prejudice and bias that ebb and flow in our communities, often following global incidents or exacerbated by local factors, like a downturn in the economy. While immediate actions are needed right now to stop escalating threats and violence, we need to plan for long term community support strategies to successfully address the rise of antisemitism in Sydney and remain vigilant of flare ups in the future.

#### *6.4 Council's Strategy to Combat Antisemitism*

In March 2025, Waverley Council endorsed the Strategy to Combat Antisemitism, a toolkit of practical actions built around strategic partnerships can be scaled up or down depending on circumstances and severity of impacts. The Mayor, Cr Will Nemesh hosted a roundtable with the Sydney Jewish Museum, NSW Jewish Board of Deputies and other stakeholders in early 2025 which sought input and feedback on the draft strategy and action plan. The Strategy aims to protect Jewish communities, promote social cohesion and ensure that individuals, groups and institutions are safe from discrimination, prejudice, hatred and violence.

Ideas and suggestions addressed a range of topics covered in the Strategy. There was strong agreement around the need to strengthen social cohesion to build community understanding and connection, and to ensure the Jewish community, instead of being singled out, is supported by a community of allies. Stakeholder feedback was incorporated into the final draft, along with suggestions from Council's Multicultural Advisory Committee.

We hope the Strategy can be applied in other locations as well and would also be happy to work with interested parties to implement, evaluate and further develop the action plan.

## **7. The role of the Sydney Jewish Museum in providing Holocaust education for students**

The Strategy's action plan includes support for and further strengthening the role of the SJM in providing Holocaust education for students. Feedback from our schools indicate that already there is strong interest and uptake in educational experiences and learnings facilitated by the SJM. Council has also committed to have its senior leadership team and councillors visit the SJM, both to demonstrate commitment to promoting understanding and awareness of the lingering impacts of the Holocaust but also to visibly take a leadership role in championing the importance of education in this area.

## **8. Recommendations for Government Action**

Returning briefly to the issue of 'whole of government' approach, some of the measures governments can take more broadly include:

#### *Strengthened Legal Protections*

- Updated hate crime legislation to ensure stronger penalties for antisemitic offences.

- Improve reporting mechanisms to ensure that antisemitic incidents are accurately documented and prosecuted.

Recent changes have already introduced by the NSW Government that address antisemitic offences. Criminalising the incitement of racial hatred is the latest measure to respond to acts of racial violence and hatred.

Other actions include:

- Introducing a new offence in the *Crimes Act* to ensure people of faith can attend their place of worship in safety and provide police with associated move on powers;
- Introducing a new offence in 93ZA of the *Crimes Act* directed to the display of a Nazi symbol on or near a synagogue or place of worship, Jewish school or the Sydney Jewish Museum;
- Amending existing graffiti offences to make it an aggravated offence to graffiti a place of worship; and
- Ensuring that hatred or prejudice as motive for an offence will be an aggravating factor on sentence regardless of the presence of other motives.
- Consolidating laws and establishing clear guidelines of permissible and non permissible forms of expression
- New legislation will need to be adequately resourced so that perpetrators are actively deterred from carrying out criminal acts, understand they can no longer act with impunity.

#### *Increased Security Measures*

- Provide or advocate for additional funding for security assessments or security upgrades at synagogues, Jewish schools, and community centres.
- Expand law enforcement training on recognising and responding to antisemitic incidents and develop agreed measures to record and report on follow up actions in response to incidents.

#### *Educational and Awareness Programs*

- Introduce compulsory Holocaust education in all NSW schools to combat misinformation and historical revisionism.
- Implement training for teachers on identifying and addressing antisemitism in schools and provide resources and supports to assist teachers in their responses.
- Support interfaith and programs focused on culturally diverse communities to promote social cohesion.

#### *Social Media and Online Regulation*

- Work with technology companies to remove antisemitic content and prevent the spread of hate speech.
- Strengthen laws against the incitement of violence online.

#### *Workplace and Institutional Reforms*

- Implement anti-discrimination policies in workplaces and universities to address antisemitism.
- Provide support for Jewish professionals facing bias or exclusion.

## 9. Conclusion

The rise of antisemitism in Sydney represents a direct challenge to the principles of multiculturalism, safety, and social harmony. Antisemitism, along with other forms of discrimination and racial

vilification can significantly undermine social cohesion in our communities. While it is acknowledged that the three levels of government have already responded to the increase in threats and violence on many fronts, more is needed to protect Jewish residents and uphold the values of inclusivity and respect.

We urge the parliamentary inquiry to take decisive action to combat antisemitism and ensure that Sydney remains a safe and welcoming city for all. We remain open and committed to contribute to these efforts in any way we can. Waverley's recently adopted Strategy to Combat

Antisemitism may be a useful tool that can be more widely used by others in the fight against hate crimes.