

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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KELLIE SLOANE

— MEMBER FOR VAUCLUSE —

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NSW

Dear Committee Members,

I make this submission as the Member for Vacluse, a state seat covering Sydney's eastern suburbs.

Vacluse is a diverse electorate with almost half of residents declaring on the latest census that both their parents were born overseas.

19.8% of our community marked their religion as Jewish, though this figure does not capture the many secular and culturally Jewish members of our community.

Many are Holocaust survivors or descendants of survivors. The eastern suburbs became a refuge for thousands of Jewish people—part of the 27,000 who sought safety in Australia after the horrors of World War II. They brought with them stories of unimaginable suffering and extraordinary resilience—stories that are still told and felt today.

This living memory is central to understanding how deeply antisemitism cuts in our community. Recent events have reawakened generational trauma. The fear many now feel is not abstract—it is personal, and at times, overwhelming.

With the highest concentration of Jewish citizens in the State, Sydney's eastern suburbs have borne the brunt of a disturbing rise in antisemitic incidents, both before and following the atrocities of October 7, 2023.

- Vandalism
- Hate speech
- Criminal activity targeted at Jews including fire-bombings and arson
- Doxxing
- Exclusion and friendship breakdowns
- Intimidation at workplaces and universities

This is not just a community under pressure—it is a community under siege.

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We must act decisively with both short and long-term measures to confront this rising tide of hate, to protect our Jewish communities, and to uphold the values of tolerance, inclusion, and mutual respect that define our democracy,

My submission offers 9 recommendations and covers the following:

1. Prevalence and impact of antisemitism in Sydney's eastern suburbs
2. Antisemitism in institutional settings
3. Wholistic approach to antisemitism
4. Education and Awareness
5. A consistent and coordinated national approach
6. The role of social media in addressing antisemitism

Thank you for considering this submission, and for the opportunity to contribute to the critical conversation about a safer, more inclusive Australia.

If I can be of any further assistance in this inquiry, please contact my office.

Yours sincerely

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INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NSW

SUBMISSION BY KELLIE SLOANE MP

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1. Prevalence and impact of antisemitism in Sydney's eastern suburbs

In the past 18 months I have witnessed a profound shift in the mindset and spirit of our local Jewish community – indeed, across our whole electorate.

When elected in March 2023 I was, of course, aware of the ever-present security threats to local Jewish Australians and organisations. Jewish schools are fortified with high fences and barbed wire. They have sophisticated security systems and often guards at the entrances. The community has additional local policing by way of the Community Security Group (CSG).

Jewish locals grew up with stories of persecution and resilience woven into their identities. Yet in Sydney before October 7, 2023, there was a sense of fortune – of freedom. They were not looking over their shoulders every day.

It was a community that was integrated in every part of society - be it in the arts and cultural communities, educational institutions, business, or philanthropy. Whether someone was Jewish or not seemed of very little consequence in our proud multicultural, multi-faith city. At least that was what I thought then.

On reflection I was naïve.

I believe we all took Sydney's cultural success for granted. We celebrated it. We promoted it. But we didn't invest in it. Our "she'll be right, mate" attitude didn't cut it when it came to social cohesion. We didn't take enough notice of the small warning signs. We didn't invest enough in education. We let the rigor of process and impartiality in our institutions and public service erode, bit by bit.

We appeased bad behaviour because that was easier.

And when the atrocities of October 7 unfolded, we were hopelessly, inadequately prepared for the unravelling of the social fabric of our city and the unrest and hatred that rose to the surface.

On October 8th, Sheikh Ibrahim Dadoun told a crowd of cheering protesters that the attacks on innocent civilians in Israel were an act of "resistance".

"I'm elated, it's a day of courage, it's a day of pride, it's a day of victory."

On October 9, before Israel had retaliated to the terrorist massacre of 1,195 Israeli men, women and children in Gaza, pro-Palestinian supporters, with police escort, marched to the Sydney Opera House, burning flags and chanting "fuck the Jews," and "where's the Jews".

The Jewish community, who should have been witnessing the Opera House sails light up to honour the innocent civilians killed in a barbarous act of terrorism, were told to stay home for their safety.

Our government failed not just the Jewish community that day, but our whole city; because in seeking to appease the hateful protesters for “operational reasons”, they set the standard for acceptable behaviour in our city.

These sickening displays – well before any military retaliation by Israel on Hamas, were the moments we lost our innocence as a city.

And that’s when I noticed the change in my community. It happened almost overnight.

People told me they felt vulnerable. Betrayed. Alone. Motorcades of Palestinian protesters come into our community in an attempt to intimidate local Jews. Nazi and Hamas symbols were painted on local school bus stops.

Local students didn’t feel safe attending university because of the intimidating encampments of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish protesters. The local arts and creative community had their personal details shared online in a doxxing incident that led to personal threats and attacks on their places of work.

Jewish community leaders received personal threats to their safety. Trusted friendships dissolved – often without explanation.

Then we saw a wave of terrifying attacks and car bombings across Sydney’s east over summer – targeting at Jewish homes, synagogues and even a childcare centre; most of which were, allegedly, masterminded by criminals.

There are many more examples.

These events have left deep psychological scars and shaken the foundations of trust and belonging in a community that has long considered Australia a safe and welcoming home. The trauma is real - and for many, it echoes generational memories that were thought to belong only in history.

But this is not just a Jewish issue. When any community in our city feels unsafe, all of us are diminished. Antisemitism is a litmus test for the health of our democracy, our institutions, and our collective moral compass.

This submission is not just a list of concerns. It is a call to action—a plea for stronger protections, more courageous leadership, and a renewed commitment to the values of tolerance, diversity, and inclusion which underpin Australian society.

The time for complacency has passed. What we do now will determine whether Sydney remains a city that is safe for everyone, or one that allows hate to thrive in the cracks of our inaction.

We must be better. We must do better. We must begin now.

2. Antisemitism in institutional settings

The workplace is meant to be a place of professionalism, safety, and inclusion—yet for many Jewish Australians, that expectation has been increasingly compromised. This is especially the case within our state education and health systems.

Since October 7, 2023, the climate in some Sydney workplaces has become openly hostile toward Jews, with antisemitism no longer whispered but worn as a badge of political expression.

The incident at Bankstown Hospital, where two nurses were charged over a video which allegedly included threats to Israeli patients, made many Jewish medical professionals feel unsafe, and led to further revelations about workplace culture. Many Jewish professionals report feeling pressured to remain silent on issues affecting their community, fearing that voicing concerns may lead to ostracisation or professional repercussions.

The Alliance Against Antisemitism conducted a survey of health professionals that found almost half of the 265 respondents (48%) felt the need to hide their Jewish identity since October 7. One third had experienced antisemitism in the workplace and two thirds were aware of others experiencing workplace antisemitism.

In our schools, the politicisation of staff rooms has created similar concerns. In October 2024, the Parents and Citizens Federation condemned plans for some teachers to engage in a week of pro-Palestinian activism in schools.

According to the Sydney Morning Herald, materials circulated by Teachers and Support Staff for Palestine called for staff at public and private schools next week to show their support for Palestine and Lebanon during teaching hours through the wearing of keffiyehs, passing motions, or creating a lesson to teach students about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

These views should be expressed and debated in appropriate forums in the free time of these teachers; however when they arrive at school, they are obliged to adhere to policies of political neutrality.

When ideology overrides duty of care and public service, our institutions risk becoming complicit in the spread of hate.

In my opinion, the following must be addressed in our public service

- Political Bias in Policies and Training: DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) initiatives, while well-intentioned, often exclude Jewish identity or fail to recognise antisemitism as a form of discrimination. In some cases, DEI programs promote narratives that contribute to antisemitic bias rather than address it. An example of this is the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) had to apologise to a Jewish academic after showing a slide of “Dutton’s Jew”, who “hates Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims, and thinks of antisemitism as the only form of racism.” This was displayed at a conference on anti-racist research.

- **Tolerance of Hostility:** In recent years, political discourse surrounding Israel and broader Middle Eastern politics has increasingly infiltrated the workplace. While it's important for employees to feel free to express their views, this has often created an environment where anti-Jewish rhetoric, disguised as political expression, goes unchallenged. The rhetoric, sometimes veiled as criticism of Israeli policies, can quickly cross into antisemitism, fuelling an atmosphere of hostility which impacts Jewish employees.
- **Failure to Act:** Constituents and members of the medical profession have reported to me that antisemitic incidents in institutions are often dismissed or downplayed, leaving Jewish employees feeling unprotected and unsupported.
In the case of hospitals, there is no whistle-blower mechanism, short of escalating complaints to the Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC) or the NSW Ombudsman. Professionals have told me they feel unable to speak to their immediate superiors, who may be dismissive, or worst case, complicit in some of these conversations.

Recommendation 1: Recognising antisemitism in DEI programs

- Institutions must acknowledge antisemitism as a unique and serious form of discrimination within DEI training and policies.
- There should be mandatory training on antisemitism (both overt and subtle), guided by reputable Jewish organisations

Recommendation 2: Recognising antisemitism in DEI programs

- While most public institutions have workplace policies that prevent political activism from turning into discrimination, there must be better promotion of those policies and sufficient enforcement.
- A review of enforcement and compliance should be prioritised.

Recommendation 3: Stronger accountability mechanisms

- Develop a workplace "racism whistle-blower hotline" in our public hospitals. Require institutions to investigate antisemitic incidents with the same urgency as other forms of discrimination.

Recommendation 4: Workplace culture review of the NSW Public Service

- Conduct an independent workplace culture review, starting in our State's Public Hospitals, but broadening to other parts of the public sector, to identify gaps and improvements in our current policies and training.
- Foster a culture where employees of all backgrounds feel safe expressing their identities without fear of hostility or retaliation.

In conclusion, if left unaddressed, the rise of antisemitism within our institutions will continue to erode trust, safety, and inclusivity for Jewish professionals, as well as Jewish patients. Ensuring that institutions remain politically neutral, enforce clear anti-discrimination policies, and integrate Jewish perspectives into DEI initiatives to create workplaces where all employees feel safe and respected.

3. Antisemitism in institutional settings

Antisemitism does not exist in isolation—it is part of a wider ecosystem of prejudice and discrimination which includes racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and other forms of bigotry.

These forms of hate often intersect, feeding into a broader climate of division, fear, and exclusion. When antisemitism is left unchallenged, it not only harms Jewish communities but also normalises the language and actions of hate more broadly; emboldening those who target other minority groups.

It's essential to recognise that addressing antisemitism requires a collective response—one rooted in solidarity across different communities. When Jewish, Muslim, Indigenous, migrant, and other groups stand together against hate in all its forms, we begin to dismantle the narratives which seek to divide us. Combatting antisemitism, then, is not just a Jewish issue—it is a societal imperative.

Recommendation 5: Building alliances across communities

- In Sydney's diverse and multicultural landscape, there is a real opportunity to build strong, values-driven alliances between the Jewish community and other marginalised groups—including Muslim, Indigenous, Asian, African, and LGBTQ+ communities.
- These alliances can be rooted in shared experiences of discrimination, resilience, and a mutual desire to create a more just society.

Building coalitions means listening to one another's stories, showing up for each other in times of crisis, and working side-by-side on initiatives that uphold human dignity.

In saying this, I recognise the important work already being done by NSW Faith Affairs Council, Faith NSW, The Interfaith Dialogue Association, and others.

However, my concern is that their voices have not been strong enough or swift enough.

I commend the work of the Mayors of Waverley, Liverpool and Inner West Council whose leadership – bringing other local government colleagues together to combat antisemitism and all forms of racism, including islamophobia - was inspiring.

We need more of these initiatives.

Stronger voices (unequivocal public statements) and swifter response times by our faith and cultural groups to all acts of racism must occur.

4. Education and awareness

Education is one of the most powerful tools we have to combat ignorance, fear, and prejudice. In Sydney—home to one of the largest Jewish populations in Australia—it is **essential that we implement comprehensive and inclusive educational programs that address antisemitism head-on.**

This includes incorporating Jewish history, culture, and contributions into school curricula, while also teaching about the patterns of exclusion, scapegoating, and hate that have historically targeted Jewish communities.

Such education must go beyond the school desk. It should include visits to museums, engagement with Holocaust survivors, and firsthand accounts that personalise the Jewish experience. The Sydney Jewish Museum already plays a vital role in this space, but its reach could be expanded through stronger partnerships with local schools, universities, and community centres. Their efforts to do so should continue to be supported by Governments at State and Federal level, and, I am pleased to see bipartisanship on this so far.

Changes to the NSW high school history course to include mandatory Holocaust education is also to be applauded.

Recommendation 6: Improved civics education in schools

- NSW should strengthen its civics education, including consideration of stand-alone civics subject in our schools.
- The new syllabus in 2027 includes compulsory civics content but consideration should also be given to developing a more comprehensive and focused education.

I support the Federal Parliament's joint standing committee on electoral matters recommendation for a nationally mandated and stand-alone civics and citizenship education curriculum, plus mandatory civics, and citizenship training for all teachers.

This followed ACARA's 2024 testing of Australian students' proficiency levels in civics, which showed just 28% of year 10 students met proficiency standards compared to 38% when the test was last conducted in 2019.

While civics is currently included in the national curriculum; states, and even individual schools, have a large degree of autonomy in the importance given to civics.

Why is this important when it comes to helping combat antisemitism?

By equipping students with critical thinking skills, and a better understanding of our democracy and institutions, civics education fosters a sense of national identity and cohesion. Civics education gives meaning to the line in our unofficial national anthem, I am Australian, "we are one, but we are many".

We should be actively fostering a sense of national pride – and a desire to protect and invest in our identity as one country built on the strengths of our different cultures and faiths.

While freedom of speech has long been a protected and cherished part of university life, freedom of speech should not be absolute, and it should not be at the expense of the rights, freedoms, safety, and security of others.

The University of Sydney got the balance wrong in allowing a pro-Palestinian encampment for 8 weeks. During this period, Jewish students reported experiencing intimidation and a sense of exclusion, with some expressing fear about attending classes. The University of Sydney and Macquarie University reportedly created high security “safe rooms” on campus for Jewish students.

It should never have come to this; **Universities should be focused not on safe rooms but on safe campuses.**

Recommendation 7: Universities must invest in prevention

- Universities have an obligation to ensure the freedom, safety, and security of students, regardless of their religion.
- Conduct independent reviews of policies and procedures .
- Proactively implement new and evolving social cohesion programs for students.
- Explore new ways to allow student protest and provide a “pressure-valve” for free speech.

Lessons could be drawn from other local universities such as UNSW, where early action was taken immediately post October 7, anticipating possible problems and seeking to minimise risk.

These included, but were not limited to:

- Additional security
- Additional staff and student counselling
- Additional noticeboards built to create an authorised space for protest posters and to advertise rallies.
- Additional cleaners were hired to remove graffiti and unauthorised posters.

I note that the University of Sydney has resolved, in principle, to accept the recommendations of the Hodgkinson External review report, commissioned by the Australian Senate, following the encampments.

Transparency around the actions being taken to deliver on the commitment will be important.

5. A consistent and coordinated national approach

While there have been varied legislated approaches across the States to address antisemitism, and the appointment of a Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, **there must be a cohesive national strategy to combat antisemitism.**

A consistent and coordinated approach could look at the following.

- Setting common definitions on what constitutes antisemitism.
- Common or complementary legislative response to crime concerning antisemitism.
- Encourage inter-agency cooperation (such as government, law enforcement)
- Education and awareness
- Online hate prevention
- Community engagement

Recommendation 8: A national strategy on antisemitism

- Antisemitism needs to be recognised as a national problem, not just a local one.
- Wherever possible, governments and communities should have a consistent and coordinated approach to antisemitism.

6. The role of social media in addressing antisemitism

The role of media in shaping public perception cannot be overstated, particularly in the context of antisemitism.

Media outlets, whether traditional or digital, have the power to either perpetuate harmful stereotypes and false narratives or to challenge and dismantle them.

Unfortunately, in many cases, media coverage of Jewish communities, particularly around topics like Israel and Palestine, has contributed to the perpetuation of antisemitic tropes, including, the demonisation of Jewish people and the spreading of misinformation.

The biggest area of concern is online platforms that appeal to young people. If we don't address this, we risk having a generation of young people whose perceptions of Jewish people are altered by pervasive themes generated online – potentially by foreign actors with a motivation to destroy social cohesion in our country.

Recommendation 9: Social media platform accountability and balance

- Social media companies must enhance their content moderation systems to detect and remove both antisemitic and anti-Islamic content more effectively.
- The Government should provide balanced and engaging content that raises awareness of online hate and promotes counter narratives that provide positive perceptions of the Jewish community.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the rise in antisemitism, particularly in Sydney's eastern suburbs, demands urgent attention and action at all levels of government and society. The experiences shared in this submission reflect a community deeply affected by fear, violence, and prejudice. However, they also highlight the resilience and determination of the Jewish community and their commitment to a society founded on tolerance, diversity, and inclusion.

As we move forward, it is essential that we not only address the immediate concerns of antisemitic incidents but also work towards long-term solutions through education, stronger legal frameworks, better institutional practices, and robust community alliances.

Every step we take to combat antisemitism will help build a more cohesive, united, and just Australia, where every individual - regardless of their background - can live in safety and dignity.

We cannot afford complacency. Now is the time to act with urgency and conviction. Together, we can ensure that the values that define us as Australians - respect, inclusion, and freedom—are protected for all communities, today and in the future.

Thank you for considering this submission, and for the opportunity to contribute to the critical conversation about a safer, more inclusive Australia.