

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Jewish Voices of Inner Sydney (JVOIS)

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JEWISH VOICES OF INNER SYDNEY
SUBMISSION TO THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 5
JUSTICE AND COMMUNITIES:
INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Dear Committee Members,

April 6 2025

We write on behalf of Jewish Voices of Inner Sydney (JVOIS), an organisation of Jewish residents in the local government areas of Inner West Council and the City of Sydney.

We are a group that came together in 2024. Many of our members felt that the established Jewish representative bodies in NSW were not reflecting the full diversity of opinion in the Jewish community, particularly with respect to the Israeli government's policies towards the Palestinian people. In the past 6 months, we have had fruitful discussions with our elected representatives in local, state and federal government across partisan lines about combating antisemitism in Inner Sydney.

Our group is deeply committed to combating all forms of racism and bigotry, of which antisemitism is the example that affects us personally. It is our view that, for all parts of society to succeed in challenging antisemitism, it needs to be clearly defined, measured in an evidence-based way, holistically addressed alongside all forms of discrimination, and not weaponised or exceptionalised for political ends.

Several of our members who attend the Newtown Synagogue were deeply alarmed by its defacement by criminal vandals in January 2025. We were reassured that law enforcement quickly came to the conclusion that these attacks were part of an opportunistic criminal hoax and not indicative of any broader societal increase in antisemitism.

However, we were dismayed by the response in political and media commentary in the immediate aftermath of these incidents, which in some cases sought to tie these attacks to a purported antisemitism generated by the Pro-Palestine movement. It has now been reaffirmed by the evidence presented by the police that these claims were entirely untrue. We note that the Australian Federal Police Deputy Commissioner Krissy Barrett acknowledged that in the aftermath of the attacks; *“There was also unwarranted suspicion directed at other communities – and that is also reprehensible.”*

The political instrumentalisation of the attacks did not increase a feeling of Jewish safety or social cohesion between Jews and the broader community.

Our members do not feel unsafe living in Inner Sydney, at the heart of a successful multicultural society. They do not feel unsafe attending pro-Palestine demonstrations in the Sydney CBD. Our members, some of whom are staff or students at the University of Sydney, did not feel unsafe when the encampments were in place last year. What did make our members feel unsafe were the statements of our political representatives, including Premier Chris Minns, that warned in the initial aftermath of the Dural caravan incident that it was a “potential mass casualty event” and a case of “terrorism”.

Our position is this: attacks or rhetoric against Jewish Australians, as Jews, is antisemitic and must be called out. But we reject the idea that the Pro-Palestine movement is characterised by, or responsible for, widespread antisemitism.

We reject definitions of antisemitism, including the definition used by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), which deems as antisemitic political expression which criticises Israel's human rights record, calls for the boycott or sanctioning of the Israeli occupation or participating businesses, or which calls for a single, democratic state in which Palestinians and Israelis have the same political and civil rights. Kenneth Stern, the lead drafter of the IHRA, has since distanced himself from the way the definition has been weaponised to police criticism of Israel. The inquiry should consider alternative definitions, such as the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, that provide a more precise explanation of anti-Jewish hatred.

Zionism and Jewish identity are distinct from each other, with Judaism preceding the political ideology of Zionism by over 2000 years. Many Jews in Australia are not Zionists, and many Zionists are not Jewish. We recognise that many Jewish Australians identify strongly with Zionism and have a deeply felt attachment to the State of Israel. For some, that attachment can render all criticism of the Israeli government indistinguishable from an attack on all Jews. However, it is misleading to suggest there is a singular Jewish position on Zionism or a monolithic view amongst Jewish people towards Israel's record of treatment of Palestinians. An inquiry into antisemitism must recognise this diversity of viewpoints if it is to be successful.

We are concerned that, if antisemitism continues to be weaponised in service of political ends, that this politicisation will undermine efforts to create broad awareness and opposition to antisemitism in Australian society. Whatever its intentions, such discourse will only do damage to the Jewish community's place in society.

Please see below for our members' testimonials:

"Australia is a successful case study of multiculturalism, and has a strong and vibrant democracy and civil society. Those things have made it a wonderful place to be Jewish and are why so many Jewish families like my own have made it their home. Restrictions on the right to protest, curtailing of academic freedom and other polarising measures will not make Jews safer. If anything, they will do the opposite."

- Bart, Camperdown

"Nothing makes me feel more unsafe than politicians using antisemitism as a way to score points with voters or strip Australains of their rights on false claims, all in the name of Jewish safety. Having attended Pro-Palestine protests with my children, seeing Jewish groups walking with them, attending sit-ins and visiting the encampment, the claim that these are hateful, violent, or in anyway antisemitic is absurd"

- Tanya, Lewisham

"At every pro-Palestine demonstration I have attended, I have not once ever been subject to or witnessed antisemitic abuse directed against me, my friends, or any other Jewish participants. Instead, at every demonstration I have been welcomed. I have been pleased to see that Jewish people were speakers on the platforms and seemed to be involved at every stage of the organising."

- David, Newtown

"As a Jew who criticises Israel's genocide against Palestinians I am more afraid of being called antisemitic by pro-Israeli Jewish acquaintances trying to silence me than I am of being subjected to antisemitic abuse walking the streets of Sydney"

- Jesse, Glebe

Thank you for your time in reading our submission. We would be happy to provide any further assistance the committee requires, including appearing at a public hearing.

Sincerely,

Jewish Voices of Inner Sydney