REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 5 - JUSTICE AND COMMUNITIES

ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

CORRECTED

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, on Monday 15 September 2025

The Committee met at 10:30.

PRESENT

The Hon. Robert Borsak (Chair)

Dr Amanda Cohn (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Greg Donnelly
The Hon. Scott Farlow
The Hon. Stephen Lawrence
The Hon. Cameron Murphy
The Hon. Chris Rath

Dr ANDREW MOORE, former associate professor, expert on right-wing extremism in Australia; author of *The Right Road? A History of Right-wing Politics in Australia*, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: Thank you for appearing, Dr Moore. Would you like to make a short opening statement?

ANDREW MOORE: My expertise in this area is simply as a historian—one might even say as a humble historian. I wrote my PhD broadly on the subject in 1984; that's a long time ago. I've written three books on the extreme right in Australia, partly or mainly, and many articles in books and things. I was an academic, so I did what academics do. I just want to explain that I write from a broadly social-democratic, anti-fascist point of view. I've had people assume, because I've written a lot on the right-wing movements of the 1930s, that means that I'm a supporter of right-wing movements in the present day. I'm not. I'm presently finishing a manuscript—even 10 years after retiring, I'm still going on the wretched subject—on people who joined the right-wing movements of the 1930s. Who were they and what motivated them?

One thing I just want to make a general point about at the outset is simply that it's a constant undercurrent—antisemitism, as is racism—in Australian politics. As Graham Davison the very good historian once said, it's the serpent in Australia's Eden. There's been an eliding of antisemitism with extreme-right fascism politics, and I think that mainly happened after World War II with the example of nazi Germany and the Holocaust. But antisemitism doesn't just exist on the extreme right of politics. Indeed, if you go back to the 1890s and to the versions of money power that were promoted by the labour movement and the Labor Party, there was a strong antisemitic strand there. Today we would associate antisemitism with the extreme right, but I think it has had many manifestations on the left of politics, or broadly on the left.

The most substantial and dangerous right-wing group of Australian history was a group in the 1930s known as the New Guard. They're best remembered for the act of theatre that Francis de Groot committed at the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. But, beyond that, they weren't joking. They were very, very nasty. There were at least three attempts to stage a coup d'état on Macquarie Street in 1932, and they didn't get around to it. They were a non-event that way. But the point here is that they, interestingly, I think, weren't especially antisemitic. They admitted—welcomed—Jews to membership. Several of the prominent members, like Samuel Barber, who was a major furrier in Sydney—he was a Jew and a member of the New Guard. Indeed, interestingly, he told a another member of the New Guard—a man by the name of Tom Walsh, who was a famous trade union leader but had crossed over to the right—that the New Guard must be accepted as fascist, and we must accept it as fascist and it must be accepted as fascist.

So my point is that perhaps the Premier of the time, Jack Lang, who the New Guard hated, was quite possibly even a little more antisemitic than the New Guard was. He had the view that the Niemeyer plan—the Bank of England sent over an expert, Sir Otto Niemeyer, to tell Australians to pull in the reins of finance—that is, to reduce wages—and Lang promoted antisemitic ideology pretty strongly against Niemeyer. Broadly speaking, the New Guard was not antisemitic and the left of politics was.

But now, when we're looking at present-day events and the people who are roaming the streets, clearly there's—I mean, they seem to be happy, apparently, to call themselves "neo-Nazi". They are very strongly antisemitic. That's their modus operandi, in many ways. I suppose what that means is, unfortunately, antisemitism is very popular. Indeed, in a way, the New Guard I think would have been even more popular. It had 60,000 or 70,000 members, but I think it would have been even more popular had it been more antisemitic. Antisemitism is certainly to the fore with right-wing movements at the moment and it's good that this Committee is considering these matters.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Thanks so much for coming along, doctor. It's really appreciated. Are you able to give us a sense within, I suppose, the boundaries of your expertise and what you've talked about as your work of how the current presence of the far right compares to historical periods going back to the 1930s? Is it stronger now than it has been in the past? Is it bigger now than it has been? Is it currently in an ebb or at a high? Can you give us a sense of where we're at?

ANDREW MOORE: I think the high water mark of the extreme right in Australia was the 1930s. There were groups like the League of Rights that existed in the post-World War II period that were strongly antisemitic. There were Nazi groups promoted after the 1960s. I vividly remember attending—I don't even remember the context of it, but there was a famous figure in right-wing politics called Ross May, aka "The Skull". He was at a meeting, I think, about some intervention in the Middle East early in the 2000s. I was shocked to hear him amongst this group of people—I was elsewhere; just walking past, really. Every time he yelled out "Kill Jews!" the crowd would cheer. That really shocked me. That's certainly not a perspective that I thought would be coming from that group of people, since they were broadly on the left and progressive people, I assumed.

I think there's a constant undercurrent of these people. There are all these forgotten figures. There was a wrecker from Warracknabeal—very hard to say—in Victoria who was the leader of the right-wing groups of the 1990s. He had huge support at the time, bigger than the groups now—massive marches. I saw one through Melbourne and I was, again, quite surprised. The present cadres of the right, maybe they're just passing phases. That's what I hope. But I guess it's good to be wary of them.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: So you wouldn't say that we're at, historically speaking, a high point in terms of the strength or activities of the far right?

ANDREW MOORE: I wouldn't, no, but one can be sanguine about these things. For much of Australian history, the extreme right could hold its meeting in a telephone booth, but that's clearly not the case now. They've got significant support and figures who are populist leaders. One of the things that the New Guard didn't have in the 1930s was a good, charismatic leader. I've never heard Thomas Sewell speak—the present guys—but I assume that he does have some charisma. That's not a good thing. But Colonel Campbell in the 1930s was among the most boring public speakers in political history. He used to send crowds to sleep sometimes. That didn't help his cause.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: There's talk at the moment among elements of the far right about entering electoral politics. Obviously that's something that they can't do in some countries—that the constitution prohibits. Have you got any thoughts, with your historical perspective, on this question of the neo-Nazis or far right, which is not exactly interchangeable, I should say. Have you got have any thoughts on the possibility of them entering electoral politics? Is there anything that we should know about or should think about?

ANDREW MOORE: Interestingly, the New Guard went into electoral politics, having failed in street politics. They started their own political party called the Centre Party. They contested the 1935 elections. Most of the candidates—there weren't that many; three or four—failed to do any good at all. They had lost their money for entering the parliamentary race. Again, by 1935, conditions had improved a lot. The Great Depression was the major motor of extremism, both on the left and the right—not that the Communist Party did very well out of the Depression; it remained a very small force. In the eyes of the New Guard, which had, as I said, about 60,000 members at one stage—it was a terrible ogre and a fearsome threat. It took a fair amount of imagination to get to that view. They were very small. But still, it's hard to imagine that the New Guard and other groups around Australia—there were similar groups in Melbourne and similar groups in South Australia—would have risen to any prominence at all without the Great Depression.

Economic conditions deteriorated so badly, unemployment reached 33⅓ per cent in some working-class districts. It had been, too—if you look at the rise of fascism in Italy from 1919 to 1922, the economic conditions of Italy post-World War I were disastrous, and that drove a lot of Mussolini's forces. The same happened in Germany. It's hard to imagine that Hitler would have risen to power had not the economic conditions and the disastrous state of the Weimar Republic intervened. In Australia, the Depression was almost—it wasn't as bad as America or Germany, certainly, but it was still pretty bad. I remember reading in oral histories of the period that in some streets in a place like Bankstown, every second person would not have a job. It wasn't as bad as Europe, but it was still pretty bad. I think it was a major factor behind the rise of the New Guard.

To the present day, I'm a bit surprised by all the things that are going on. I didn't expect it or I don't follow it that closely; I sit and write calmly about the 1930s. But I am surprised that there is such support or apparent signs of support. As I said, the only thing that I can think is a solace is perhaps that these figures are transitory. They come and they go; there's one and there's another. They all seem pretty significant at the time, but basically they don't get traction to any great extent in the long term. That's certainly what happened to Eric Campbell in the 1930s. He was a major figure. He would have town hall meetings of 3,000 people—pretty significant gatherings. But by the end of the 1930s he was a non-event.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: In terms of antisemitism, your area of expertise, the 1930s, predates the creation of Israel. We've got a lot of evidence that there has been an explosion in antisemitism since the events of 7 October. Have you got any thoughts on how you would situate that rise in antisemitism, its cause, why it has occurred, the extent of it, the nature of it? How would you situate it in a historical perspective in terms of your expertise about antisemitism?

ANDREW MOORE: It's a good question. Mainly, I think I try to be sanguine about it, but I wouldn't be too sanguine. As I said, antisemitism seems to ebb and flow. It never had a high point in a comparative sense to Europe, but it's always there. It's in the community. It's in the fabric of society, I think. The problem is—and it's the final words in a book that I wrote in the 1990s thinking about these sorts of things too—that as soon as you censor these movements, it only helps them to gather strength. Until things get really bad—and, obviously, hopefully they won't and hopefully we'll never see violence in the street to any great extent—then it's better to let the likes of Thomas Sewell rave on rather than intervene too much, because that only adds fuel to their fire and

only assists them. As I said, that does sound a bit sanguine, but I look at Thomas Sewell, in particular, as a figure that is a short-lived one. He's not going to be around forever, but I wouldn't like to be terribly wrong about this. That hopefully would be so.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Thank you very much, Dr Moore, for your attendance here today and for your evidence. In terms of what we're seeing now, we're of course seeing social media being used a lot. Once you scratch beneath the service of some posts or some commentary, we're starting to see quite a lot of antisemitic commentary online. I'm just interested in terms of your analysis of that and how that might be fuelling, potentially, some of this antisemitism that we're seeing from the far right.

ANDREW MOORE: I'm sure it is. I'm not a huge consumer of social media, but even though I try very hard to keep unpleasant Facebook sites off my feed, I still seem to get a number of them. Obviously, it's a different thing. Maybe I shouldn't be too sanguine. Evidence suggests that people can build whole careers around being a Facebook warrior and presenting their views on Facebook. I'm always surprised by how many people get their political views, not just about the extreme right or whatever, from Facebook. It's a much more instrumental source. The media in the 1930s was very small. There were the mainstream newspapers. As opposed to modern politics, there were papers that would represent the ideas of the labour movement. There was a paper that the State Labor Party ran and there was a paper that the Federal Labor Party ran, and they were both good newspapers. They were also able to put the perspective of labour, whereas most of the mainstream media doesn't have that sense of responsibility anymore.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: This is one of the things in terms of some of these views. They're not views that are expressed, necessarily, if you're watching the evening news on TV. They're not views that are expressed if you're reading the daily newspaper, whatever it might be. But they're views that are coming out now online, and people are able to push these views online. In terms of your historical background, there obviously were communication pieces that were written at the time. Were they direct mail or direct newsletters, or were they more widely available than that?

ANDREW MOORE: An organisation like the New Guard or those that followed could be expected to have its own journal and had several, and they were pretty intelligent journals, unlike most of the Facebook feeds. They had some interesting articles and they had various aspects of political theory. But Facebook is a big difference to the 1930s. The social media thing does make a big difference.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: To that point, there's now the ability for people to do this anonymously as well—and I imagine it was possible in those days as well—and to maybe even amplify their impact by having either bots or anonymous accounts, which might be multiple accounts, and amplifying these views so that it seems even larger than what it might actually really be within society. Is that something that you're conscious of at all?

ANDREW MOORE: I'd agree with that, I'd say. It's hard to tell. There is a significant presence on Facebook, obviously, of extreme right groups. As I said, I do my level-headed best to get none of them, since I use Facebook for family and recreational purposes. But you still get some. I think that proliferates it. As you said, once it's on Facebook, someone else decides, "That's a good idea." It is interesting how even within certain groups—I'm a member of a motor racing club and the Historic Sports and Racing Car Association, an entirely estimable journal. I get their Facebook feed, and there's a couple of antisemites on there. I just individually block them, but people find a way to promote their views.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I guess this is one of the challenges, in a sense. As you were saying, you try to keep away from it. But when you've got algorithms that throw up what people want to see or what people are interested in—I can imagine even your research might sometimes change your algorithm if you're having a look at certain issues and then you might be consuming some of that content. We do have this problem now. Not only is it information that you may see in one shape or form, but you also go down the rabbit hole, so to speak. Once you consume part of that information, you then start to consume more and more and it takes you to different places. Is that something you've analysed at all, in terms of how it's operating?

ANDREW MOORE: It's not something I've analysed, but it's certainly something I've noticed. It certainly happens that way. Going back to the 1940s, there was a very significant, very antisemitic and very extreme group called the Australian League of Rights. They just had journals and they had meetings, but they managed to get a large following without social media. Had these organisations existed to the present day, I suspect they would be much more powerful. Social media definitely amplifies the issues.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of the current organisations, have you tracked their genesis with some of these organisations of the '30s and '40s—as you were saying before, it ebbs and flows in a sense—and how they've survived or reorganised through those ebbs and flows?

ANDREW MOORE: I am aware of some of the sense of historical continuum. One of the historians and practitioners—an interesting guy—is Jim Saleam. I've been amazed that he hasn't appeared recently in terms of politics. He usually makes an appearance when there is an anti-immigration issue.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: He is a perennial candidate for Lindsay, I think.

ANDREW MOORE: Yes. That is my main thought—when is Jim Saleam going to say something? I marked his PhD, and it wasn't entirely a bad work either. People thought that maybe you shouldn't give a PhD to a fascist, but the scholarly credentials of it were pretty significant and it made a major contribution to knowledge. That was what I voted for when it became an issue. He's a pretty bright guy. He actually came from the left, proving the point about aligning with the right. He was, I believe, some sort of Maoist at some stage and then gravitated towards National Action and groups like that. When you read his works, he is clearly of a different standard to most of the fairly ill-informed and very mindless—antisemitic or otherwise—thoughts that are promoted now and have been in the past.

The League of Rights, though, spread all the way through the countryside. That was its strength, I suppose. It mainly had a stronger strength in rural society than it did to the present day. I think it's now mainly moribund. I don't think it exists at all. I am aware that my knowledge is really about the 1930s. I did write a book on the road that took right-wing politics up to the present day, but that present day was 1995. It has the distinction of being a book on the extreme right that didn't mention Pauline Hanson, simply because it was published in 1995 and Pauline Hanson didn't make her appearance until 1996. I've always rather regretted that, but it is what it is.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm interested in your views on when antisemitism has become more widespread historically and whether that's occurred in isolation or in tandem with other forms of racism or hatred against other marginalised groups.

ANDREW MOORE: I would say the two of them—racism, xenophobia, antisemitism—are the same thing. They do hold hands. They do run in concert with each other. The groups of the 1930s, even those that weren't antisemitic, were very racist. They were White Australia policy, which was still very much in people's minds. The cursed curs from overseas your average orator would talk about, which were partly communist, but also usually partly the Asian devils of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat. Anti-Asian sentiment was a strong thing in the 1930s and, clearly, at recent stages in recent history—Perth, in particular—anti-Asian sentiments again have been very popular and very widespread.

Dr AMANDA COHN: When we're looking backwards, have there been any approaches by governments or any other civil society groups or others that have successfully de-radicalised people from the extreme right?

ANDREW MOORE: That's another good question. I think not. They just lose energy. They lose steam. They die out naturally. In the 1930s that certainly happened. The New Guard, in particular, was just about to be prosecuted—or its leaders were—for seditious conspiracy, and that didn't happen. But the law was very heavy on—the New South Wales police, I should say, were really good in terms of suppressing the New Guard in the 1930s. There were major street battles between the New Guard and the police, and invariably the police won substantially. There's an event called the Liverpool Street police riot, and the famous policeman of that period, Inspector Bill MacKay, simply told his men to go out there and belt their heads off. And they did just that. I think that in particular stopped a lot of the popularity of the New Guard. Your average Artarmon stockbroker or lawyer from Killara wasn't that keen on being beaten up by the cops. In fact, they probably never thought that they would be. That took a lot of the steam out of the New Guard. The police was a significant factor.

Dr AMANDA COHN: There was a recent Victorian Legislative Council inquiry into extremism. That was a very interesting read, and there was significant commentary around the need for responsible media reporting. For example, there are media codes of conduct around reporting of suicide or reporting around domestic violence to reduce the risk of exacerbating those issues. Are there examples or trends of media actually disseminating propaganda and supporting the growth of these movements?

ANDREW MOORE: The media always promote propaganda, to an extent. Sorry, what was the precise question? I couldn't hear that clearly.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm trying to frame the question as backward-looking, noting your expertise is history rather than the present day. I'm interested in the role of the media having disseminated propaganda and actually contributing to the growth or the strength of right-wing extremist movements.

ANDREW MOORE: In this country, and in Britain, the media for a while were very energetic supporters of right-wing fascist movements. The newspapers in Britain promoted Mosley until there was a big rally at Olympia in 1934. They decided that the violence there was probably not entirely acceptable, so they

back-pedalled. The media in Australia did much the same for the New Guard. The conservative media promoted the New Guard. They talked about it as a new force in politics, as a new spirit arising in the country, and aren't we all lucky. As I said, at the time, there was a labour press. There's no labour press now, not one that's like this, anyway—like *The Labor Daily* or "The World". And they were also very energetic in putting counterarguments against the things that the New Guard said and did.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: You were talking before about Jack Lang and antisemitism and, I suppose, left-antisemitism in that time period. Could you give us a sense of what were the central characteristics of left-antisemitism in that time period?

ANDREW MOORE: Very nasty stereotyping of Jewish people—cartoons in the conservative papers and angry, declamatory language about the Jewish bankers who would cause the depression, so it was alleged. Nasty cartoons of Jews and things. It's an undercurrent that's always there, and it was in the 1930s, and those images have been used and re-used.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Was it being used in that context to further particular objectives politically or policy wise?

ANDREW MOORE: It is, yes.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: What were the issues?

ANDREW MOORE: Lang was a populist and a nationalist. He was very good speaker and he promoted himself very well by these ugly images. He did it very successfully. He was arguably the most popular politician of Australian history, but also the most hated and the most reviled. He had enormous support amongst the blue-collar working class in New South Wales in the early 1930s and continued to have a fair bit into the 1930s. He didn't lace every speech with antisemitism, but he did a fair bit of it—that is, always talking about the cormorants of finance, backed up by the Labor daily newspapers. They supported his arguments. But I remember antisemitism being stronger in the community than the present day anyway. When I was growing up, you always used to hear it at school. I grew up in a conservative, middle-class area at a State school there. I have heard antisemitic things, it feels like, all my life. But it's about whether the further you investigate it, is it getting worse. You're probably in a better position to judge than me. Hopefully it's not getting worse, but I wouldn't bet the house on it.

The CHAIR: Dr Moore, thank you very much for coming. Your evidence has been most helpful.

(The witness withdrew.)

Mr JOSEPH LA POSTA, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: Would you like to make a small opening statement?

JOSEPH LA POSTA: Yes, I would, but I'll keep it brief, because I think transparency in government is important. That's why we're here today: to have as many questions and as honest a conversation as we can. I'd like to thank Portfolio Committee No. 5 - Justice and Communities for the opportunity to appear today. I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet today, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

Multicultural NSW has a number of legislative functions, as set out in our enabling legislation, the multicultural Act of 2000. Firstly, I want to acknowledge the impacts of conflict, strife, violence, hate and antisemitism on our communities around the State here in New South Wales. In a time when many people are still suffering from events overseas and locally, it is everyone's responsibility that those around us get the support that they need. We've been through some unprecedented challenges before, but we've pulled through these because we are stronger together as Australians. That's what we must continue to do: Come together as one, show compassion and understanding for one another and recognise that we all share a common commitment to a unified Australia.

There is no place for antisemitism in any form in our society. Racism and hate directed towards any group is abhorrent and it is simply unacceptable. The New South Wales Government, the Premier, the Minister for Multiculturalism, the Chair of the Multicultural NSW advisory board, the Chair of the Faith Affairs Council and myself have all taken strong, unequivocal stances against antisemitism. For more than four decades my agency, Multicultural NSW, and its predecessors have worked to build and maintain a cohesive and harmonious multicultural society that enriches the lives of all people of New South Wales.

Our work and the work of the New South Wales Government is guided by the multicultural principles, which are a policy of the State and are entrenched in legislation under the multicultural Act of 2000. This has enjoyed bipartisan support for more than 40 years. The objectives and functions of my agency are set out in the Act and include, but are not limited to, promoting a unified and strong commitment to Australia, and promoting a cohesive and harmonious multicultural society. Whilst our core tenets remain steadfast, our work and approach evolve to meet the changing needs of our communities.

Accordingly, my agency follows a whole-of-community and multifaceted approach to social cohesion. This approach recognises we can always do better, but we are all responsible for social cohesion, and we promote social cohesion from multiple angles. The last thing I'd just like to say is, since the terrorist attack on the people of Israel on 7 October 2023, and then the subsequent suffering of the people in Gaza, the last 18 or 20 months has been a really unenviable task for the staff at Multicultural NSW. It's been an incredibly difficult time trying to navigate that, and I want to commend my staff, the agency and all the people more broadly that have tried to support us during that time. I hope my testimony today will be of use to the inquiry.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Thanks so much for coming along—it's really appreciated—and thanks to your staff. Firstly, could you outline some of the direct support your agency has provided to the Jewish community recently to assist them to navigate the challenges they have faced over recent years?

JOSEPH LA POSTA: Certainly, Mr Lawrence, and thank you for your question. There are a couple of things first and foremost. The first thing I just wanted to talk about is how the agency coordinates the role of government in dealing with social cohesion and community relations. Under our legislative function, we have the ability to form a committee called COMPLAN. That committee sits with Education, New South Wales police—all the key players in government central agencies and so forth—to work together on what are the issues that may be bubbling away in schools or bubbling away in communities, places of worship et cetera. That is a committee that, unfortunately, in the past two years—but particularly even in the two years before, during COVID—has been called an extraordinary number of times.

The second thing that we do is we have longstanding partnership projects in place that try to empower young people to stand up united against divisive forces, standing united against hate and racism. Three programs are probably relevant to this Committee: the Common Ground Project, an innovative anti-discrimination project from young leaders in schools, led by Jewish service organisation B'nai B'rith, Courage to Care; the interfaith schools community project, led by Catholic Mission, in partnership with Rabbi Zalman Kastel's Together For Humanity, the whole purpose of which is about empowering safe spaces and dialogue across different faith communities, be they Islamic, Catholic or Jewish; and the NRL is a willing partner with us as well, through Ernie Friedlander's project Moving Forward Together, a social cohesion project again working with young people to

promote work in schools by tackling issues such as social disengagement, racism, gender inequality, bullying, and promoting and enabling youth to be advocates for peace in their communities.[1]

In addition to that, as mentioned before, this Government has invested a considerable amount of time and energy in empowering our faith leaders through the establishment of the Faith Affairs Council in 2023. This council meets regularly; I think they've met now 10 times. They've issued a series of statements. I think some of the statements that they've issued are actually world leading, and we should commend Right Reverend Dr Michael Stead and the entire Faith Affairs Council for their inclusive and very compassionate leadership during these difficult times. In addition, this Government established the Premier's Prevention Panel on Hate and Extremism, which addresses the growing safety concerns of cultural and religious communities and the LGBTIQA+ community in New South Wales, and has discussed the impacts of conflict on young people, particularly in education settings.[2]

Recently we've been very active with local councils as well. We partnered with Mayor Swan, Mayor Parker and Mayor Nemesh on a recent Social Cohesion Forum. We continue to try to empower and support our community organisations right across the State. We've now distributed more than 19 grants in excess of $1 million to Jewish faith organisations in Greater Sydney, Newcastle and Byron Bay to help them in improving safety and security around their places of worship and ancillary structures. We recently empowered the Rabbinical Council with a small but modest grant to help them contextualise faith learnings, knowing that many of our rabbis are trained overseas and then contextualise that to an Australian way of life.[3]

We've provided $8.5 million to the Sydney Jewish Museum. Education is one of the core tenets and pillars that will help us in tackling antisemitism going further. The Emanuel Synagogue, the Jewish Board of Deputies, Jewish House Limited, the Hakoah Club—we want to help many of these important and strong pillars within the Jewish community not just in supporting the wellbeing, welfare and ongoing health of their community but also, more importantly, in building the soft bridges that need to come off the back of the last couple of really difficult years, particularly the last summer. That will help just get back to normal, where we're all together as New South Welsh people and Australians, sharing this great city and this great country and not being so hung up on divides about faith or foreign conflict.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: On that point, we've heard a lot of evidence about antisemitic incidents in the inquiry. Much of that is very clear cut. We're talking about attacks on institutions, criminal assaults, threats and so forth. However, we have had quite substantial evidence about what I would consider another category of incidents. I'm talking about things like street protests, strong commentary about Israel and other things. There's a strong body of opinion in the Jewish community that categorises those things as antisemitic, and a very strong body of opinion in other communities—especially Arab and Muslim communities—that says that that is not antisemitism but just political expression. Is the Government funding anything that aims to build knowledge in both communities or both camps—dare I use that language—of some of the historical realities for each community, as a way of building a common understanding so that our definition and understanding of what antisemitism is can align more? Is there space for each community to have a better understanding of how the other community interprets these very controversial historical facts?

JOSEPH LA POSTA: I think it's an excellent question. My honest opinion is that in the past 20 months there has been so much emotion, fear and anger being felt by communities, largely because of issues that are occurring overseas but also because of how they have quite strongly influenced the behaviour and sentiment of people here in Australia. Part of the challenge over the last two years is we've almost gone into our own tribes, and we haven't necessarily been in positions to be able to have democratically different and robust conversations across some of the divides on these issues and build an appreciation of alternative perspectives as a consequence of that. Every time we've tried to start to softly talk about the opportunities for roundtable discussions, leaders that have worked together in New South Wales to promote collaboration and dialogue for 20 or 30 years and have done amazing job—it has just been so hot, Mr Lawrence. The instabilities overseas and the ongoing human suffering, whether that be people who are still captured by Hamas now—that's just atrocious. Seeing the suffering of young, innocent kids in particular is equally heartbreaking and devastating.

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[1] In correspondence to the committee received 8 October 2025, from Mr Joseph La Posta, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, provided a clarification to their evidence.

[2] In correspondence to the committee received 8 October 2025, from Mr Joseph La Posta, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, provided a clarification to their evidence.

[3] In correspondence to the committee received 8 October 2025, from Mr Joseph La Posta, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, provided a clarification to their evidence.

It has been such a transient, unstable environment for the last 20 months that we haven't necessarily been able to bed down—in the way that we would—specific conversations about some of these things just because of the emotion and often the anger that's there. That all being said, we have not taken a step back from tackling hate and extremism as a government and in partnership with our community. I mentioned some of those community programs and partnerships before. Antisemitism is arguably the oldest form of hate. The tenets that remain with our Remove Hate from the Debate program—and I was listening to the doctor talk before about Mr Farlow's questions around the manifestation of antisemitism online.

I'm incredibly proud that our New South Wales Government Remove Hate from the Debate program has engaged more than two million young people online with simple tips and tools to help them in tackling taking the anger out of some of these online conversations, not allowing yourself to get caught and swept up in it, and identifying when you're potentially talking to a robot or a chatbot rather than a fellow human in some of the discussion that you're having. The COMPACT program—which has now engaged in excess of 200,000 to 300,000 kids in New South Wales—and our Remove Hate from the Debate programs are two that continue to try to tackle hate and racism as best we can.[4]

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Thank you very much, Mr La Posta, for your attendance here today and for all of the work that Multicultural NSW has done with all communities across New South Wales—not just the Jewish community, but all of them. In terms of those programs that you're running, how much has been dealt with in terms of dialogue amongst communities? Obviously you've brought in new initiatives such as the NSW Faith Affairs Council and the like but, across the broader community leadership, how much have you seen be able to change through dialogue?

JOSEPH LA POSTA: The first thing I would say is that dialogue with all communities has probably only increased over the past 20 months. When I say that, proactively outreaching and checking in with some really special people who have led the Jewish Board of Deputies over the past two years. I can't even begin to think of the pressure that some of those individuals have been under within their community. The Rabbinical Council's rabbis—and I mentioned a few before—Emanuel Synagogue and some of the leadership that has been in our New South Wales community that we've had direct daily—sometimes hourly, given the instability that happened over the past summer, has been something I've been incredibly proud of.

Equally, we can't just focus on one community. We're not going to solve antisemitism by just supporting the Jewish community through this. We also have to understand how it is being perceived by other communities. Obviously, naturally, our mind goes to those in the Middle East and to our Muslim communities more broadly, but also a lot of other communities. What is their sentiment about the geopolitical conflict? Are they somewhat apathetic to it? This whole thing is just dominating the media landscape, and they want to get back to talking about rugby league and cost of living and house prices, or is it all starting to manifest and sort of swirl around? I'm proud that some of those discussions between Jewish leadership and non-Jewish—whether it be Middle Eastern, Arabic, faith leaders—have led to discussions where support has been offered. I'm really proud of how strong our Hindu and Indian community was in supporting our Jewish community.

I'm really proud that some of our faith leaders from different groups have gone over to stand shoulder to shoulder with our Jewish community for memorials, commemorations, harmony events and all of those things. But, equally, the minute that—to Mr Lawrence's question before—we sort of get a stable footing in terms of the geopolitical conflict in the Middle East, we as a society have to really invest in reconnecting and restoring a lot of those bridges. That all being said—again, it was fascinating listening to the doctor before. I think there has been a perception at times—it's almost this idealistic view of how everyone has gotten on so closely and so well together for generations or decades. Communities have their differences, so we also need to be realistic about what success can look like in New South Wales going forward, and not have idealistic views about how close some of these communities have potentially always been or always worked together.

Mr Farlow, it's really about finding common ground, potentially on issues that aren't as related to this. It's our collective obligation to New South Wales and as Australians that we need to be focusing on. What can we control here in Australia to make us as strong and united as possible—it's not fair to say block out what's happening overseas, because obviously we can't—but equally not allow what's happening overseas to then import itself here and create even greater levels of breakdowns in social cohesion and trust in each other?

[4] In correspondence to the committee received 8 October 2025, from Mr Joseph La Posta, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, provided a clarification to their evidence.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: One of the other areas that we've heard about quite a lot during the inquiry has been in terms of security. I know the Government has had initiatives with respect to increasing security infrastructure for community organisations. How much of that has been directed towards the Jewish community?

JOSEPH LA POSTA: Bear with me for one second. We've administered two rounds. I think you're referring to the Safe Places for Faith Communities Grants. This takes an all-hazards approach to safety, which includes social policy approaches and practical measures, such as mental health and first aid training, as well as capital investment in physical security—fences, security cameras et cetera. The program is not designed to increase or even validate concern within the community but, rather, acknowledge that some places of worship could benefit from enhancements to security and it could positively affect people's perception of safety.

I think all of us agree that no-one should ever feel threatened going to a place of worship. We are proudly a secular society here in Australia, but we practise 139 faith traditions. I would be incredibly disappointed in a country like Australia, which is relatively safe compared to the rest of the world, if people weren't. Since the program began, nearly $1 million—$908,448 to be exact—has been awarded to 19 programs supporting the Jewish faith across Greater Sydney, Newcastle and Byron Bay. In the first round of funding, in 2023-24, over one quarter of a million dollars was awarded to five organisations affiliated with Judaism. In the second round of funding, $0.6 million was awarded to 14 organisations affiliated with Judaism.[5]

In addition, as I mentioned before, the Sydney Jewish Museum, the Central Synagogue and the Great Synagogue have also received additional funding from the New South Wales Government. As I mentioned before, we've also provided additional, modest support to some of the softer programs that are in place that are looking to build cohesive bridges through Emanuel Synagogue, the Rabbinical Council, Jewish Board of Deputies and others to help in—as Mr Lawrence said before—restoring and rebuilding some of the relationships and links that are there. The last thing, obviously, in partnership with White City, we've got a project to help support their commensurate security requirements as part of that redevelopment.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We've learnt recently of Iran's role in some of the attacks on the Jewish community, particularly at Lewis' Continental Kitchen. When did Multicultural NSW become aware of that or suspicions of that? Was that at the same time as it was made publicly known?

JOSEPH LA POSTA: Yes. Can I just say we're naive if we don't think foreign interference in this country, either through soft or in this really overt, disgusting, manipulative behaviour from foreign governments—we all must stand united and condemn any foreign government that is looking to undermine our social cohesion and our community safety here in New South Wales. I was incredibly disappointed. I found out through the media.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of some of those initiatives you were talking about, particularly with the Sydney Jewish Museum, we've heard quite commonly—and we had a visit to the Sydney Jewish Museum—about the impact of Holocaust education in particular. I'm just wondering if Multicultural NSW has had any role in that, either with education or with broader community groups in being able to facilitate Sydney Jewish Museum visits and the like?

JOSEPH LA POSTA: I sort of hoped you would ask this question. I've got great admiration for Greg Shand, the president of the Sydney Jewish Museum. Greg and I have probably spoken more than we would've liked to in the past 18 months about some of these things. I think he's a fascinating guy to sit down and have a coffee with. He's passionate about the Sydney museum, but he's bloody passionate about Australia. I really admire that in him. He's a pragmatist. I've connected Greg Shand and Murat Dizdar from the Department of Education to think about how we can, once the Sydney Jewish Museum reopens, make sure that our understanding of the Holocaust—you read Eddie Jaku's book, *The Happiest Boy on Earth*. It's a slippery slope. We need to be really careful as a society—again, as the doctor was talking before about the 1930s—that we never get anywhere close to that again. I think if there's one positive thing that can come out of the last really distressing 20 months, it's that we take some really important learnings as a society about getting better to make sure that any extremist and any hate is stomped on as quickly as possible.

Dr AMANDA COHN: My first question is a quick one. You responded to a question from the Opposition about the grants that have been provided to Jewish community organisations. Are you able to table the full list of grant recipients under that program from across all faith groups?

JOSEPH LA POSTA: No problem.

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[5] In correspondence to the committee received 8 October 2025, from Mr Joseph La Posta, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, provided a clarification to their evidence.

CORRECTED

Dr AMANDA COHN: Thank you very much. My second question is a much broader one. You've talked about some of the work Multicultural NSW and the Government has already done in terms of social cohesion. This Committee has spent a significant amount of time with New South Wales police. I suppose a social problem like antisemitism, like any other kind of racism, is not something that we can just police our way out of. What do you see as the opportunities or potential solutions moving forward?

JOSEPH LA POSTA: Whole of societal—I think the police are very good at enforcing the law, whether that's been some of the taskforces and the strike forces that have been implemented to try to reinforce public safety, particularly in and around the eastern suburbs, but, more broadly, around all of—Mr Lawrence touched on this before. For a large part, a lot of our protests have been incredibly peaceful protests. The majority of our protests have been peaceful, have been in central locations, haven't been inflammatory or targeting community X or Y, haven't been connected to places of worship or synagogues, or any of these things. There's an argument to say a lot of our peaceful protests have set an example for the rest of the world. I'm really disappointed in terms of the narrative around protest, particularly more broadly, and how the stronger stances about anti-immigration—I don't need to tell this community in terms of what's going on—that are adding complexity and politics and all of these things. Even in the last week, in terms of some of the politics that's been directed at community X or community Y, it's completely unhelpful, if I'm honest, to creating a society in a country that needs to be united now more than ever.

I think the police have done an incredible job. But, Dr Cohn, please don't think for one minute that I'm not in their ear as much as I can be about a lot of the nuance that happens with these things. I do want to take this opportunity to commend a lot of those hardworking police that have given up their Sundays with their families, or have potentially come in from regional New South Wales to safely administer these protests, as they have. Like I said to you before, we're not going to get out of this by building higher fences and more barbed wire and more security cameras. We're going to get out of this not through a law enforcement focus but more around restoring and re-establishing some of those links and investing in our social capital.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Finally, obviously the focus of this inquiry is antisemitism and we've received a volume of evidence about the rise in antisemitism in recent months and years. In your view, has that occurred in isolation? Or has a rise in racial hatred or hatred against other marginalised groups occurred in tandem?

JOSEPH LA POSTA: I think you can't ignore the direct attacks, particularly those perpetrated by foreign governments, that occurred on our Australians of Jewish faith in the past 12 months. Do I sit here resolved that all the different reports that we see in the media each and every day about percentages and numbers and everything is entirely accurate? I don't know, but I've got a dedicated team—I've got a systemic change team—that is specifically looking at working with partners right across the board to understand the ramifications and impacts of racism and perceived ramifications around racism.

I, again, take this opportunity to condemn all forms of hate and racism, particularly that directed to the Jewish community manifesting through antisemitism. I don't think it's happened in a vacuum, but I certainly think that a small minority number of Australians have been disproportionately targeted because of their faith. I can understand why that is incredibly triggering, thinking about generations of trauma that have—we're talking about parents and grandparents. Some of the people in this room can relate to exactly what I'm talking about in terms of the genocide and the Holocaust. I think we've all got to stand up united to that because, as I said before, we can never take our social cohesion for granted and we can never allow these extremists to marginalise views and to start to become mainstream. We're all on a unity ticket with that, I think.

The CHAIR: Mr La Posta, thank you very much for coming. I note you've taken one question on notice to provide some documents. The secretariat will be in contact.

(The witness withdrew.)

Ms SONIA MINUTILLO, NSW Privacy Commissioner, Information and Privacy Commission NSW, sworn and examined

Ms CARLA WILSON, Director, Regulatory Advice and General Counsel, Information and Privacy Commission New South Wales, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Welcome. Ms Minutillo, do you want to make a short opening statement?

SONIA MINUTILLO: If I may, I would like to. Chair and Committee members, thank you for the invitation to appear today to assist the Committee with its inquiry into antisemitism in New South Wales. As the NSW Privacy Commissioner, I'm responsible for overseeing compliance with the privacy framework established under two pieces of legislation: the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act and the Health Records and Information Privacy Act. This legislative regime applies to protect the privacy of individuals by regulating the handling of personal information by New South Wales public sector agencies, which includes State Government agencies, universities, councils and State owned corporations.

Collectively, these two Acts establish the rights of individuals in relation to their personal and health information that's collected and held by the public sector agency, and it establishes the Information Protection Principles and the Health Privacy Principles that apply to public sector agencies and which they must comply with. The legislation governs how agencies handle personal information and health information throughout the life cycle and creates a framework for individuals to seek redress where their privacy may have been breached by a regulated entity.

I'm aware that the terms of reference for this inquiry include reference to the practice of doxxing, a practice involving a publication of an individual's personal information online without their permission and intended to cause harm. While the PPIP Act protects the privacy of individuals by regulating the handling of personal information through those principles I referred to earlier, its application is contained to the conduct of agencies and not individuals or private sector organisations more generally. I note that recent reforms at the Commonwealth level have introduced a new criminal offence by amending the Criminal Code to address the targeted release of personal information in a malicious manner using a carriage service. Further, a statutory tort for serious invasions of privacy has also been introduced, providing individuals with the ability to sue another person where that person has invaded individuals' privacy by intruding upon their seclusion or misusing information relating to harm.

The terms of reference of this inquiry also include the privacy arrangements around public information that may identify an individual or their address, such as land title records and electoral roll information. On this aspect, I would observe that the PPIP Act includes specific provisions around the personal information held in public registers, unless those public registers have been specifically excluded by way of regulation or otherwise modified by a code of practice. These provisions include mechanism to address the suppression of personal information by public sector agencies in certain circumstances. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Are you covering for both in terms of an opening statement?

SONIA MINUTILLO: Correct, I am.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Thank you both for coming along; it's really appreciated. I appreciate that your responsibility is in relation to public sector agencies. Firstly, if a New South Wales Government agency came into possession—this could happen in a variety of contexts—of the transcript of a chat group where things had been said by people in a chat group of, let's say, 600 people, what would privacy policy considerations say about the innate private nature of that information, given that it was first generated in a very large group of people with hundreds of people having access to it?

SONIA MINUTILLO: There's no straight, simple answer to that question and, given its hypothetical nature, I think it is difficult to answer in a categorical sense. If one was to leave to one side how that information came to exist and its possession, in terms of the privacy regime, the principles apply to the collection of information by agencies, so the issue would become, has the agency collected that information and, if it has collected it, would that then give rise to the application of the privacy laws of New South Wales? I'm reluctant to give a definitive answer because these things are inherently complex and there are many different components that might feed into how that information has come into the possession of an agency. But, in the truest sense, under New South Wales privacy laws, if an agency is collecting information, and generally that information is collected from the individual to whom the information relates, that's how the legislation is generally operating or intended to operate. It is at that point that the legislation would have application to that collection.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: There's not necessarily a requirement that the information be private in its nature?

SONIA MINUTILLO: Without appearing to sound as if I'm trying to be unhelpful, again, it's very contextual and it's very hypothetical. The legislation in New South Wales applies to, essentially, the collection of personal information from the individual and sets requirements about the collection of that information from the individual. I'd be reluctant to offer a generalised view about whether it's private or not private in a hypothetical context.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: In terms of New South Wales law—and I'm sure you're aware that our terms of reference require us to look at things like land title records, electoral roll information and other things that identify an individual or their address—could you just talk us quickly through what New South Wales law provides in terms of a person's capacity to apply to have their particular information made secret? What are the statutory preconditions et cetera?

SONIA MINUTILLO: Certainly. If I can split that question into two parts and deal with the land titles separately to the electoral roll, the first observation I would make is, in terms of these registers, generally these registers are not created as a consequence of the creation of the privacy Act. They generally are formed out of their own statute or a different set of statute provisions, and they become known as a public register for the purposes of the privacy Act. However, under the privacy Act, there are certain of those registers that are exempt by way of regulation. The land titles is one of those to which the public register provisions, which I mentioned in my opening statement and that exist under my legislation, exempt the operation of the land titles.

In terms of the land titles, as I understand—and this is a matter that the Office of the Valuer General is probably more expert to answer—broadly speaking, the information is contained in that register. Access to that register is—a person can make a request to have the information suppressed under that legislation. The agency then makes a decision as to the interest in retaining or not retaining the information—the register—and whether it should be suppressed. As I understand, there are provisions in the land titles statutes that would enable a review of that decision to occur. But the public register provisions as they apply under the PPIP Act, in terms of that requirement, are exempt by way of regulation the Land Titles Act.

Similarly, in terms of the electoral roll, it's considered to be a public register. Therefore, the part 6 register provisions under the PPIP Act do apply. As I understand it, the way that is given effect by the Electoral Commission is you can make an application to access the electoral roll. There's a particular process and a particular form that the Electoral Commission has that you must follow. The intention is that you are not to access it for a purpose other than for which the electoral roll was established, which may be in order to establish the correctness or the accuracy of your entry on the electoral roll, for example. You can make an application for suppression. Sometimes there are separate provisions that apply for silent electors that exist under the electoral roll separately. Those provisions enable an agency to consider whether or not there is potentially a safety or a health wellbeing consideration and balance the public interest. If the agency is of the view that the public interest outweighs, then it does not have to suppress the information.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: That's helpful. Thank you. In terms of the subject matter of this inquiry, antisemitism, are you aware of, in the last couple of years—let's say, since the events of 7 October and the increase in all sorts of things since—any particular problem where people are being doxxed through the use of government-held information? Are you aware of an increase in applications for information to be kept confidential? Have you had more issues being drawn to your attention about those sorts of things?

SONIA MINUTILLO: Not directly. We receive, often, inquiries around a range of matters. I'm advised that our records indicate we've had two direct inquiries around doxxing, but they relate to private sector individuals, so not within my legislative remit. I'm not aware of any specific or direct nexus between a complaint or an issue arising that connects those two issues as a consequence of doxing specifically.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Excuse me if I'm putting you on the spot in terms of the esoterics of constitutional law, but does New South Wales have the power to create criminal offences about privacy and things that breach privacy? Is the Federal jurisdiction only there because of telecommunications? Is there capacity for New South Wales to create more general laws about rights to privacy and criminalisation of acts that infringe upon it?

SONIA MINUTILLO: That's a complex question. You're correct, you're asking me to offer a view about the operation of constitutional law and I'm no constitutional lawyer. My remit is concerned with the application of privacy law to the conduct of public sector agencies. Therefore, currently in the New South Wales privacy laws there are existing offence provisions. But if you were asking a question that is more general in its application, I think that's perhaps a question I'm not best positioned to answer.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Commissioner, the two complaints in relation to doxxing that you referred to, what period were they covering?

SONIA MINUTILLO: I understand, based on the information from my office, that that was a look at records that went over the last five years. I'm happy to—

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: So back to 2020?

SONIA MINUTILLO: Yes. My understanding is one was in 2020—that inquiry—and the other was in 2023.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I have some potentially challenging questions that might need to be taken on notice. I'm interested in offences, both at a Commonwealth and at a State level, relating to doxxing, particularly where there is reference to carriage service. In your view, how effective is that when it relates to social media specifically and the ability to enforce those provisions?

SONIA MINUTILLO: It's a difficult question because it pertains to the conduct of social media, which entities are not within my remit in terms of their conduct. In terms of the effectiveness or otherwise, I think that's potentially a matter of perspective. There are many perspectives around that. I'm happy to take that on notice and perhaps provide a further response, but it lends itself to a view of the operation of Federal legislation and the offences. For example, the serious tort has only just commenced in June, so it may be difficult to offer a view.

Dr AMANDA COHN: In taking that on notice, I'm happy to provide additional context for my question. A number of the examples that the Committee has been provided with in terms of doxxing relate specifically to social media, where that is the carriage service that was used. Noting particularly that a lot of these are corporations operating out of other jurisdictions, I'm interested in your views as to the effectiveness of our current framework to rein them in.

SONIA MINUTILLO: I'm happy to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming. I note that there was a question taken on notice. The secretariat will be in contact with you soon.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 11:45