

Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion

Personal Submission of Daniel Aghion KC, President of ECAJ

Preliminary

1. My full name is Daniel Victor Aghion. I make this submission in my personal capacity as an Australian Jew. This submission addresses my lived experience of antisemitism as an Australian Jewish communal leader.
2. This submission is divided into the following topics:
 - a. family background;
 - b. personal history;
 - c. community history;
 - d. personal experience of antisemitism prior to 7 October 2023;
 - e. personal experience of antisemitism since 7 October 2023 and concerns;
 - f. Federal Government response to antisemitism since 7 October 2023;
 - g. other political parties' response to antisemitism since 7 October 2023;
 - h. international response to antisemitism in Australia;
 - i. impact upon the Jewish community;
 - j. impact upon community leadership; and
 - k. hope for the future.

A. Family background

3. My maternal grandparents both survived the Holocaust.
4. My maternal grandmother Eva was born in Poland and was orphaned before the Second World War. As a teenager, she was interned in the Warsaw ghetto with her 3 siblings. The 4 of them used forged identity papers to escape the ghetto before it was liquidated and the occupants sent to Auschwitz. For the remainder of the war my grandmother and her 3 siblings lived in the Polish countryside, constantly relocating, under a false name and in perpetual fear of being identified as Jews and killed.
5. My maternal grandfather Arthur was born in Satu Mare on the Hungarian/Rumanian border. He was also orphaned before the war. His three sisters and their families were all murdered in the Holocaust. My grandfather Arthur was conscripted into the Hungarian army, and later sent to the

Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. Mauthausen was officially a forced labour camp and not a death camp, but the historical record shows that conditions in Mauthausen were particularly brutal and many inmates were worked to death. There was an infamous “staircase of death” where prisoners were required to carry extremely heavy granite blocks out of a quarry. Those who were unable to do so, were executed where they fell.

6. My grandfather would talk about his time before Mauthausen, and the time from when he was liberated by the Americans. He said that, on the day of his liberation he was 23 years old and weighed less than 30 kilograms. He would not speak about his time interned at Mauthausen, but I am told by my mother that throughout his life he had terrible nightmares and he would wake screaming and shouting. In about the 2000's, my mother arranged with the Melbourne Holocaust Museum for my grandfather's testimony to be video recorded. He was asked about his time in Mauthausen, but he declined to answer.
7. Curiously, the only event I know from that period of my grandfather's life was told directly to me. I was about 22 years old, and I was driving my grandparents Arthur and Eva to Spencer Street station in Melbourne. They were returning to Sydney by train for a reunion of workers at my grandfather's former workplace. My grandfather was sitting in the front passenger seat and my grandmother in the rear. As I turned the car into Spencer Street, all of a sudden and completely without context my grandfather started talking about his time in Mauthausen. He said:

You know, when I was in the camp one day, an inmate and I walked around a corner of the barracks. A guard called out 'Hey Juden [Jews], come here.' There were some German soldiers, who had shot some prisoners. There was a pile of corpses. They told us to move the bodies. So we did. They had just been shot and were still warm.

My grandfather then put his hands on the dashboard of my car, palms open and upwards, stared at them, and said in German ‘...und das blut...’ [...and the blood...]. My grandmother then shushed him from the back seat of my car, and he said nothing more.

8. After the war, my grandparents met at a displaced persons camp in southern Germany and in 1948, they made their way to Israel. My mother was born in Israel as their only child. In 1956 when my mother was 7 years old, they came to

Australia by ship with a few British pounds in their pocket, no capacity to speak English, and virtually no possessions. They lived in western Sydney, in Northmead. Eva worked on the line in the local shirt factory, and Arthur did the same at the Eli Lilly pharmaceutical plant. They were blue collar workers for their entire lives. In their retirement, they moved to Melbourne to be closer to their daughter (my mother) and their two grandchildren (my brother and me). On Friday nights, we would gather at their house for Shabbat prayers and a meal. My grandfather would say occasionally: *Do you know how I beat the Nazis?* He would then point to his family around the table one by one and then to himself. He would say: *I survived. That's how I beat them.*

9. My grandmother was very proud of her ability to read and write in English. She often asked my brother and me to correct her spelling. English was her fifth language, her others being Polish, German, Yiddish and Hebrew. She left school before she turned 12. I asked her once what she would have liked to become, if she had the opportunity to live a different life. It took her some time to understand the question, as she could not conceive that her life would have been different if the Holocaust had not occurred. Eventually she said she would have liked to have been a translator, because she thought that she was good at languages.
10. On my paternal side, my family is Sephardic. This is a branch of Jewry that traces its history back to Spain (the word 'Sepharad' is Hebrew for 'Spain'). It is a long and proud history which my father has retraced, from the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, to Salonika (now Thessaloniki) in northern Greece, then Amsterdam, and then Egypt in the mid-1700's. The family were in Egypt for nearly 200 years, and my father was born in Alexandria in 1946. My grandfather Victor was a maritime insurance broker with connections to Lloyds of London. In 1956, there was a military coup in Egypt and President Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power on a wave of pan-Arab nationalism. Foreigners, meaning those with European connections no matter how long they had been in Egypt, were restricted and ultimately required to leave. My family were French speakers with Dutch nationality. My grandfather's insurance broking office in Alexandria was nationalised without compensation and the family were required to leave without any possessions. They came to Australia in 1958, when my father was 12 years old. The family settled in the suburb of Beverly Hills in Sydney, and my

grandfather recommenced his insurance brokerage in Sydney's central business district.

11. My grandmother Fortunee (Touny) was a strong and proud woman, firm in her convictions, who carried herself well. As a child, I remember travelling to Sydney for family events and eating Egyptian sweets that she had made.
12. My father was one of six children. As a result I have many first cousins, most of them based in Sydney. It is a particular attribute of our family, and a matter of pride, that several of those cousins are qualified and practising teachers.
13. In his retirement, my father now arranges large family reunions every five years. In excess of 100 people attend, from more than 20 nations. They have been held in the family's ancestral home in the town of Ayllon¹ in Spain, in Thessaloniki and in Amsterdam. In each location, there are monuments to Jewish communities that previously thrived but no longer exist, either due to expulsion (Spain) or destruction at the hands of the Nazis (Thessaloniki, Amsterdam). The extended family is very proud of the fact that it has produced two Nobel Prize Winners - Gertrude Elion (1988, Medicine) and Philippe Aghion (2025, Economics).
14. As a young man in his early 20's, my father served in the Australian Civilian Military Force at the time of Vietnam. This was the home army, later to be reorganised and absorbed into the Australian Army Reserve. Many decades later, my father attended a dawn service at the war memorial in Melbourne. He went up to a regiment of old Diggers in their 80's who had served as Rats of Tobruk. It is known as one of the most difficult engagements of the Australian soldiers during World War II, where the allied troops dug in without supplies for more than 12 months but were ultimately successful. My father thanked these old men for their service and told them that he was alive because of them. He said his father (my grandfather Victor) had told him as a young boy that the Rats had stopped Rommel's Afrika Korp at El Alamein, about 100km from Alexandria. If the Australian soldiers had not done so, recounted my father, the Jews of Alexandria risked being rounded up and deported. One Digger by the name of Charlie Scales started crying and said *they never told us what we were fighting*

¹ In the local Castilian dialect, the town name is pronounced *Aeljion*. The family name Aghion is a derivative of the town name.

for. Charlie and my father became firm friends, and would travel to jazz festivals together around country Victoria.

15. I recount my family narrative in detail for three reasons. First, although the history on either side of my family is fundamentally different, they share common themes of persecution, antisemitism and generational relocation. It is a more than typical history of an Australian Jew. It also speaks to the inter-generational trauma of the Jewish people. Second, on each side my family came to Australia as a place of safety and security, far away from the troubles of the world. Third, they represent a common thematic history of many Australians - both Jewish and non-Jewish - of migrant communities that have arrived in Australia since the 1950's and to the present day.

B. Personal history

16. My parents met and married in Sydney. They moved to Melbourne in 1972, to establish a branch office of my paternal grandfather's insurance broking business. In about 1975, they established their own insurance broking business and a permanent life in Melbourne.
17. I was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1972 and am 53 years old. I have one younger brother, born in 1975.
18. My brother and I attended Haileybury College, a private boys' Presbyterian and later Uniting Church school. This was a deliberate choice by my parents. They reasoned that Jews were less than 0.5% of the Australian population, and it was therefore important for my brother and me to associate with non-Jews when going to school. In the senior school (years 9 to 12), there were 900 boys. Three of them were Jewish – another boy in my year, my brother and me.
19. My brother and I were the first people in our immediate family to complete university education. My mother did not go to University. My father commenced an engineering degree in Sydney, but did not complete it.
20. My brother completed an Honours degree in Psychology. He now runs his own business as a consultant on office relocation and an expert witness in land acquisition and compensation cases.
21. In 1994, I graduated with an Arts degree from Monash University and in 1996 I graduated with a Law degree from the same university. In 2002, during my early

years at the Bar, I graduated with a Master of Commercial Law from the University of Melbourne.

22. In April 1997, I was admitted to practise as a barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Victoria. In November 1997, I signed the Victorian Bar Roll. I have sat on several Victorian Bar Committees, including the Indigenous Lawyers and Law Students Committee and the Professional Standards Committee. In my position on the former committee, I mentored an indigenous law student who has since been admitted to practise. In my time, the Indigenous Lawyers and Law Students Committee was led by Stephen Kaye KC, then Colin Golvan KC, then Dan Star KC all of whom are Jewish. In my position on the Professional Standards Committee, I was the joint commissioning editor of the *Good Conduct Guide: Professional Standards for Victorian Barristers* (2006), authored by Roisin Annesley² and published by the Victorian Bar. In 2014, I received the Ron Merkel QC award from the Victorian Bar, for my pro bono advice and advocacy in respect of homelessness and elder law. In 2017, I was invited by the then Victorian President of the Court of Appeal, Maxwell P, to sit on his Advocates for Change committee. I have mentored seven Bar readers. For about fifteen years, I have taught and continue to teach the pleadings subject in the Victorian Bar Readers' Course. In November 2021, I was appointed Senior Counsel and in August 2022 King's Counsel. I practise in commercial litigation, principally in property and equity litigation. I am regularly mentioned in peer publications as a leading practitioner in Victoria and Australia in my areas of practice.
23. I have achieved much professionally, and I have given much. I take great pride in the fact that I have been able to do so because of the opportunities that my family has afforded me in coming to Australia and establishing a life in this country. I believe that equally, my immediate and extended family take pride in those achievements for the same reason.
24. I grew up in the Reform stream of Judaism. Our family was not daily observant of the religious laws, but we did not eat pork or shellfish at home, we would go to synagogue on important days of the year, and we would always gather together as a family on Friday night and say the Shabbat prayers. I believe that my parents did not have much exposure to religious practice while growing up – my maternal

² Now Roisin Annesley KC.

grandparents had effectively turned their back on religious observance because of their experiences in the Second World War. On my paternal grandparents' side, there did not seem to be much in the way of daily observance either. But on each side of my parents' families and in our own family home when I was growing up, the sense of being Jewish and the customs and the rhythm of the Jewish calendar, were very strong.

25. I gained my sense of Jewishness from my family, from the synagogue we attended, and from extra-curricular activities such as a Jewish Scouts group and Jewish youth groups.
26. In 1993, between my Arts and my Law degrees, I took a gap year and spent 6 months in Israel. I studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for partial credit towards my law degree, and also volunteered for Magen David Adom (Red Star of David, equivalent of the Red Cross), the Israeli ambulance service. I also learned to speak modern Hebrew to a basic level, which I did not previously speak. Because my mother was born in Israel, I am an Israeli citizen by descent. I was required to travel to Israel on an Israeli passport. As a non-resident, I was entitled to and obtained an exemption from military service for that year. The modern State of Israel is therefore part of the essence of who I am.
27. I wish to emphasise the importance of this last point to me personally, and to many Australian Jews. Were it not for a bureaucratic piece of paper issued to me in 1993, I would have served in the Israeli army that year. If I had returned to Israel for more than a month at any time in the following 30 years, I would have been called up for compulsory military duty. When I hear the chant in Australia *Death to the IDF*, I have a very clear understanding that it is a call for people like me – Australians with Israeli citizenship - to be killed.
28. In 1997, I met and became engaged to a Jewish woman named Jenny, who lived in Sydney. Jenny and her family migrated from South Africa to Australia in 1986 when Jenny was 13 years old. We married in 1998, and have three children, aged 19, 17 and 14. They have all attended The King David School, a Jewish day school in Melbourne.

C. Community history

29. As mentioned, I was involved in various youth groups as a teenager including in leadership positions. For a short period in the early 2000's, I served on the Board

of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (**JCCV**) as Public Relations Officer and then as Vice-President.

30. In 2013 and 2014, together with Nina Bassat AM and Harry Rosenberg, I was a member of Maccabi Australia's Committee of Review into member protection matters.³ We produced a document informally known as *The Bassat Report*. I have been told that our report was adopted by Maccabi Australia and several of its sibling organisations worldwide, to assist those organisations in their member protection work.
31. In April 2021, after some time away from communal roles, I was elected President of the JCCV. In that role I was also Vice-President ex officio of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (**ECAJ**), and in November 2022 I was elected as the ECAJ's Honorary Secretary. I maintained those roles until November 2023, when I was elected as President of the ECAJ. It is a 3-year term until November 2026. The Constitution of the ECAJ permits me to seek one additional year. If I choose to do so and if the electors agree, then I would serve as President of the ECAJ until November 2027.
32. All of my community roles have been honorary in nature.

D. Personal experience of antisemitism prior to 7 October 2023

33. Apart from some schoolyard bullying which I do not give much weight to, while growing up I did not experience antisemitism. As a young person of perhaps 10 or 12 years, I remember a visit to one of my parents' insurance clients. The client told a joke about a *Jewish stocktake*. I did not understand it, and my father had to explain the joke to me. I asked my father why he did not say anything and he replied that he did not want to lose the client's business. That is the only significant antisemitic matter I remember.
34. In my role as JCCV President from 2021 to 2023, combatting antisemitism against the Victorian Jewish community was a significant part of our mandate and my work. However, it was not the largest component. The JCCV has a charitable fund which receives tax deductible donations for harm prevention and specifically to combat antisemitism. For tax purposes, we calculated the work of the JCCV staff in combatting antisemitism as 30% of their time.

³ Maccabi Australia Inc is the national confederation of Jewish sporting bodies.

35. Much of my time as JCCV President was spent in reforming and rebuilding the organisation, and planning for what I would describe as typical ethnic community demographic matters such as ageing, assimilation and youth outreach.
36. There was one significant exception. Much of my time as JCCV President coincided with COVID and the consequent strong lockdowns in Melbourne. During that time, there was an engagement party held in breach of COVID regulations. The event was filmed and uploaded to the internet. It was apparent from their clothing that the participants were observant Jews. The moment that the video became public, there was an extraordinary outpouring of antisemitic behaviour. There were abusive messages left on voicemail machines at synagogues, disgusting social media posts, and offensive email messages. Two email messages that I received contained personal threats, and I referred them to Victoria Police. The JCCV asked the then Premier of Victoria Dan Andrews for his assistance in combatting the explosion of antisemitism following the engagement party. At the time, the Premier was giving daily media conferences about COVID. They were watched by an extremely large audience within Victoria, because almost daily there would be a change announced to the lockdown restrictions. Watching the Premier's media conferences provided the earliest opportunity for Victorians to learn of the constantly changing restrictions or relaxation of those restrictions. The next day, at his media conference the Premier said that antisemitism was *unacceptable and evil*, and that it was *pure evil*. He said that *if you want to trade in that stuff, there'll be consequences for you too, because that's just not on*. Brett Sutton, Chief Health Officer, also spoke and endorsed the Premier's words, as did Shane Patton, Chief Police Commissioner.⁴
37. After the Premier's speech, the antisemitic behaviour stopped almost immediately. I was greatly impressed by this, and I became aware of the voice of leadership as an extremely important tool in combatting antisemitism, if the message is strong and delivered early.

E. Personal experience of antisemitism since 7 October 2023, and concerns

⁴https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3DRBWESOJC_H4&ved=2ahUKewi39cHq4IqUAXWQUGwGHZopJ-gQwqsBegQIFRAB&usg=AOvVaw13ZZfkCHdwU8YfhIpxifcw

38. Almost immediately after 7 October 2023, my experience of antisemitism in Australia changed significantly – its scope, its severity and its response.
39. The Commission has heard evidence of the chants on the Opera House steps that occurred within 48 hours. I was shocked as much as others were. I was quite bemused by the extensive police investigation to determine whether the chants were *gas the Jews*, *where's the Jews* or *f*** the Jews*. As a lawyer, I understood the need for NSW Police to obtain clear evidence of a crime. But as a communal leader, I thought that there was no material distinction between the three possible phrasings. Whatever was said on that day, there was a clear expression of mob hatred against Jews.
40. My first direct experience of antisemitism after 7 October 2023, was on a train on the morning of Wednesday 11 October 2023. I was briefed for a trial in Melbourne, and was on the train travelling from home into chambers to collect my robes and go to court. It was peak hour about 7:45am, and the train was relatively full. Across the carriage from where I was standing, there were two men conversing. Both were dressed in casual business attire. Although they were chatting to each other, they were speaking loudly and could be easily overheard by some 20 to 30 people in the train carriage.

The first man said *Israel got everything it deserved*.

The second man agreed.

The first man said *The Americans will come in and help them like they always do, but that is only because the Jews control all the money*.

The second man agreed.

41. I have thought long and hard about that discussion since, and I have recounted that event several times within my community. The conversation occurred some 72 hours after Israel was attacked by Hamas and innocent Israelis were slaughtered. Clearly, those two men did not form their antisemitic views within those 72 hours. They must have already held them and were clearly comfortable expressing them to each other. But there was something about the Hamas attack on Israelis which emboldened them to say out loud, an opinion which they may not have been prepared to express publicly before the 7 October Hamas attack.

42. I consider that there is a similarity between the conversation on the train and other post-7 October events that the Commission has heard and will hear, and the immediate and trenchant outpouring of antisemitism that I saw in Victoria after the engagement party during the COVID lockdown. On each occasion, the mere fact that Jews were involved in a newsworthy event, gave social permission to voice existing antisemitic thoughts in public. This concerns me greatly because, if I am correct, then hatred of Jews is more prevalent than one might expect or the data might show. It would mean that antisemitism exists in this country, but it is a light sleeper.
43. Two recent examples illustrate this point. First, evidence has been produced to this Commission of witnesses being harassed, vilified and threatened. The Commissioner quite rightly denounced this conduct. But it is apparent that this Commission's enquiry into antisemitism and social cohesion, is itself a vector for antisemitic conduct outside the Commission. That is tragic and ironic, but entirely to be expected.
44. Second, over the last 20 years the Australian Jewish community has secured and protected its institutions, at increasing and punitive cost to its members. After 7 October 2023, and with the rapid increase in antisemitic conduct and consequent risk to the Jewish community, further significant expenditure was required to protect the community. The Federal Government made significant funding available via the ECAJ, to distribute to Jewish community organisations to cover some of that cost. That funding only partially alleviates the burden upon the Jewish community. This Commission has received evidence of how that funding, designed to protect a vulnerable community from very serious risk including threat to life, has itself become an element of Jew hatred.

F. Federal Government response to antisemitism since 7 October 2023

45. Until very recently, the response of the Federal Government to rising antisemitism in Australia has at times in my view been tentative and reactive.
46. I have visited Canberra 5 times in the last 2½ years. I have met and spoken with a great many politicians, including the Prime Minister and senior members of Federal Cabinet, both in Canberra and elsewhere. None have turned me away or refused to listen. But until recently, a determined political will by the Federal

Government to take effective and proactive measures against antisemitism seemed to me to be lacking. I give examples below.

Neutrality of early Government statements in relation to antisemitism

47. In the first 6 months after 7 October, it was common for the Federal Government to make statements regarding antisemitism with the words *We condemn antisemitism in all its forms, including antisemitism and Islamophobia*. This was a deliberately neutral statement, that the Government used in answer to antisemitic conduct where no Islamophobia was present.
48. I advised the Federal Government that the statement made no sense. If a Hindu temple were attacked for example, it would not be appropriate for the Federal Government to state *We condemn Hinduphobia and antisemitism*. To put it in that language diminishes the importance of the condemnation, and neutralises it to meaningless words that do not address the problem. In about mid-2024, the Federal Government ceased using that form of language to describe antisemitic conduct.

Delay in appointment of Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism

49. The concept of an Australian antisemitism envoy first arose at an antisemitism forum I attended in late 2023, hosted by the Australian Jewish Funders network. I undertook to present the idea to the Federal Government, in my then upcoming role as President of the ECAJ. In December 2023, a few weeks after I was appointed as President of the ECAJ, Jillian Segal AO, co-CEO Peter Wertheim AM and I travelled to Canberra to present the idea to the Prime Minister. He was receptive.
50. In January 2024, the Federal Government responded to me to the effect that they would agree to our proposal, if an Islamophobia envoy were also appointed. Because of the neutral statements described in paragraphs 47 and 48 above, the ECAJ anticipated this response. I advised the Government that this was acceptable, provided that the appointments were not the same person. This was because the sources of antisemitism and Islamophobia are different, the experience of Jews and Muslims as victims is different, and tackling those two forms of racism requires different knowledge bases and skillsets.

51. Throughout February and March 2024, I heard from various people both within Government and without, that the Government was considering a number of different candidates for the role of antisemitism envoy. By Easter 2024 however, there had been no appointment. I was told by several Government representatives that the delay was due to the Government taking longer than it had anticipated in identifying a suitable candidate for the Islamophobia envoy position.
52. The delay in appointing the antisemitism envoy was extremely frustrating. The ECAJ knew that Australia was facing a rising tide of antisemitism; we knew that the best response to antisemitism is strong, decisive and early leadership; and we had conveyed this repeatedly to the Federal Government. But the appointment of an antisemitism envoy was being held up because of the Government's inability to fill an unrelated position, which position we considered the Government had created for political reasons to demonstrate even-handedness.
53. An international gathering of antisemitism-fighting representatives was scheduled for July 2024 in Buenos Aires, on the 30th anniversary of the bombing of a Jewish community centre there which had killed 85 people and injured more than 300. The ECAJ pressed the Federal Government and pointed out that it would be embarrassing if Australia did not have a representative at the Buenos Aires meeting. The Government agreed. On Tuesday 9 July 2024 at a hastily arranged media conference, the antisemitism envoy's position was announced together with Jillian Segal's appointment. Ms Segal departed Australia later that week just in time in time to attend the Buenos Aires conference.
54. The Islamophobia envoy was finally appointed several months later, on 30 September 2024.

Delay in responding to Special Envoy's strategic plan

55. On 10 July 2025, the Special Envoy released her Plan to Combat Antisemitism. Over the balance of 2025, the ECAJ repeatedly pressed the Government to respond. By 8 December 2025, when the Government still had not responded, the ECAJ publicly called for the Government to respond.⁵

⁵ <https://www.ecaj.org.au/j7-we-are-one-jewish-family/>

56. The Government finally responded to the Special Envoy's plan on 19 December 2025, 5 days after the Bondi massacre. No explanation for that delay has ever been provided.

Lack of strong leadership

57. At paragraph 36 above, I mention the early and strong intervention shown by Premier Andrews in Victoria during the COVID lockdowns. It is for experts to speak of the role that this style of leadership takes in combatting antisemitism. I am aware however of its importance.
58. From my first visit to Canberra in December 2023 and on many occasions afterwards, I have pressed this point repeatedly, to no avail until very recently.

Hesitancy and reactivity

59. I repeat the matters set out at paragraphs 47 to 58 above. Despite repeated warnings from the ECAJ and others, I consider that the Federal Government has not responded proactively to contain a threat of harm to the Australian Jewish community. Responses have only been forthcoming when the Australian Jewish community has pressed for them, and even then only after long delays.
60. The Prime Minister's initial response to the call to establish this Royal Commission is another example.
61. I do not accuse the Federal Government of ill-will. I do however contend that until Bondi, the Federal Government failed to appreciate the significance and scale and severity of the problem that the Australian Jewish community was facing. The Federal Government also failed to appreciate the importance of acting decisively and promptly, in combatting the rise of antisemitism in this country. This is despite the fact that I and many others frequently advised them of the growing problems, and the criticality of appropriate government response.

Positive elements of Federal Government's response

62. Notwithstanding the matters set out above, I commend the Federal Government for the following acts:
 - a. the cross-partisan resolutions in both Houses of the Federal Parliament on 16 October 2023 strongly condemning the Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel on October 7;

- b. the appointment of and continuing support for the Antisemitism Envoy and her office;
 - c. the establishment of Special Operation Avalite on 9 December 2024;
 - d. the Prime Minister's visit to Adass Israel synagogue on 10 December 2024, after it was firebombed and his subsequent support of that community. I was present at the Prime Minister's visit, and I believe that he was deeply moved by what he saw;
 - e. the visit by Minister Burke together with former Attorney-General Dreyfus to East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation on 6 July 2025, where Minister Burke described the firebombing as *an attack on Australia... The Jewish community in Australia was harmed, and we were harmed as a nation*;⁶
 - f. the provision of and significant increase in funding of Jewish community security in December 2023, December 2024 and December 2025; and
 - g. legislative reforms towards more effective proscription of hate speech and proscribing doxxing;
 - h. stronger steps to prevent hatemongers from receiving visas to enter Australia; and
 - i. the establishment of this Royal Commission.
63. I believe that since Bondi, the Government has been more prepared to recognise the scale and severity of the problem of Jew hatred in this country, and has taken positive steps to begin addressing it. However, it took the tragedy of Bondi to cause the Government to recognise and adopt this position. There is a long way to go and much remains to be done.

G. Other political parties' response to antisemitism since 7 October 2023

64. The Federal Coalition has been strongly supportive of the Jewish community since 7 October 2023, and has spoken often of the importance of acting decisively against antisemitism. I commend the Coalition for that strong stance. Nonetheless, the Coalition did oppose legislative reforms tabled in January 2025 which would have lowered the threshold for criminalisation of hate speech.
65. The leadership of Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) has also been strongly supportive of the Jewish community since 7 October 2023. I again commend the

⁶ <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/nsw-man-charged-over-melbourne-synagogue-arson-attack/ezra2p27p>

leadership. But there have been problems. PHON Senator Malcolm Roberts, doubted that the Bondi massacre was a “false flag” - ie an attack committed by Jews upon their own people – but he would not rule it out because he *did not have the facts*.⁷ In the April 2026 South Australian State election, Tyler Green the preselected PHON candidate for Mawson had a history of publishing social media posts referring to *Jewish bankster wars* and promoting a book on Holocaust denial.⁸

66. As to the Australian Greens, in December 2023 State Member for Newtown Jenny Leong was a panel member at an event convened by the Palestine Justice Movement. She said *The Jewish lobby and the Zionist lobby are infiltrating into every single aspect of what is ethnic community groups. Their tentacles reach into the areas that try and influence power, and I think that we need to call that out and expose it*.⁹ The reference to tentacles is a well-known and longstanding trope of malign and secretive Jewish influence. After being challenged on her statement, Ms Leong issued a highly qualified apology as follows:

*I acknowledge that I used a word at one point that was an inappropriate descriptor for the influence of groups backing Netanyahu’s genocidal attacks in Gaza and the ongoing occupation – I apologise that this has caused offence. It is incredibly telling that after a conversation where myself and other speakers made countless mentions of the genocidal attacks and occupation occurring in Gaza right now, that two months later more focus isn’t being put on the deaths of over 26,000 people, many of them children.*¹⁰

67. The text of Ms Leong’s apology is notable in two respects. First, she apologised for the use of an *inappropriate descriptor* ie the word *tentacles*. She neither apologised for nor retracted her allegation that Jews were reaching into areas that try and influence power, and should be exposed for it. Second, her statement contained an apologia to the effect that she was justified in making her original allegation about Jewish influence and infiltration because of Israel’s military action in Gaza. Ms Leong remains a member of the Australian Greens.

⁷ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/malcolm-roberts-dangerous-equivocation-on-bondi-conspiracy-theory/news-story/73672970861883b3e0bcd829d188dcaa>

⁸ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-04-02/fresh-questions-over-one-nation-candidate-vetting-processes/106517960>

⁹ <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/jenny-leong-accused-of-using-antisemitic-trope/news-story/eefe49399d73c9243b40b16d4d678580>

¹⁰ Ibid.

68. After the Adass Israel Synagogue was firebombed and severely damaged on Friday 6 December 2024, the following Monday Antoun Issa published a social media post to Instagram. At the time, Mr Issa was the chief of staff to Greens Senator and antiracism spokesperson Mehreen Faruqi. The post stated as follows:

Can someone tell Albo that doing the bidding of the pro-Israel lobby isn't a vote winner, particularly among communities that have traditionally voted Labor? I'll also add that we don't yet know the full details of the attack. It could very well be a white supremacist or someone enraged by the genocide or a Zionist false-flag (they've done this before). But I suspect Albo's trying to weaponise the moment to further a Zionist agenda to criminalise criticism of Israel under the banner of 'anti-Semitism'.¹¹

69. Mr Issa was counselled by Ms Faruqi and he issued an apology.¹²
70. I am deeply troubled that neither Ms Leong nor Mr Issa faced significant punitive consequences for their actions from within their own party. I am concerned that the leadership of the Australian Greens was and remain at best indifferent to the harm that their members are causing to Australian Jews, and at worst approving of it.

H. International response to antisemitism in Australia

71. In my role as ECAJ President, I deal with many colleagues overseas. There are four principal groups:
- a. the World Jewish Congress (**WJC**), which is the international organization that represents Jewish communities and organizations in 100 countries around the world;
 - b. the African Australian Jewish Congress, which is a regional organisation of the WJC representing Africa, Australia, and Jewish communities of the Pacific and UAE;
 - c. the J7 Large Communities' Task Force Against Antisemitism, which is a recently formed group of leaders of the 7 largest Diaspora communities – USA, Canada, France, UK, Argentina, Germany and Australia, with the core responsibility of combatting antisemitism; and

¹¹ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/greens-staffer-reprimanded-for-suggesting-synagogue-arson-may-have-been-false-flag-20241210-p5kxe4.html>

¹² Ibid.

- d. the J50, which is an informal grouping of leadership in 50 Jewish communities around the world.
72. Over the last 2½ years, I have spoken with many of my colleagues overseas in those organisations and in others. Their main reaction has been of shock and surprise that antisemitism in Australia has been so widespread and so violent. International Jewry had previously perceived Australia as a place of refuge for Holocaust survivors, as far away from Europe as could be reached. Australia was perceived as safe for Jews and even more, a place for Jews to integrate and thrive.
73. In March 2025 and March 2026, I attended the Anti-Defamation League's (**ADL**) Never is Now summit in New York. The ADL is based in the US, and is the largest US and international organisation dedicated to combatting hatred including antisemitism. The annual summit attracts almost 4500 attendees. On both occasions, I was invited to speak as a panellist on the panel topic of antisemitism around the world. I was asked to attend and speak because of Australia's recent record, and the particularly violent expressions of anti-Jewish hate in our country. In 2026, I also stood on the main stage together with representatives of international communities who were victims of mass violent antisemitism in the previous 12 months – Washington DC, Boulder Colorado, Manchester England, Bondi Australia and Jackson Mississippi. In those attacks across the world, 20 people lost their lives including 15 in Bondi.
74. In 2025, I visited Israel twice. On each occasion, the moment I said that I was from Australia I received pitying looks from Israelis and a commentary about how bad antisemitism was in Australia. On one memorable occasion in May 2025 – 8 months before the Bondi massacre, I visited one of the kibbutzes that had been attacked on 7 October 2023. Our guide was the head of security for the kibbutz. She described sheltering her grandchildren in her house while trying to coordinate her security team who were being murdered by Hamas terrorists on the streets of the kibbutz. But the moment that I mentioned that I was from Australia, she immediately expressed concern and asked how the Australian Jewish community was managing the significant antisemitism that we were facing.

75. In the first week of December 2025, the ECAJ hosted representatives of the J7 in Australia.¹³ The meeting closed with the following statement:

We came from around the world to show our solidarity with the Australian Jewish community and make clear that we are one Jewish family. The antisemitism that targeted a synagogue in a devastating arson attack in Melbourne and has led to record levels of incidents in Australia, has had a deadly impact in Manchester, Boulder, Washington, and beyond.

We reiterate our call on our governments to take all necessary steps to fight antisemitism and ensure the security of the Jewish community. We join our Australian partner, the ECAJ, in calling on the government of Australia to accept and implement the plan to combat antisemitism formulated by its Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, Jillian Segal, AO.¹⁴

76. The J7 representatives attended Shabbat services at Bondi Chabad. They were invited to Shabbat lunch at the home of Rabbi Ulman, and met his son-in-law Rabbi Schlanger and his newborn son. This was only one week before the Bondi massacre.
77. It is a fair summation of my very many discussions with colleagues from around the world, that Australia now has a terrible reputation amongst Jewish people and organisations around the world. That reputation is of extreme violence against Jews, and of an inability of government to stem the tide. As a result, I foresee a difficulty in attracting Jews to live and settle in Australia in the near future. Their well-founded fears are likely to be a consideration in any decision to emigrate to Australia.

I. Impact upon the Jewish community

78. Over the last 2½ years, I have spoken to many people within the Australian Jewish community, in every State and Territory. I have listened to as many as I can. It is extraordinary how similar the responses have been.
79. First, there was genuine puzzlement. As with my overseas colleagues, Australia was seen as a place for Jews to thrive and prosper. Our safety was a given, and was assumed to be at the level of all other Australians. Particularly in the early

¹³ <https://www.ecaj.org.au/global-jewish-leaders-australias-antisemitism-spike-is-a-warning-for-democracies-worldwide/>

¹⁴ <https://www.ecaj.org.au/j7-we-are-one-jewish-family/>

months after 7 October 2023, I heard many comments asking how it was possible that fellow Australians could treat Jews so badly.

80. Second, as it became clear that the post 7 October environment of hatred for Australian Jews was both severe and entrenched, fear and despair became a theme of those many conversations.
81. In March of this year, a community member telephoned me. He asked about Purim, a festival geared towards children – they dress up and the synagogues will host activities for the children with the theme of the biblical story of Queen Esther. He said *I know I should take the kids to Purim, but mate, I am terrified*. In the same month, I had a lengthy conversation with another community member. His thesis was that the army should be protecting synagogues, armed with heavy weaponry. He said that, while praying on Saturday, he noticed a side door to the synagogue was partially open. His first thought was *what if a terrorist comes through the door and kills me while I am praying?* I have had many conversations of this type throughout the last 2½ years.
82. Advertisements for self-defence classes are now common in Jewish media, particularly online. Hebrew classes have become very popular. I have been told many times of people who have enrolled their children and themselves in Hebrew classes *just in case* they need to leave Australia and emigrate to Israel. About 6 to 12 months ago, I noticed that the weekly newspaper *Australian Jewish News* began to publish advertisements to purchase apartments in Tel Aviv. Those advertisements now appear almost weekly. I have met families investigating their historical connections to other countries to see if they are eligible for a foreign passport. About a year ago, I asked one scion of Australian business if he had recently thought that there might be a time when it would become necessary to leave Australia. His answer was *Absolutely. The way things are now, you would be crazy not to think about it*.
83. As the President of the Jewish community in Australia, I am very distressed that parts of my community are looking elsewhere for refuge, as we have so many times before in our long history. But very many conversations with community members have made it clear to me that the community is watching and waiting to see if conditions can improve. If there were another Bondi massacre for example, as a communal leader I would be forced to concede that neither I nor

my country can keep my community safe. If there were another massacre like Bondi, I would not be surprised to see a large exodus of Jews from Australia.

84. Third, there is significant and palpable anger. The community has felt betrayed by inaction or inadequate action at various times by governments and local police. There is a real sense that governments – particularly the Federal Government – have been too dismissive of the Jewish community’s concerns, have not done enough, and have acted far too late. We have seen the general Australian population react with shock and revulsion at the Hamas atrocities on October 7 2023, at the Adass synagogue arson attack in December 2024 and at 15 innocent people being murdered at Bondi Beach on December 14 2025. But little has been done to address the underlying culture of rabid hatred at street protests, in universities, in the arts and culture sector and in many other parts of society which has spawned an unprecedented surge in the number and severity of antisemitic incidents in Australia over the last 2½ years.
85. When I was JCCV President in 2023, the immediate concern post-COVID was how to get people back into synagogues and to community events after 2 years of health messages of the dangers of public gatherings. Now, synagogues and community events are full. But that is not necessarily a positive thing. If a community organisation presents a speaker about antisemitism, the event will be fully booked and the room will be overflowing. I am very concerned that the community is establishing a mindset of self-definition based upon external hatred.
86. I have said repeatedly, both publicly and privately, that we must find a way to return to Jewish joy and pride and not let ourselves be defined by hate.¹⁵ But I confess that it is an extremely difficult task to lead the community to a position of positivity and communal pride, in the face of relentless and continuing attacks.
87. The ECAJ’s counterpart in the United Kingdom the Board of Deputies of British Jews, convened a Jewish culture month from 16 May to 16 June 2026. The program is supported by the British Government and includes events at public non-Jewish institutions such as the Science Museum, the British Library and the Tate Museum. I cannot say whether there is merit in transposing that idea to

¹⁵ <https://www.australianjewishnews.com/have-we-lost-jewish-joy/>

Australia. Nor is it a panacea. In March 2026, 4 Jewish community ambulances were torched in London. In April 2026, 3 Jewish sites in London were the targets of arson attacks.¹⁶ One of the events at the British Museum was postponed because a significant proportion of attendees were planning to cause disruption and undermine the event.¹⁷

J. Impact upon community leadership

88. When I first became President of the ECAJ, I had planned to deal with demographic matters as an extension of the work that I had started in my time in Victoria as JCCV President. That has not been possible. For the last 2½ years, the ECAJ has been operating in ‘crisis mode’. We have been dealing with one antisemitism crisis after another. When I commenced in November 2023, there were 6 staff. Now there are 13 and by the end of this calendar year 2026, there are likely to be 15. That growth reflects the workload, which is solely due to the consequences of antisemitism in Australia and necessary actions taken to combat it. That includes the significant work required to assist this Royal Commission, the formation of which the ECAJ campaigned strongly for and supports.
89. A particular example is the Bondi massacre. After two years of unrelenting work since 7 October 2023, almost all of it at crisis level, in late November 2025 we directed that almost all staff would take four weeks’ annual leave. The leave was to be absolute – no mobile phone work calls were to be answered, and no work emails were to be responded to. This ‘down time’ was scheduled to commence on Thursday 18 December 2025. The assumption was that December 2025 and January 2026 would be a quiet period. Because of Bondi however, very few employees received their scheduled down time and most worked full-time throughout December 2025 and January 2026.
90. Bondi has been particularly traumatic for the ECAJ staff. It is a matter of public record that ECAJ’s media director was shot and injured. It is also a matter of public record that co-CEO Alex Ryvchin was a member of Bondi Chabad and was close to Rabbi Eli Schlanger who was murdered at Bondi.

¹⁶ <https://www.ecaj.org.au/we-express-our-total-solidarity-with-our-brothers-and-sisters-in-the-british-jewish-community/>

¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn8pk8r79vpo>

91. I am extremely proud of every one of the ECAJ staff and the work that they do. They are the best feature of the organisation, and some of the unsung heroes of the community. I am however concerned that the ECAJ staff are overworking and, by shouldering the burdens of the community, are at risk of burnout. I am trying to manage this by employing more staff, encouraging the taking of leave, availability of counselling and position reviews. All of this requires private funding which must be sourced from the Australian Jewish community.
92. My own work, and the work of my executive committee, has also increased exponentially. When I first commenced as ECAJ President, similarly to my time as JCCV President, I estimate that I was spending 10-15 hours per week on communal work. That has now increased to at least 30-40 hours per week. My legal practice has suffered as a consequence and is now greatly reduced. I do not begrudge the impact on my legal practice because I feel the worth of the community work. But it is an unexpected and unplanned consequence of the post 7 October communal work. I am aware that there are many others in the community who are facing similar constraints.
93. I believe that it will now be far more difficult to obtain good leadership of the Jewish community. Communal leadership within Australia is much more complex, traumatic and time consuming than it has ever been. This will be a problem at Federal and State levels and in all organisations, not just the ECAJ. As a barrister, I am uniquely positioned to accept or reject a brief and to make personal decisions about my own professional practice. I am also strongly supported by my wife. But my unique position is not available to those who are employees or business owners or who have significant familial responsibilities. The consequences of 7 October means that the pool of potential leadership candidates within the Australian Jewish community has narrowed significantly.

K. Hope for the future

94. After Bondi, I was inundated with many hundreds of messages from non-Jewish Australians. They spoke of their grief and sorrow, their admiration for the Jewish community, and the importance of standing against antisemitism in Australia. Many asked what they could do to assist, and some even spoke of what they would do to spread a message of love and support for Australia's Jews. Some spoke of the *One Mitzvah for Bondi* campaign, where the NSW Government used

a Hebrew word *mitzvah* for an act of kindness, compassion and moral responsibility and called for Australians to do a good deed in honour of the Bondi victims.¹⁸

95. As the mound of flowers left by well-wishers grew outside Bondi pavilion, I began to receive telephone calls from around Australia. Community Presidents expressed wonder to me as people left flowers at the gates of synagogues across the country. Many Jewish Australians have expressed to me the depth of their emotion at receiving messages and simple gestures of support. They helped us to understand that Australians understood our pain, that we were not alone, and that we belong in this country.
96. I consider that the key role of this Commission within its Terms of Reference, and the Federal Government in carrying out its work during and after the conclusion of the Commission, is to expand the goodwill of that small group of well-wishers and supporters, to a much broader cross-section of the Australian community. Australians need to look past thousands of years of prejudice, and see Jews for who they are – human beings who contribute to society, often in greater proportion than our small population. History has taught many times that a society which rejects Jews as equal participants, is willing to reject any other group or minority and often does so. This Commission is a powerful opportunity for Australia to be set on a path of tolerance, inclusion and understanding, for the Jewish community and for all Australians. That is how social cohesion can be achieved in this country.

Daniel Aghion

14 June 2026

¹⁸ <https://www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/one-mitzvah-for-bondi>