

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Jewish Council of Australia

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Submission to Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Justice and Communities Inquiry into Antisemitism in New South Wales

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Introduction

The Jewish Council of Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Portfolio Committee No. 5's Inquiry into Antisemitism in New South Wales.

The Jewish Council is a registered charity made up of a diverse group of Jewish academics, lawyers, writers, and teachers with expertise in areas including Jewish history, human rights law, antiracism, First Nations justice, and politics. We provide an independent, expert Jewish voice opposing antisemitism and racism and supporting Palestinian human rights.

We work with policy-makers, civil society organisations, politicians, and the media, across the political spectrum, to advocate on issues of human rights, racism and antisemitism. We also host community events and forums, as well as facilitating discussion groups for over 200 Jewish people around the country.

The Jewish Council was formed in February 2024 in the midst of Israel's bombardment of Gaza, to provide an alternative Jewish perspective to that provided by pro-Israel Jewish organisations. We are made up of two Executive Officers who serve as spokespeople for the Jewish Council, as well as an Executive and Advisory Committee of twenty Jewish people, who are all volunteers. We have over 1,000 Jewish people who have signed on to support of our statement of Core Principles, publicly listed on our website.¹

It is important for this Committee to acknowledge and understand that the Jewish community is not a monolith who all support one political position, or who all support the state of Israel.

¹ <<https://www.jewishcouncil.com.au/supporters>>.

There is a long history of Jewish support for human rights and solidarity across racial lines, and opposition to the policies of the state of Israel.²

The Jewish Council's formation in February 2024 reflects a growing movement of Jewish people in Australia, the USA, Israel, and elsewhere in the world, who support Palestinian human rights.

The Jewish Council is deeply concerned about rises in antisemitism in Australia, which is part of a broader increase in racist rhetoric and conduct that includes Islamophobia, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Asian racism, and anti-Palestinian racism, as well as prejudice against LGBTIQ+ communities and other socially marginalised people. We consider that the only way for us to effectively fight antisemitism is by working in partnership with other groups facing bigotry and discrimination.

We draw this Committee's attention to the rise in anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia,³ and warn that the Committee's exclusive focus on antisemitism rather than all forms of racism risks fomenting the exclusion of other communities experiencing racism and driving division between Jewish communities and other racialised communities.

In terms of governmental responses to rises in antisemitism and racism, we support approaches which adopt a unified commitment to opposing all forms of racism, which do not create hierarchies of racism, and those which are targeted at addressing systemic and structural discrimination and addressing the root causes of racism. Such measures can include community support initiatives, education and early-intervention programs.

We are also concerned about the ways in which the commentary and actions of the media, political and other leaders, in reference to the Jewish community and incidents of antisemitism, has fuelled racism and division. This inquiry into antisemitism risks forming part of a broader trend of exceptionalising and politicising antisemitism in a way which pits Jewish communities against other racialised communities and ultimately makes Jewish people, and all racialised people, less safe.

One major risk is that this Inquiry will feed into a politicised and divisive discourse which seeks to label any criticism of Israel as antisemitic, thereby increasing antisemitism by linking Jewish identities to the state of Israel and its human rights abuses.

We also warn the Committee of the danger of relying on antisemitism data from organisations which conflate criticism of Israel and the political ideology of Zionism as antisemitic. This data is unscholarly and has been widely critiqued in Australia and globally.⁴

² Shaul Magid, 'Zionism's History Is Also a History of Jewish Anti-Zionism', *Jacobin* (2024), <<https://jacobin.com/2024/01/shaul-magid-interview-zionism-anti-zionism-judaism-history>>; Sarah Lazare, 'The Forgotten History of the Jewish, Anti-Zionist Left', *In these times* (13 July 2020), <<https://inthesetimes.com/article/jewish-anti-zionism-israel-palestine-colonialism-annexation-apartheid>>.

³ Islamophobia Register, 'Islamophobia in Australia 2023-2024 Report' (2024) <<https://islamophobia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Islamophobia-in-Australia-Report-5.pdf>>.

⁴ Shane Burley and Naomi Bennet, 'Examining the ADL's Antisemitism Audit: A line-by-line reassessment of the organization's data illuminates the flaws in its methodology', *Jewish Currents* (17

What is antisemitism?

Like all forms of racism, antisemitism has taken many different shapes and forms throughout history. As described by Naomi Klein, “[f]rom the Illuminati to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, from the Rothschild banking family to George Soros’s philanthropy, Jews have been the subjects and targets of the most persistent conspiracy theory of the last two and a half centuries. Despite shifting names and players, the script has stayed remarkably similar: an international Jewish conspiracy stands accused of colluding in the shadows to undermine Christian values, weaken Christian states, seize Christian property, and, in later versions, control the media. From revolutions to pandemics to terrorist attacks, it always seems to be our fault.”⁵

The history and modern forms of antisemitism are too voluminous to recount in this submission. We refer this Inquiry to a large body of work on the history of antisemitism and racism against Jewish people, and its current iterations. We have referred the Committee to resources which appropriately distinguish between antisemitism and criticism of Israel. We urge the Committee to avoid relying on widely criticised material on ‘the New Antisemitism’, which strategically conflates criticism of Israel with antisemitism.

Instead, we refer the Committee to the following resources:

- Shane Burley and Ben Lorber, *Safety Through Solidarity: A Radical Guide to Fighting Antisemitism* (2024);⁶
- Rachel Shabi, *Off-White: The Truth About Antisemitism* (2024);⁷
- Peter Beinart, Debunking the myth that anti-Zionism is antisemitic (2019);⁸
- Jewish Currents Podcast, *Talking about antisemitism* (2024);⁹
- Max Kaiser, *Jews, antisemitism and power in Australia* (2024).¹⁰

Our approach to addressing antisemitism and racism

One of the core principles of the Jewish Council is that “the only way to effectively fight antisemitism is by committing to work in solidarity with other groups facing bigotry and discrimination to fight all forms of racism.” We recognise that while each form of racism has differences in terms of modes and forms of operation, all forms of racism are interconnected. It is this interconnectedness which makes it so important to have a unified approach to tackling racism.

June 2024), <<https://jewishcurrents.org/examining-the-adls-antisemitism-audit>>; Alex McKinnon, “Anti-Jewish racism ... [is] not generally coming from the neo-Nazis”: Inside ECAJ’s Bizarre Antisemitism Report, *Everything is Fine* (October 2024), <<https://everythingisfine.beehiiv.com/p/inside-ecajs-bizarre-antisemitism-report>>.

⁵ Naomi Klein, *Doppelganger* (2023) p. 285.

⁶ <<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/741043/safety-through-solidarity-by-shane-burley/>>.

⁷ Review is available here: <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/nov/03/off-white-the-truth-about-antisemitism-by-rachel-shabi-review-racism-by-any-other-name>>.

⁸ <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/mar/07/debunking-myth-that-anti-zionism-is-antisemitic>>.

⁹ <<https://jewishcurrents.org/talking-about-antisemitism>>.

¹⁰ <<https://meanjin.com.au/essays/jews-antisemitism-and-power-in-australia/>>.

As stated by the Australian Human Rights Commission in its *National Anti-racism Framework*, “systemic and structural racism is deeply embedded throughout Australia and requires an urgent national response.” The Framework seeks to be grounded in “an understanding of racism that is intersectional, community-centric, and grounded in truth-telling.” It also seeks to “recognise the similarities and differences between forms of racism that affect different communities.”¹¹

As members of the Jewish community committed to antiracism, antifascism and solidarity, we recognise that Jewish freedom is intimately connected to the defeat of all forms of racism. This guides our work, consistent with our commitment to Tikkun Olam (repair of the world), Pikuach Nefesh (the sanctity of human life) and the ethos of social justice embedded in our shared histories.

We do not support law and order responses as a way to address underlying issues of racism. Such approaches are not grounded in evidence, and do little to tackle issues of racism. Instead, we highlight the need for working across affected communities to address racism and discrimination.¹²

We support approaches to addressing racism that include institutional and systems change, prevention, education and early-intervention. There are a myriad of resources which the Committee can rely on as to the importance and effectiveness of these approaches.

We list some of them here:

- Griffith et al. *Dismantling institutional racism: theory and action* (2007)¹³
- Australian Human Rights Commission, *Anti-Racism Framework* (2024)¹⁴
- Shane Burley and Ben Lorber, *Safety Through Solidarity: A Radical Guide to Fighting Antisemitism* (2024)¹⁵
- Max Kaiser, *Jews, antisemitism and power in Australia* (2024)¹⁶

The dangers of defining antisemitism in relation to Israel and conflating Jews with Israel

We refer this Inquiry to our submission to the Inquiry into the Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024.¹⁷ In that submission, we discussed the

¹¹ <<https://humanrights.gov.au/anti-racism-framework>>.

¹² Dr Max Kaiser, *Law and Order Crackdown Won't Make Jewish Community Safer* (2024), <<https://www.crikey.com.au/2024/12/12/antisemitism-police-crackdown-australian-jewish-community-synagogue-fire/>>.

¹³ Griffith, D. M., Mason, M., Yonas, M., Eng, E., Jeffries, V., Plihcik, S., & Parks, B. (2007). Dismantling institutional racism: theory and action. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 39(3-4), 381–392.

¹⁴ <https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/national_anti-racism_framework_first_nations_consultations.pdf>.

¹⁵ <<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/741043/safety-through-solidarity-by-shane-burley/>>.

¹⁶ <<https://meanjin.com.au/essays/jews-antisemitism-and-power-in-australia/>>.

¹⁷ <<https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=b414484c-c3a6-4241-8314-d2141c51a824&subId=762493>>.

importance of avoiding definitions of antisemitism which relate antisemitism to criticism of the state of Israel, such as the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) definition and the recent definition of antisemitism adopted by Universities Australia.¹⁸ Definitions such as these equate legitimate political discourse with antisemitism, have a chilling effect on legitimate criticism of Israel, risk institutionalising anti-Palestinian racism, and undermine efforts to address antisemitism.

The IHRA definition was never intended to be used as a tool to regulate free speech. The use of the IHRA in this way is increasingly rejected by scholars of antisemitism and Jewish studies, including its own author.¹⁹ This is because its examples have been weaponised globally to chill criticism of Israel and the political ideology of Zionism, with a particular impact on silencing Palestinian voices. Its widespread adoption, including in the university setting, would undermine academic freedom of inquiry and speech and is incompatible with the principles identified in the Hon Robert French AC's *Report of the Independent Review of Freedom of Speech in Australian Higher Education Providers* (French Review).²⁰

The adoption of such definitions in Universities chills legitimate discourse and protest and stokes a culture war around the nature and function of the academy that undermines, rather than protects, academics, students and staff from racial intimidation, discrimination and hatred.

The conflation between Jews and Israel is also something that can breed antisemitism itself. By linking Jewish identities to the state of Israel, such definitions can increase forms of antisemitism in which people blame all Jewish people for the conduct of the state of Israel and its human rights abuses.

We refer the Committee to further analysis of this topic in the following texts:

- Jewish Council of Australia, media release, 'Jewish Council slams Universities Adoption of Dangerous, Politicised and Unworkable Antisemitism Definition' (2025);²¹
- Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, media release, 'McCarthyism reborn: Australian universities capitulate to Israel lobby, suppress criticism of Israel' (2025);²²
- Censoring Palestine: Human rights, academic freedom, and the IHRA by Lana Tatour (2024);²³

¹⁸ <<https://www.jewishcouncil.com.au/media/jewish-council-of-australia-slams-universities-adoption-of-dangerous-politicised-and-unworkable-antisemitism-definition>>.

¹⁹ <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/13/antisemitism-executive-order-trump-chilling-effect>>.

²⁰ <<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-reviews-and-consultations/independent-review-adoption-model-code-freedom-speech-and-academic-freedom#:~:text=French%20Review%20Terms%20of%20Reference&text=Assess%20the%20effectiveness%20of%20the,intellectual%20inquiry%20in%20higher%20education>>.

²¹ <<https://www.jewishcouncil.com.au/media/jewish-council-of-australia-slams-universities-adoption-of-dangerous-politicised-and-unworkable-antisemitism-definition>>.

²² <https://apan.org.au/media_release/mccarthyism-reborn-australian-universities-capitulate-to-israel-lobby-suppress-criticism-of-israel/>.

²³ Tatour, L. (2024) 'Censoring Palestine: human rights, academic freedom and the IHRA', Australian Journal of Human Rights, 30(1), pp. 106–114.

- *The IHRA Definition of Antisemitism: Defining Antisemitism by Erasing Palestinians*, by Rebecca Ruth Gould (2020).²⁴

The dangers of the current political discourse around antisemitism

We are concerned about the very real harm being caused by irresponsible political and media commentary about antisemitism and Jewish people.

For example, following the discovery of a caravan with explosives in Dural, senior politicians referred to this as a “mass casualty event” and severe escalation in antisemitism. Anti-protest legislation was passed in NSW apparently in response to this incident. However, the Australian Federal Police found that this incident, as well as other incidents, were part of ‘fabricated’ plots orchestrated by organised crime. The hyperbolic nature of political commentary around this incident caused fear and panic amongst many in the Jewish community and broader public.

Following these incidents, politicians, journalists, and community leaders, including the Government’s antisemitism envoy, sought to falsely connect these violent acts to anti-war Palestine protests, universities, writers festivals and the arts. These responses were irresponsible and dangerous.

We consider that this response demonstrates the importance of politicians, the media and community leaders acting responsibly when reporting and speaking about antisemitism.

It is now clear that individuals are seeking to exploit the Jewish community’s, and the broader public’s, concern about antisemitism. Disinformation and irresponsible reporting is providing a permissive environment for these malicious acts.

We also raise concerns that many so-called leaders have sought to use antisemitic incidents to spread Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism, exploiting the Jewish community to push bigotry and hatred, and attempt to silence legitimate criticism of Israel. Our co-Executive Officer Sarah Schwartz has written about the dangerous of this instrumentalisation of Jewish people to fuel bigotry and anti-immigrant sentiment.²⁵

In addition to politicians refraining from exploiting fears within the Jewish community, we consider that the Committee should recommend responsible media reporting of alleged antisemitic incidents, through guidelines to be used by media. Media outlets should avoid labelling unclear or contested incidents as racist or antisemitic until they have been properly investigated. Mislabelling incidents as antisemitic before they have been verified can instil unnecessary fear within Jewish communities, heightening feelings of unease and anxiety.

²⁴ <https://pure-oai.bham.ac.uk/ws/files/106826859/1467_923X.12883.pdf>.

²⁵ Sarah Schwartz, ‘When Peter Dutton and the Coalition use the Jewish community as political footballs it makes all of us less safe’, *The Guardian* (2025) <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/jan/28/when-peter-dutton-and-the-lnp-use-the-jewish-community-as-political-footballs-it-makes-all-of-us-less-safe-ntwnfb>>.

Guidelines should emphasise thorough fact-checking and avoiding sensationalism, to ensure accurate and balanced coverage. These measures will help prevent misinformation, reduce unnecessary fear or division, and promote informed public discourse.

One of the other problems with exceptionalist discourse on Jewish experiences of discrimination, including through inquiries such as this one, is that they insufficiently address how antisemitism intersects with other forms of racism and oppression. This in turn limits broader anti-racist work.

As one example, one of the most prominent antisemitic conspiracy theories currently in circulation is ‘the great replacement theory’, which posits that Jews are promoting mass immigration to replace ‘white people’. This idea combines antisemitism, anti-migrant racism, and often other forms of racism such as Islamophobia, demonstrating how antisemitism cannot be considered in isolation.

The concerning rise of far-right extremism

As stated in our evidence last year to the Federal Senate’s Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee inquiry into right wing extremist movements in Australia, we are particularly concerned about the rise in neo-Nazi activities, fascism and far right extremism, both in Australia and globally.

White nationalist groups in Australia and globally have embraced antisemitic conspiracy theories, portraying Jews as orchestrators of global power structures. Some of these groups do so while also defending Israel’s campaign against the people of Palestine.²⁶ Some individuals espousing white supremacist views have also latched onto the movement for a free Palestine, particularly online, to promote the hatred of Jewish people.²⁷ Palestinian leaders in Australia have been steadfast at calling out these forms of antisemitism and making it clear that such groups are not welcome at Palestine solidarity protests.

The far-right threat is not merely theoretical. Australia has seen a surge in white supremacist activity, from online radicalisation to real-world attacks. Platforms like Elon Musk’s ‘X’ have become hubs for Nazi propaganda,²⁸ with antisemitic and racist content reaching mass audiences. The normalisation of these narratives has emboldened violent actors, as seen in recent attacks on synagogues and Jewish institutions.²⁹

We support approaches to combatting white supremacist ideologies which are evidence-based and focused on prevention and addressing the root causes of racism. We refer the Committee to the following resources:

²⁶ <<https://www.dw.com/en/where-white-nationalists-and-zionists-meet/a-38873676>>.

²⁷ <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/neo-nazis-hijack-pro-palestine-protest-mike-enoch/>>; <<https://www.crikey.com.au/2023/11/15/pro-palestine-protest-neo-nazi-freedom-movement-israel/>>.

²⁸ <<https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/x-twitter-elon-musk-nazi-extremist-white-nationalist-accounts-rcna145020>>.

²⁹ <<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/antisemitic-attacks-escalate-australia-2025-01-21/>>.

- The Christchurch Call, *Working together to eliminate terrorist and violent extremism content online*;³⁰
- Australian Muslim Advocacy Network, *Dehumanisation – Policy Brief*;³¹
- “The New-Far-Right Movement in Australia” by Jade Hutchinson (2019);³²
- Thomas J Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right* by Thomas J. Main (2018) (book).³³

We would welcome the opportunity to appear before this Committee and provide oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Sincerely

Jewish Council of Australia

³⁰ <<https://www.christchurchcall.org/>>.

³¹ <<https://www.aman.net.au/policy-brief-combatting-online-dehumanisation-of-minorities/>>

³² <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546553.2019.1629909>>.

³³ <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt1vjgnxx>>.