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JUSTICE, INTEGRITY AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr MA Hunt MP—Chair
Mr MC Berkman MP
Mr RD Field MP
Ms ND Marr MP
Ms MF McMahon MP
Ms C Mullen MP

Staff present:

Ms F Denny—Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE FIGHTING ANTISEMITISM AND KEEPING GUNS OUT OF THE HANDS OF TERRORISTS AND CRIMINALS AMENDMENT BILL 2026.

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 18 February 2026

Brisbane

WEDNESDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2026

The committee met at 9.01 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Fighting Antisemitism and Keeping Guns out of the Hands of Terrorists and Criminals Amendment Bill 2026. My name is Marty Hunt. I am the member for Nicklin and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today. With me here today are: Charis Mullen MP, acting deputy chair and member for Jordan, who is substituting for Peter Russo MP, the member for Toohey; Melissa McMahon MP, the member for Macalister; Natalie Marr MP, the member for Thuringowa; Michael Berkman MP, the member for Maiwar; and Russell Field MP, the member for Capalaba.

I thank the Townsville community for showing up. The committee is here because of the enormous interest shown by regional Queensland in these laws. It is important that we get out of Brisbane and listen to the voices of regional communities. That is why we are here today, so thank you for this enormous turnout. I also acknowledge in the room the member for Mundingburra, Janelle Poole, who is one of your local MPs. I believe Adam Baillie, the member for Townsville, will be attending as soon as he can. We have apologies as well from the mayor and councillors, who would have liked to be here, but they do have council meetings this morning. They may attend at some stage later on.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I would also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. Media may be present at these proceedings and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Please remember to turn your mobile phones off or to silent mode.

KLEINMAN, Dr Sarah, Private capacity

RUBIN, Rabbi Ari, Private capacity (via teleconference)

WRONSKI, Professor Ian, private capacity (via teleconference)

CHAIR: Professor Wronski, I understand that you are under the most time pressure, so would you like to make a statement to the committee first? If you have to jump off the phone at any point in time, that is fine.

Prof. Wronski: Thank you for the opportunity to contribute. My parents always said, 'Don't get too comfortable. Anti-Semitism will come to Australia too; you'll see.' Many of my parents' friends said they could not believe that the land of Beethoven, Bach and Brahms would turn to Nazism in the 1930s. As a teenager and young adult I thought they were being ridiculous and it would not happen here. My parents were Polish Jews. My father served in four armies: the Polish, the British and the Israeli twice. He fought the Nazis in southern Poland and spent the early war years in a Soviet labour camp.

I am Israeli born. Brought up in Melbourne, I went tropical at the end of the 1970s to work in the Kimberley and did not go back. I was recruited by James Cook University to lead the establishment of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. Then we went on to the medical school, the dental school, the veterinary school and an armful of allied health areas. Significantly, when deciding whether to accept JCU's job offer and come to Townsville with my family in 1991-92, we investigated carefully whether anti-Semitism was prevalent in Townsville. It was not. If it was, we would not have come. We want to keep it that way. I studied tropical medicine in Liverpool in Britain in the 1980s and I found it uncomfortable. I could not quite put words to it. I did not go back and did the rest of my studying in Boston in the United States instead.

I sense some of that in Australia now. We as a society are at a decision point. Australia has been good to us. We did not come here with much and we have been able to build happy lives, have an education and hopefully contribute to society. We want to keep it that way. Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Professor. Rabbi, I invite you to make a statement.

Rabbi Rubin: I take care of the Jewish community from Mackay all the way up to Cairns, Port Douglas and the entire North Queensland region. I moved about 10 years ago and can safely say that I know the majority of the Jewish people who live in the region and am in constant contact with them. They confide in me all of their personal issues, whether related to religion or not.

I can tell you categorically that I have seen an increase in anti-Semitism not just in their lived experiences but in actual cases. Since I moved up 10 years ago I have seen the cases increase and I have seen the public not care as much. When an incident occurred in 2017 there was a huge outcry over a small incident. Those incidents have since become more in number and there has been less of an interest in the defence of those Jewish people. I do not know a single Jewish child who goes to any school in the entire Queensland area I am servicing who is proud to tell anybody their ethnicity or religion. The one or two incidents where they have, they have confided in me that the worst mistake they have ever made in their life is telling their friends and their colleagues they are Jewish. This is not something that is sustainable for the Jewish community.

There is an increased amount of anti-Semitism not just in the schools but also in the workplace, in the colleges. There is an increased amount of anti-Semitism that is disguised as anti-Zionism but is clear and overt. For example, there was an incident where it said, 'Israelis are not to be served in this establishment.' There is an increased amount of anti-Semitism in the universities, where all of the college-aged men and women are feeling threatened to be proud of who they are, not just for their religion but even just their ethnicity and their culture.

We as a society should understand that anti-Semitism is the canary in the coalmine. This is the beginning, but it does not end with the Jews. Anti-Semitism is an Australian problem. It is a problem that, if left unchallenged, is going to affect everybody. It is going to affect regular Australians. Nobody is going to be safe if we continue to allow racism, anti-Semitism and such to fester. We need to put a stop to this. If there is anything we can do to allow Jews to feel freer and safer, I ask the committee to consider that. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Rabbi. We are examining a bill that is before the parliament. What we have been speaking about is what underlies that, but if you could make some comments on the bill that would be great. Sarah, would you like to make an opening statement?

Dr Kleinman: Good morning. Let me please begin with a very sincere thank you to all of you for taking the time to travel to hear from us in regional Queensland today. It is a meaningful intervention and we appreciate it. Similarly, I sincerely thank all of you who have taken the time and made an effort to be here today. It was at very short notice. I am very grateful that you are here to listen to me today: thank you.

I suspect part of the reason we are having this bill is that we have all leaned too far into emotions and not rational discourse with open and empathetic communication, so if my back is turned towards you please know that it is only because of the configuration of the room, not because of any meaningful intent. I value the opportunity to communicate with you today.

Through a mixture of impulsivity, idealism, altruism and occasional sheer dumb luck, to date I have had a very adventurous life. It has had moments of sheer terror: I had a near drowning during a maritime accident; I have been attacked by substance-affected patients in frontline medicine; I have provided health care during the middle of a gang war in south-west Sydney; and I have been through pandemics, cyclones and floods—mostly with all of you. But here today is the ultimate, most terrifying moment of my life which you are all bearing witness to. Today I am standing before a crowd of people, some of whom I know and some of whom I do not, and outing myself as a Jewish Australian.

I am Dr Sarah Leah Kleinman. I stand here today on behalf of the Townsville Jewish community because I believe in an Australia where I should not be scared to say who I am. I believe in an Australia where the part of me I did not choose—my genetics and the culture in which I was raised—should not be outweighed in terms of the value of me as a human in what I provide to my society and community, and it should not be the reason that I fear for my safety.

In my lifetime, anti-Semitism has progressed from whispers to a roar. I was raised with a number of elderly Holocaust survivors. My father was born in 1940. His very first memories were of all the adults in his life sitting around listening to the Yiddish news on the radio, hearing about their villages being taken and crying. Every older adult I knew had a tattoo on their left arm; I assumed that came with age. They used to tell me, 'Be careful. One day it can happen here too.' I had the youthful audacity to laugh at them and say, 'Not in Australia. This is a safe place. I have been to protests to keep it safe. I know this is where I belong.'

It started with a whisper. I stopped using my Jewish last name in frontline clinical practice over a decade ago—not so much for my safety, although there was that aspect to it, but because I had internalised the anti-Semitism so much that I did not want people to leave hospital because of their prejudice and not receive valuable health care because they might have presumptions about my Jewishness.

It became louder. Most recently in 2021, after working a series of 12- and 16-hour shifts at the hospital in the week of Christmas Eve, I thought I would lighten the mood. We all decided to wear holiday T-shirts because we were exhausted. I walked out of my 16-hour shift wearing a big shirt with a menorah on it, only to be confronted by protesters holding signs saying 'All doctors are Nazis and there will be a Nuremberg'. Coming from the background that I did, this was rather shocking in the first instance. When they all turned and saw the large menorah on my shirt and started screaming words that I will not repeat here, it was a secondary trauma. When I went to security, who then called police, it was quite a slap in the face to find out there was nothing I could do about it at that time. The 2023 legislation had not come in. I was not protected in any way. All they could offer was a lift to my car. I heard it again when patients started screaming 'Jew bitch' in my waiting room when I had to take a motoring licence away for medical reasons. It was not, 'I hate that doctor. I disagree with her decisions'; it was 'Jew bitch'.

After 7 October it became a roar. When I saw the police stand by in Sydney as protesters yelled outside the front of the Opera House before the war had even begun, something shifted in me and I felt that Bondi was inevitable, and we come here to today. I no longer freely attend public spaces in Townsville. I do not go for a run on the Strand unless I check that there is not a protest there first. I do not attend NAFA festival performances. I am very careful about where I walk in the JCU campus, even though I am a senior lecturer in that same campus in the school of medicine, because this is a regional town and I do not know who knows me in that crowd. When somebody is yelling, 'Globalise the intifada'—which essentially, let's be honest, means uprising here in the diaspora—and I am pointed out as the only Jew in the crowd, how safe am I? I am not safe because I am a Jew—not because of any opinions I may or may not have. You do not know what my opinions on Israel are—and, frankly, they are private; they are not for public consumption—but I am already prejudiced and stereotyped by my ethnicity.

To that point, in a world where Russia is continuing war in the Ukraine, China is openly and gleefully destroying the cultures of the Uyghurs and the people of Tibet, where there are actual undisputed genocides in Sudan and Nigeria, where we see the ongoing horrors of the Iranian people standing up against their government, the ongoing protests here in Townsville while there is a ceasefire in Gaza about a war that is taking place in a country that can fit into Tasmania 11 times are beginning to feel a little pointed. Please believe me: when I am running along the Strand a hot, sweaty mess, nobody from the Israeli government is calling me to find out what my views on the ongoing conflict are.

I feel that every government, including my own here in Queensland, should be open to scrutiny, but that scrutiny should not come at the cost of my safety, my community's safety or my family's safety, and we legislate for the safety of the majority, not the biased views of the minority. I am an Australian. I still hold rank in the Australian Naval Reserve. I am married to a Jewish Army officer. My Jewish Australian brother completed two back-to-back 11-month tours in Afghanistan—which, frankly, broke him—for this country. We agreed to put our lives on the line for this country because it had always previously represented everything we wanted—safety, belonging, nationalism without fear of a lack of safety due to our religion.

I have worked the majority of my career in the public health system. I still am one of the few bulk-billing doctors for brain injury in this town. I have provided of my own volition voluntary education on the radio and in local newspapers—yes, that Dr Sarah is me—about ongoing health concerns in the region. I became an accredited foster carer. I fostered your children. So today I am here because I think it is the time for our state to decide on the standard of behaviour and safety they are willing to accept for all of our citizens. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thanks, Sarah. I was loath to interrupt any of the three speakers even though we have allocated 20 minutes, but we have three witnesses here and I am sure that members have questions, so I propose to go a little over that time, if that is all right with those waiting. I also want to acknowledge the member for Townsville, Adam Baillie, who has entered the room and is up the back there. Welcome, Adam. I also welcome the member for Hinchinbrook, Wayne Chiesa, who is also here. Rabbi Ari, as a leader of a Jewish community, first of all, approximately how many Jewish people are you the leader of, essentially?

Rabbi Rubin: In my area we have around 1,000 Jews, so not a huge number and therefore we do not have the security of the numbers that perhaps other communities feel, so when things happen to us in our small community they are felt a lot more by the close-knit community.

CHAIR: Sure. I want to ask you, Rabbi, about the bill itself. The intention of the bill is to fight anti-Semitism, as per the title, but it provides certain protections around religious institutions, religious buildings and the wilful damage of them and the interruption of religious services and it puts a framework around certain phrases. Can you comment on how the bill would provide protections to your community—or not—or whether you think it could be strengthened or weakened in any way et cetera?

Rabbi Rubin: There is so much that is out there already in the hate speech world and the Jewish community do not feel that we are having the adequate hate speech rules being applied to us as they are to any other religions. We feel that anti-Semitism gets swept under the rug, so it is kind of like for all the other ethnicities and cultures if somebody was to come and say something racist against them it would make a huge deal but anti-Semitism kind of gets just swept under the rug. It is just like, 'Yes, they're another white people. It's a religion.' Therefore, if there is anything that can be done which would be able to alleviate that, we would love that. Therefore, I think all of the protections in this bill would be very welcomed by the Jewish community, although we wished it would never have to get to this stage. We wished that we would be able to just be treated like any other person and we never want to see anybody punished because of us, but we do want to be able to live with dignity and to have the same protections as anybody else.

Ms MULLEN: I would like to thank you all for your testimony, which was very powerful. I have two questions. Firstly, Rabbi Rubin, I have been contacted by a number of Jewish people who are not supportive of what the bill is proposing in terms of prohibiting speech and also increasing policing as a result. They absolutely want us to address anti-Semitism but they are concerned around the idea of prohibiting two particular phrases or expanding police powers in this space. As well as doing this, are there other ways that you believe we should be addressing anti-Semitism, which, I agree with you, is on the rise here in our country and in our state? I would be interested to hear whether you have had suggestions from your own community about other ways that anti-Semitism should also be addressed, whether that is education or other ways.

Rabbi Rubin: Absolutely. Education is the No. 1. I have been a proponent of that for many years. Already we have been seeing the writing on the wall for years. As Dr Sarah said, this did not come out of the blue. We all foresaw that this was going to happen, and it is not because we are prophets; it was just a cause and effect. Already for years I have been talking about the need for education. In every school even the Jewish kids in my community do not know about the Holocaust from the regular Queensland education that they are getting. The Holocaust is not something that affected just the Jewish people; the Holocaust was something that the Australian Army were fighting. Like Sarah and Will, who are members of the Australian Army, I myself am a chaplain of the Army. Being Australian meant fighting in World War II against the Nazis and yet that part of our education is missing. The Holocaust was a great example to show what benign comments that do not get checked lead to. Therefore, education should be No. 1.

Although I am happy with this bill and I wish it would not have to happen, I 100 per cent believe that education is a far better solution to be able to pre-empt any of these things. We do not want to live in a box. We do not want to just live in jails and have to be protected at all of our events. We want that the public should be able to accept us as a regular. Australian Jews have had an incredible impact on the Australian way of life, starting with Sir John Monash, Sir Isaac Isaacs, Sir Zelman Cowan, governors and musicians. We assimilate beautifully into the Australian culture. Why shouldn't the Jewish people be able to live just like everybody else in this country?

Ms MARR: Dr Sarah, thank you so much for being here today. It was very powerful listening to you. You do have a community of your own and I am sure you have all spoken about the bill. Can you please give us an example of what they do like in the bill? We are taking this very seriously. Obviously the Bondi incident has brought this to the table and we want to make sure we consider everything. What in this bill do you think is going to work actively to make them feel that we are listening?

Dr Kleinman: I need to be clear and transparent that there are certain elements of the bill that I am not a fan of.

Ms MARR: Yes, that is fine.

Dr Kleinman: I am certainly very much a fan of free speech, but there are certain words that should not be heard. There are words that were used for First Nations people when I was a child that my children do not know and they have never heard before. They have never come across those words and I am glad that I live in an Australia where those words are not known to them. As a doctor who

now works in the mental health space, I do not think wider history searches on people who own weapons is ever going to be a bad thing. Certainly, in my 22 years in the medical system I have come across people who have had access to weapons who maybe should not have had access to weapons. Did I think that the guns got up in Bondi and killed all of those Jews congregating peacefully in a park? No. The hate of the people who pulled the triggers on those guns killed those people, and I have always been very proud of our firearm legislation here in Australia. It sets us apart from the rest of the world, but I think we need greater education about what you are screaming when you scream certain slogans aggressively around my places of worship, the schools that our children go to and the public areas that I would like to also frequent and what that actually means.

There are certain responsibilities that come with screaming certain things. For instance, at my children's school some of the kids put at the end of their presentations, for reasons I do not quite understand, 'Heil Hitler' and Nazi flags. They thought it was funny, because that is the evolution of history that we are moving into. Those things are now getting the post postmodernist take and it is funny. When I said to the school, 'This is deeply offensive and I would like to come in and explain to the school,' as somebody who has an honours degree in Middle Eastern history and Jewish history, 'about why that is offensive,' I was told that I was overreacting. So it would be nice that, if I am in a situation where I am fearful or something has been said pointedly towards me, I have the ability to enact criminal law to protect me, and at this moment it does not exist. I think people should be able to rise up and protest. My father was an anti-apartheid activist. It is why we are here in Australia. It is important. Governments should be held to accountability, but not all words are just easy to say and can be said without ramifications.

CHAIR: Thanks, Sarah. There will be one more question from this side from the member for Maiwar.

Mr BERKMAN: I do actually have a question for Rabbi Ari Rubin, but can I ask very quickly: Sarah, how old are the children you are talking about?

Dr Kleinman: I do not want to talk about my children in this public place, if that is okay.

Mr BERKMAN: Sorry. I was just trying to gauge an age.

Dr Kleinman: This was in primary school.

Mr BERKMAN: Primary school?

Dr Kleinman: Yes.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you. Rabbi, I wanted to pick up on one point you raised in your statement where you said that you are seeing more anti-Semitism under the guise of anti-Zionism, and that is, I think, a distinction that is largely missed in any of the conversation around the issues we are talking about here today. Can you just clarify for me: as someone who is obviously very well versed in the Jewish faith and affairs of the State of Israel, do you see a clear distinction between Zionism and Judaism, and is there a space for legitimate criticism of the State of Israel that does not stray into anti-Semitism?

Rabbi Rubin: Yes, absolutely. There is, definitely. Dr Kleinman just said that succinctly and beautifully and I am going to echo her words. Anti-Zionism is definitely something that is legitimate in general, in theory. There is a huge Israeli community as part of my constituency, part of my parishioners. All the Israeli expats are here for a reason. There is something they did not like about Israel which is why they all moved to Australia, which they love and are so appreciative of, and they celebrate the day they became Australian citizens. But that is not what is happening. What is happening is that anti-Zionism is the guise, is the excuse. It has morphed into pseudo social justice phrases as a guise to legitimise anti-Semitism.

I do not know how many tens of thousands of Iranians were mowed down, yet just last week when we had the rally for Iran where there were 16 people—me being one of them—on the same day in the same place literally a few streets over there were hundreds at the rally against President Herzog. Clearly, things like that give the Jewish community the impression that it is not Israel that they hate; it is Jews. It just happens to be the Jewish country that is their excuse to be anti-Semitic.

CHAIR: I am mindful of the time. We have gone 10 minutes over. What you have provided to us today is very valuable. I thank Dr Sarah Kleinman, Rabbi Ari Rubin and Professor Ian Wronski for your time today. We will have to leave it there. Thank you so much.

NORRIS, Mr Michael, Senior Vice-President, Northern Region Development, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr Norris: SSAA Queensland welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the Fighting Antisemitism and Keeping Guns out of the Hands of Terrorists and Criminals Amendment Bill 2026. SSAA Queensland acknowledges the government's stated objective of strengthening community safety and preventing the misuse of firearms by terrorists and criminals. SSAA Queensland supports measures that target criminal misuse of firearms, deter trafficking and unlawful supply, strengthen penalties for serious offending, and preserve the rights of fit and proper law-abiding firearms licence holders. Queensland has long maintained a balanced and robust firearms framework. It is important that reforms continue to focus on criminal behaviour rather than impose unnecessary burdens on responsible and law-abiding firearms licence holders.

SSAA Queensland supports increasing the maximum penalty for stealing firearms or ammunition to 14 years imprisonment, strengthening trafficking and unlawful supply offences, introducing an offence for a reckless discharge towards buildings or vehicles, and criminalising possession and distribution of blueprint material for 3D printed firearms. These reforms appropriately focus on criminal misuse and reflect the seriousness of these offences. SSAA Queensland agrees that firearms theft, trafficking and reckless discharge present significant risk to public safety and should attract substantial penalties.

The proposed requirement that a Queensland weapons licence holder must be an Australian citizen, subject to limited exemptions, represents a significant change. SSAA Queensland submits that any exemptions for primary producers and recognised sporting shooters must be clearly defined, transitional arrangements must ensure fairness for existing licence holders and the practical implementation of requirement should avoid unintended consequences for legitimate temporary residents participating in regulated shooting activities. Clarity in regulation and administrative guidance will be critical.

When it comes to mandatory health professional reporting, SSAA Queensland understands the intent of this provision and acknowledges the importance of preventing firearms access by individuals who pose genuine risks. However, the association respectfully submits that clear guidance should be issued to health professionals regarding thresholds for reporting, the obligation should be applied judiciously and proportionately, safeguards should ensure that temporary or minor mental health concerns do not automatically result in disproportionate licensing consequences, and maintaining trust between patients and healthcare practitioners is essential.

The proposed strengthening of storage requirements by requiring solid steel containers for categories A, B, C, E and M firearms represents a further compliance obligation for licence holders. SSAA Queensland supports secure storage as a cornerstone of responsible firearms ownership. However, the association recommends adequate transition periods for compliance, clear technical guidance defining acceptable storage standards, and consideration of cost impacts on regional and rural licence holders.

When it comes to firearms prohibition orders and broadened licensing considerations, SSAA Queensland recognises the need to prevent high-risk individuals from accessing firearms. At the same time, procedural fairness and natural justice and transparency in decision-making processes must be preserved. The association encourages clear review pathways and consistent administrative practices.

While not directly addressed in this bill, SSAA Queensland reiterates that suppressors are a legitimate hearing protection device commonly used internationally to reduce noise exposure. The association remains open to continued dialogue regarding evidence-based policy regarding this subject.

In conclusion, SSAA Queensland supports reforms that strengthen penalties for criminal misuse, target trafficking and organised crime, enhance intelligence sharing and protect community safety. It is essential that Queensland maintains its balanced framework while ensuring firearms are kept out of the wrong hands while preserving lawful access for responsible licence holders. The association welcomes ongoing consultation as the bill progresses.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Norris. Much has been made about the number of firearms a person might own or want to own. Being an enthusiast sporting shooter and knowing many of them, could you expand on those for us who are not quite into the sport shooting area?

Mr Norris: I actually have a little piece on this that I have written personally.

CHAIR: That looks a bit long to read out.

Mr Norris: That is perfectly fine.

CHAIR: Could you highlight why somebody might want to own a number of guns?

Mr Norris: There are many disciplines in shooting. Each event requires different firearms and sometimes multiple firearms. When we talk about firearms after tragedies like Bondi, sometimes people see those two firearms not realising that a lot of firearms are actually single-shot, muzzle-loading, black powder, cap-and-ball reproductions of 1800-style guns and are simply not capable of doing what people think they are.

I shoot cowboy action shooting. When I attend the Nationals, just to compete in the events that I want to compete in I need 15 different firearms. Most of those are single-shot and black powder but I need 15 firearms for that. I also shoot clay target shooting and I have four or five for that. There are different categories and different firearms needed.

Ms MARR: You were talking about having a transition period for storage compliance. When you talk about a transition period, what are you talking about there? How long do you think is fair for that to be considered?

Mr Norris: I could not give you an exact timeframe. It needs to get out to licence holders. They need to be given time to change over. The old requirements are way different to what they are now. At a guess I would say six months to a year.

Ms MARR: In general, though, do your members like that part of the bill? Do they agree with that?

Mr Norris: I would say that nearly everyone I know who is in the club that I am in—it is out at Hervey Range and there are 3,500 members there—are well above it. I would say regional and rural areas may be around that threshold. They are the ones who probably need more time.

Ms MULLEN: I just have one question in relation to Australian citizenship for gun owners. Do you know how many of your members would be affected or likely to be affected by that change?

Mr Norris: I know of none personally. There are a few who have rung. They are Kiwis who live here who are residents. They are in a panic.

Ms MULLEN: So they are permanent residents but they are not Australian citizens?

Mr Norris: Yes, and there are a couple of UK residents. My understanding is that it does not affect them with the agreement we have with those nations.

CHAIR: There are exemptions.

Mr FIELD: In general, as feedback, have your members given any support to or comments on what is in the bill at the moment?

Mr Norris: Everyone I have spoken to—and there are many of them here behind me—is very supportive of the bill. I think the fact that the government has not had a kneejerk reaction like other governments in banning firearms that do not exist such as belt-fed shotguns—they simply do not exist—and putting figures out like four million firearms, when paintball guns and parts and crossbows are registered as firearms, they are happy that this government has made a good decision.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, I thank you for your contribution today.

Mr Norris: Thank you very much for your time. I would like to say to the doctor that it saddens me to hear stories like that. I did not think that would exist here in Australia and more so in regional Queensland.

MITCHELL, Mr Bill, Principal Lawyer, Townsville Community Law

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr Mitchell: I pay my respects to the Wulgurukaba and Bindal peoples. The land on which we meet today is their land. On behalf of Townsville Community Law, I extend our support and solidarity to the Jewish community in North Queensland as they come to terms with the events in Sydney over the summer. I also acknowledge the Chabad of North Queensland, which provides services to Jewish people, and no doubt its work has been even more burdensome over recent months.

It is very pleasing that you have chosen Townsville as the first venue for this hearing. The committee's membership is obviously well adjusted to think about these things, with law enforcement officers, lawyers and victims' advocates. I also acknowledge the member for Thuringowa and I thank her for her support of our service.

Our written submission is with the committee and addresses the Criminal Code amendments alone. We also suggest that there has been little attention given to programs and other services that might increase social cohesion. This bill really only deals with an act of deterrence which we would say is already covered by the existing laws of Queensland. We acknowledge, though, that the government needs to commence a process to address anti-Semitism. This is without a doubt.

We do not have a large population of Jewish people here in Townsville. It was great to hear an update because the last Census told us we had 94 people of the Jewish faith in Townsville. Having said that, Townsville has a long experience of hate crimes against First Nations people and against members of the LGBTIQ+ community. It is well known for these things. Only a small proportion of people here are Jewish and that actually puts them at risk of a higher level of vulnerability to hate crime. I am saddened to hear Dr Sarah's evidence, but I can understand that if you are in a small minority in a place like Townsville you will experience a hate crime at some stage.

We regularly advise clients on the hate laws at state and federal level and have done so for more than 30 years. We have a pretty detailed understanding of the technical aspects of those laws and I would like to deal with some of those later if there is time. All legislation must carry a balance of human rights, and that includes all of the ones included in the compatibility statement. We do think it is important that jurisdictions address anti-Semitism and its various manifestations. However, it is essential that the law protects all people and we currently have amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Act that would outlaw vilification against people with disability and older persons. They are currently paused.

Our interest here today is twofold: firstly, to assist the committee by identifying any potential limitations and unintended consequences of the bill and, secondly, to ensure that in legislating against hate crimes we adopt a clear, careful and principled approach and one that responds to the prevalence of hate conduct across all communities. I have had very limited time to consider this bill. It is complex and the vilification or the hate act components are tricky, so it has been very difficult to assess whether this is proportionate. Even within the limited time we have had, I think it is obvious there will be some real complexity for law enforcement, for the legal profession, for the prosecutorial agencies and for the courts.

There is also a risk that this sort of targeted framework changes the recognition of equality before the law and can undermine democratic institutions because you are looking at a differential treatment in what will be our schema of hate crime protections, and I have set that out in our submission. I would say that the rule of law is best served by clear and coherent legislation that recognises every person has a right to protection under the law. These are not my own aspirations; these are the statements of the Human Rights Act by which we are all bound in this state. I am happy to answer any questions.

CHAIR: Mr Mitchell, in terms of the prescribed expression, this is something fairly new. The threshold for that is that the minister must consult with the commissioner, the CCC and the Human Rights Commissioner, as I understand it—

Mr Mitchell: Correct.

CHAIR:—and that the expression, none of which appear in the bill at this point in time—

Mr Mitchell: Correct.

CHAIR:—must be regularly used and must incite discrimination, hostility or violence towards a relevant group. Would you agree that is quite a high threshold to be banning a phrase?

Mr Mitchell: I think the threshold in the bill is even higher because it talks about an expression of an ideology of extreme prejudice. We see there is a disconnect between that threshold and then the threshold about when harm is caused. We have made some submissions about that because the bill

is actionable for a two-year penalty on an offence provision using terms that are not dissimilar to the description of sexual harassment in the Anti-Discrimination Act: menace, cause offence and harass. We already have a vilification law that provides civil remedies, including under anti-Semitism, because it covers race and religion. We already have an offence provision at section 52A of the Criminal Code which elevates to serious vilification, which also includes race and religion. We then have this new offence at two years which, I think most commentators will argue, has a lower threshold than we might expect for an offence that carries a two-year penalty of imprisonment.

I need to make it clear, as I have in our submission, that we are not against legislating for proper offences against anti-Semitism at all, but we see that this bill does look to introduce a schematic that will have layers and our fear is that some of the ambiguity in the offence provision, particularly the phrase 'so nearly resembles' in the prescription of symbols and expressions, may well not be compatible with the constitutional freedom of implied political communication. That may well be an issue.

Interestingly, this bill looks more like section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act at federal level than almost anything else. This is a law that we have been told for 30 years is problematic. It is not a criminal provision; it is a civil provision. For years we have been told it is problematic because people should not be able to take action because they are offended. The case law says something very different, of course. The case law says it has to be serious vilification. We are concerned that this is a middle approach that may have some proportionality concerns. That is what we have set out in the submission.

Ms McMAHON: I want to focus on the phrase that you were just referring to, 'so nearly resembles'. Could you give us a bit of an understanding of how that particular phrase might end up capturing conduct or symbols that could be problematic in terms of prosecution? A few of us here have spent a number of years policing and we know the level of evidence that is required in a conviction. Could you give us a bit an idea of how a phrase like 'so nearly resembles' could be problematic in prosecution?

Mr Mitchell: I do not have the answer because I have never seen it prosecuted. What I can say is that there have been six prosecutions under 52A before it was uplifted from the ADA. There have been six prosecutions since 1991, so clearly there is an issue with a law being effective. I think everyone before the hate crimes inquiry to this parliament made the point that you need to have civil complaint provisions and robust and effective criminal provisions that do punish people who engage in the sort of behaviours that Dr Sarah and the rabbi discussed. I do not know.

One of our concerns is that it is an overbroad statement: 'so nearly resembles'. Does it include things that sound like that, does it include—not so much the symbols; I cannot really comment on that. There is only one symbol, as we know, annexed to the act and it is the one that we do not talk about because it is clearly an offensive symbol. I think everyone in the community understands that. We just do not know how this would grow. One of the things I have posed is: if it is the new approach of government to take an incitement approach to vilification as opposed to the approach we already have, will all other forms of hate crimes follow this same process where we have scheduled sayings that are hateful of women or hateful of members of the LGBTIQ+ community? If we unpause, as we should, the hate crimes against older people and disability, which are very prevalent, will we then add a list of words that we know to be offensive to them?

We are not arguing at all about anti-Semitism in our submission. We think it is important that that be addressed. What we are saying is that you need a clear and consistent and effective offence framework because these laws will be challenged. A two-year period of imprisonment for someone causing offence—remembering the burden of proving their case is on them. This has a reverse burden, which is also a problem under our Human Rights Act in terms of getting a fair trial. Compare that to, for example, 18C, which uses similar words and has similar exceptions. It is a civil procedure. It has successfully been used to deal with some of the most outrageous anti-Semites over time, but, again, we are still struggling to find an effective form of words that encapsulates the things that are so clearly obnoxious and harmful to us in a way that balances proper right to free speech.

CHAIR: Mr Mitchell, after those comments I want to draw you back to my first question in terms of words that might offend. There is still that high threshold to make the phrase or expression unlawful in the first place—

Mr Mitchell: Agreed.

CHAIR:—and that is it must be regularly used, incite discrimination, hostility or violence. It is not just offending, would you agree? First of all, it has to get over that threshold that is declared by the government, the commissioner, the CCC and the Human Rights Commissioner to be a phrase or

expression. You said yourself just before that we all know there is a symbol that is quite rightly outlawed. Doesn't this bill then give scope for us to add some equally and deeply offensive phrases or symbols?

Mr Mitchell: Yes, it does and I think there is a threshold there. I do not think any of us who have spent a lot of time looking at these sorts of laws—I was involved in running the first vilification case under the act, which was a hate crime in North Queensland, with some of the greatest legal minds. Former Justice Applegarth was counsel for our service in that case. These are not easy questions to answer. They involve a complex balancing of what is proportionate.

Yes, I accept there is a threshold, but I do also draw the committee back to the fact that this is based on regulation-making power. This is already a compromise. Particularly in a state that has no upper house, your role is to be the safeguard and the guardian of the balance of citizens' interests, which I think committees do very well. Where you have regulation-making power, how long will it be where there is a strong lobby—and I am not suggesting that it would be inappropriate for that to happen—before we add other things, because as we ban these expressions they will shift and then we will add and they will shift and we will add. I would hate to see us living in a world where there was a phonebook of things people cannot say that they are probably unaware of and may well be using innocently. I know the bill does not target that. It is targeting those who seek to treat Jewish people with contempt and hatred.

I guess the submission that many—the Law Society, the Law Council and most of my colleagues in other places like ours—will make is that we still are unsure about this threshold and the two tests within it, the first test being 'offend' et cetera and the second the 'so nearly resembles'. I am not suggesting I have an answer; I do not. We have been given limited time to consider what are actually very complex provisions.

I guess that my view about law enforcement, coming back to the member's question, is that we may end up with low-hanging fruit for prosecution here because you have two years as opposed to three years, you have I think a relatively lower test for harm and you have a reversed burden on the defendant. I am not a criminal lawyer but I can see that that will be an easier case to make in the case of anti-Semitism than serious vilification under the same part of the code, which creates a situation where all of those who are experiencing hate crimes in Queensland are treated differently.

I bring us back to section 15 of the Human Rights Act which says that all citizens, in fact all Queenslanders and individuals, have a right to equal treatment under the law, which includes, within the words of the act, equal protection from discrimination. Notwithstanding the complexity that we have not quite found our way through and that it is a very tricky topic to talk about, we do not want to seem at all like we think it is a bad idea to protect people from anti-Semitism—quite the opposite. We are strongly in favour of such an approach but it has to be an approach that is workable and is actually fit for purpose.

CHAIR: I agree it is complex, but we came to a point late last year where it escalated in urgency, I think.

Mr Mitchell: No doubt.

Ms MULLEN: I am interested in the issue of transparency and the fact that both symbols and prescribed expressions would be through regulation so they do not go through the scrutiny of parliament. The only thing we are debating here is, in fact, the head of power that is given to the Attorney-General. In terms of that point, the Attorney-General needs to determine what is solely or substantially representative of an ideology of extreme prejudice, has to determine what is extreme prejudice, has to determine what is regularly used and also has to determine how many or what proportion of a relevant group would need to see the expression. This is a very significant power that is bestowed on one person who only has to be satisfied that these are met. Do you think that when we are talking about symbols or we are talking about prohibited expressions they do need greater scrutiny from the parliament?

Mr Mitchell: I think that is the best practice. We understand from many centuries of this that regulation-making power is a compromise by its nature. We know this because it does not allow for the debate by the members of parliament, who represent the interests of people. I do not quite recall the details of the consultation process, but I think we have said there ought to be an opportunity to consult with the groups who are affected. I think it will be very important.

No doubt Jewish people will be telling the Attorney-General and others that there ought to be a positive duty on the minister to proactively consult with the people who are affected by new things that come to their attention. That can be tricky because we have many issues of intersectionality—hate crimes do not come in homogenous, neat categories. They often cross boundaries. They often conflate attributes. Age and disability are often conflated. We are dealing with a tricky area.

At the very least, if the bill passes there ought to be a strong requirement that consultation occurs with the groups who are actually going to benefit and are seen to be protected by the bill. That may occur through the Human Rights Commission, but they are a small organisation in reality and they do not have the ability to talk to everyone. Of course, people living in regional Queensland have quite different needs. If you do a scan of hate crime cases, many of them come from regional Queensland, unfortunately.

Once upon a time we had the strongest vilification powers in the country. They are still very good, but the criminal aspect of that has not been used much because of the complexity of the law, and whether it could achieve its purpose was the subject of a parliamentary report not that long ago.

CHAIR: Mr Mitchell, do you have any comments in relation to other aspects of the bill such as the protection of religious services et cetera?

Mr Mitchell: No. We really did not have an opportunity to turn our mind to that. I would have liked to have. I did not see anything there that looked particularly problematic. They seem like appropriate measures. We are not involved in providing advice on gun licensing, so we have not turned our mind to those things at all. I would like to have turned my mind to some of the police powers, but I did not have an opportunity—my apologies. We are focused on the Criminal Code amendments, given that is what we have the most knowledge of.

Mr BERKMAN: The question from the chair before carried an assertion that the threshold for the prescription of a prohibited expression is quite high, referring to the requirement to consult with other parties. I wanted to run this past you. We are talking here about a decision that is made only by the minister and to the minister's satisfaction, which itself is a very subjective test, and the minister's satisfaction needs to be around regular use to incite discrimination, hostility or violence. I wanted to draw your attention to that word 'hostility'. It seems to me, contrary to the chair's assertion, to be a relatively low threshold that can include—it is not defined. The regular meaning of the word 'hostility' can include 'unfriendliness' or 'simple opposition to a position'. Do you have anything further to add to that?

Mr Mitchell: The compatibility statement describes it differently as well. It states—

... the Minister be satisfied the expression is regularly used to incite harm to that group;

I cannot quite remember whether that is different from the words you have just given. Are they from the explanatory notes?

Mr BERKMAN: Harm versus hostility, I suppose.

Mr Mitchell: Hostility is an integral part of free speech. It is remarkable to me that, if you ask most people what the most important human right is, they will tell you it is free speech, not the right to life. It is incredible. That is closely followed by privacy. The information that we give about ourselves is very important to people.

You only have to look on Facebook for 10 minutes to see how hostile people have become to each other. It is a hotbed of hate crimes. We need to become mature enough to understand that some hostility may be posturing but not offensive and that some hostility is problematic. Again, there are no bright lines that can easily be drawn. The United States have grappled with this issue in their Supreme Court for a long time. The first thing they will say in a hate speech case is that there is no bright line, that there is grey on either side. You have to work with the community to find the best level, but it has to be a proportionate response.

The intent is very good, and it is good to create a workable vilification law because what we have had has not been as successful as many of us would have hoped. It is also not being shared amongst all of the groups that are experiencing hate crimes. I do not know whether it is proportionate because we just have not had time.

Mr BERKMAN: There is one further issue that I think is really important to put to someone with legal expertise. The amendments include changes around the definition of 'a prohibited symbol'. It moves that definition beyond just what is included in regulation to include symbols that are 'used by a prescribed organisation, or a member of a prescribed organisation, to identify the organisation or any part of the organisation'.

Mr Mitchell: To be honest, I did not turn my mind to that particular provision. I do not have any views about it, to be honest. The amendment updates the prohibited symbol provision in the same way it does for expressions, but, clearly, they are different things. I was not able to turn my mind to that issue, unfortunately. I do not want to comment if I do not understand.

Mr BERKMAN: The short timelines have flummoxed many of us, Mr Mitchell. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Mitchell. I appreciate your appearing before us today.

ENGLEFIELD, Ms Julie, President, Ausdance National; Strategic Adviser, North Australian Festival of Arts

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Englefield: Across my roles, I work with professional artists, volunteer boards, regional and remote cultural organisations, First Nations cultural leaders, schools and community-based programs. Our submission, which, as you all know, happened very quickly, concerns drafting precision and its operational consequences. I am not a lawyer. I am not a parliamentarian. I do not know anything about all of that, but I do know the arts. I want to be precise, and I also apologise if some of this repeats what was spoken about earlier.

The bill introduces an offence for publicly reciting, distributing, publishing or displaying a prohibited expression in a way that might reasonably be expected to cause a member of the public to feel menaced, harassed or offended. A prohibited expression is not defined in the act itself; it is to be prescribed by future regulation. That future regulation is concerning.

The explanatory notes make it clear that the existing defence of reasonable excuse applies and that this may include conduct undertaken for a genuine artistic, religious, educational, historic or public interest purpose. That acknowledgement is important. However, this protection operates as a defence only; it does not operate as an explicit exemption at the definitional stage of the offence.

In relation to the real structural risk, the concern is not that artistic or cultural activity will be ignored; the concern arises from the structure of the offence. Expressions will be defined later by regulation. The offence applies where the conduct might reasonably be expected to cause a member of the public to feel offended, even if no-one actually heard or saw it. The protection is a reasonable excuse defence and the evidential burden is placed on the defendant. That combination creates uncertainty. It means that lawful artistic, cultural, academic or public interest activity could technically satisfy the elements of the offence before the defence is raised. The issue is not whether such an activity could ultimately be defended; the issue is whether it should be captured by the offence framework at all.

I have some operational concerns as well, managing a non-profit organisation. There are organisational and board implications. Arts and cultural organisations are governed mostly by volunteer boards. Once criminal exposure becomes plausible, directors must treat programming decisions as potential criminal risk decisions. The foreseeable consequences are: increased legal review; higher compliance and advisory costs; insurance scrutiny; conservative programming; difficulty recruiting volunteer directors; and, to be honest, a mass exodus from boards. This is not ideological; it is how risk management operates when criminal uncertainty exists.

I would like to speak a bit about First Nations cultural authority. In North Queensland, traditional owner groups regularly conduct ceremony, storytelling, dance, cultural education and truth-telling about colonisation and sovereignty. These activities may involve strong language about dispossession and historical injustice. If an expression used in a cultural context was later prescribed by regulation as a prohibited expression, this offence could be technically engaged. The cultural leader would then rely on a defence of genuine cultural, religious or historical purpose and that it was reasonable in the circumstances. That is different from being clearly excluded from the offence at the outset. For First Nations people, who have always had a responsibility to accurately record facts in order to preserve culture, that uncertainty matters.

There is an education sector implication. The curriculum in Queensland's senior syllabuses requires students to analyse political movements, examine contested conflicts, evaluate primary source material and consider different perspectives. This includes analysing controversial slogans and political messaging in context. If a teacher quoted a prescribed expression in a history lesson, the conduct could technically satisfy the elements of public recital. The protection, again, would be a defence based on genuine educational purposes and reasonableness. Clarity at the definitional stage would provide confidence to schools and teachers.

Section 18D of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 provides explicit protection for artistic works, academic discussion and fair comment on matters of public interest when undertaken reasonably and in good faith. That protection operates clearly within the structure of federal law. Queensland's legislation would benefit from similar clarity.

Because prohibited expressions will be prescribed by regulation, and because the offence threshold is 'might reasonably be expected to cause offence', there may be increased complaints, preliminary investigations and a greater reliance on prosecutorial discretion, even where conduct ultimately falls within artistic, cultural or educational purposes. Precision drafting would help to ensure enforcement resources were directed towards genuine hate conduct rather than lawful expression that must then later be defended.

On behalf of the sectors I represent, I respectfully recommend the inclusion of an explicit statutory exemption at the definitional stage of the offence for: artistic works and performance; cultural ceremony and traditional practice; academic and educational activity; and genuine public interest commentary undertaken reasonably and in good faith. This would preserve the bill's purpose while reducing institutional uncertainty.

The bill pursues an important objective. My submission is not about weakening protections; it is about structural clarity. As prohibited expressions will be prescribed by regulation, and as protection operates as a defence with the evidential burden on the defendant, lawful, cultural, educational and public interest activity may technically be captured before being justified. An explicit exemption at the definitional stage would preserve the bill's purpose while reducing uncertainty for schools, cultural organisations and First Nations communities. Clarity strengthens the law. Thank you. I welcome your questions.

CHAIR: Thank you for that submission. I get where you are coming from in terms of your fears in relation to how this might be prosecuted or seen and the reversal of the onus of defence. An investigation would only commence upon complaint, I would imagine. If it is clearly in an educational setting, I do not think it would go any further. I think the reverse onus is designed for the situation where people are trying to circumvent the rules.

Ms Englefield: I understand what you are saying, but, if a non-profit arts manager is managing a small community thing and someone makes a complaint about what they are doing, the stress and impact on that person, that organisation and that community would be immense. It is far simpler to exempt those particular activities before it even becomes a situation where someone might be investigated.

CHAIR: If in the context of a play, for example, an offensive symbol of the like we have spoken about before was used and a complaint was made to police, under the exemptions I doubt there would be—

Ms Englefield: If it is an exemption then that is fine, but if it is not an exemption someone can go to the police. That should be a nonstarter. It is the same in the classroom.

CHAIR: I guess what I am saying to you is: if somebody went to the police and said, 'I was at a play last night where they used a Nazi symbol,' the police would immediately say, 'Well, that is a play' because the exemption is clear. It is clearly there.

Ms Englefield: No, it is not an exemption; it is a defence. It is not an exemption. I am requesting that it is an exemption. I think it makes a lot more sense because then nothing happens. No-one will go to the police or if they do then the police can, but if it is not an exemption they cannot.

Ms McMAHON: Following what happened in relation to the festival in Adelaide, how is that freedom to put on events now caveated by being really cautious about who is invited and what the topics are? Could you just tell us about the restrictions you feel, without legislation or law at the moment, are currently going through organisations like yours?

Ms Englefield: I can tell you exactly because we discussed it at our board meeting last week which had a briefing paper which was 'Adelaide Writers Festival'. The impact is that we now have to test programming proposals to work out if we might have a word or two words in any of the marketing material that might red-flag to government which would impact—even though it technically is supposed to be arm's-length, we all know it is not arm's-length—the funding. It has impacted funding in organisations across the country. Already the board is much more risk-averse. We have had to have conversations which test the board's appetite for risk: 'Are you prepared to stand up in court? Are you prepared to go in front of the funding body? Are you prepared to be on the front page of the *Courier-Mail*?' It is significant. I suppose what we want to ensure going forward with this bill is that artistic cultural expression and education and genuine commentary are protected.

Ms MARR: Thank you for being here today. In your submission you were talking about pressure towards self-censorship. You were just talking about how you manage your risk. You would currently do that. How do you manage self-censorship now?

Ms Englefield: We should not be self-censoring. As an arts organisation, it is not the responsible way of delivering arts activities.

Ms MARR: You do not do that currently?

Ms Englefield: We make programming decisions. On the back of most recent events and events in the last two years, the board that is responsible for addressing risk thinks very carefully about what risks need to be assessed before agreeing on a program, but self-censorship is not where we want to

be as a society and as an arts sector. When we get to a point where we do not even look at an arts work because we think it is going to offend someone or worry someone or we are going to lose our funding, then the diversity of arts is going to decrease significantly.

Ms MARR: Can you explain to me how you would have to do that differently from when you are considering them now? How would you have to do it differently if this legislation was to go through?

Ms Englefield: The biggest thing is the criminal risk. There is a very big difference between losing your funding—having to front up to a funding body, talk to some people—and having criminal liability. Nobody wants that. No voluntary board member who comes along and gives their time to help arts organisations or cultural organisations wants to have to look through the lens of criminal liability. I believe if it is not exempt we will lose people from boards and we will lose people from senior leadership.

Ms MULLEN: When the reasonable excuse provisions were written into section 52D(2) back in 2023, they were very narrowly focused because there was one symbol at the time that it related to. Now we have a number of prescribed symbols that have been added in regulation, but the expressions make it a lot more complex around the reasonable defence provisions. I want to flesh that out a little bit more from your perspective. Is that where you are seeing the greatest risk, more than symbols—more around criminalising speech, effectively? Is that the area you are most concerned about and that reverse onus of burden of proof?

Ms Englefield: It is probably both. Part of it is the fact that the expressions are not yet determined so how can you agree to something you do not know exists? It is a bit of both because, if you imagine, in a theatre play or a play or in visual art exhibitions artists will always explore history or culture or social issues. That is the job of the artist. It is both, actually.

Mr FIELD: If the current guidelines change, would you not just have to change your perception of how you go about it? If the rules change, you have to change accordingly. As they are now, you do one thing and abide by those rules. If those rules change, wouldn't you then still have to do the same and abide by those rules?

Ms Englefield: I am not sure I fully understand. The biggest challenge for operating arts companies and boards and community education will be the possibility of criminal prosecution.

Mr FIELD: The guidelines you have now with your grants and funding—

Ms Englefield: Yes, those guidelines will not change—they may change, actually, if the funding is through the government.

Mr FIELD: You follow those guidelines now. If the rules change, wouldn't those guidelines then change as well to follow the same process?

Ms Englefield: If the rules change, we as an organisation that abides by the law will have to change our guidelines.

CHAIR: Can I clarify that your main objection is the reverse onus? You would like an exemption to be in the definition. I am fairly certain the arts community would not want to use a phrase that is regularly used to incite discrimination, hostility or violence in a way that would menace or harass or offend people. The intent is there in the legislation. I am assuming the arts community is not intending that. The exemptions exist, but your objection really is that the exemption is not clear enough and the onus is on you?

Ms Englefield: Exactly, yes.

CHAIR: I appreciate your appearance today speaking on behalf of the arts community.

HAWKINS, Mr Bob, North Queensland Rifle Association

CHAIR: If I could ask you to state your name for the record and then the capacity in which you are appearing today.

Mr Hawkins: I am Bob Hawkins. I am a member of the North Queensland Rifle Association. My initial interest here was as an individual, but because Marty Eiteneuer could not be present I came along. Most of you will already have a copy of the submission made by the North Queensland Rifle Association. The general consensus amongst our members is that the government has got it pretty right this time. There is nothing too onerous in there from our point of view. It seems to this time be looking out for the bad guys rather than the good guys. Well done on that point.

A couple of things I was hearing in conversation before raised the issue of number of firearms. One bad guy with one rifle is one too many. The Childers backpackers fire was lit with a box of matches. If we limited a box of matches to only have one match in it, is it going to reduce the risk? It is not. As an instructor and trainer, we get people of all sorts of physical sizes and shapes. I have a large range of firearms to match to a particular person. I think any restriction on the number of firearms is going to be a bit pointless.

From a training point of view, there has been a lot of interest in things lately and we see people of all nationalities come through the place, quite often from overseas. I do not necessarily think any of them are bad people. I think the one thing we really need to watch out for is: with all of the power to approve or reject firearms licences vested in the commissioner, we still need to maintain an appeals process. Not everyone gets things right every time. For procedural fairness, people need to be able to say, 'Hey, I think the decision is wrong because of this.' People get all sorts of information and not necessarily is that information correct. We need to maintain an appeals process for firearms licences. That is about it from my point of view. If you have any questions, fire away.

CHAIR: We do. One of the reasons we got out of the city into the regional areas is to hear from people who use firearms as a tool of business—primary producers et cetera. How important is firearm use in regional areas?

Mr Hawkins: From my point of view—it is purely a sporting point of view—on a weekly basis probably 20 per cent of our clientele coming through to get their firearm licence are from stations. They use them for feral pest control and things like that. You see in the media there are huge outbreaks of feral pigs at the moment because of the wet season and that sort of thing. While 1080 is effective in killing feral pigs, it also happens to kill pretty well everything else in the bush as well. Helicopter shooting targets that particular species and there is no bycatch or whatever they like to call it.

CHAIR: Do you accept the government's increase in penalties for various offences in relation to firearms?

Mr Hawkins: I think it is a good thing, and that is mentioned in our submission. I would like to say, as a member of the North Queensland Rifle Association: for those of you who are not aware of competitive shooting, go along to a King's Prize shoot and just see who is there. You will not find ratbags there; you will not find people drinking to excess and carrying on like you do at a lot of festivals. You will see fair dinkum people who are there to do their very best and represent the country. Go along, have a look and get firsthand experience. We often hear about Jewish people being vilified. Try being a firearms owner. If you look at the history, in the past it has been pretty onerous for us people. On behalf of the NQRA, I am very pleased that the government has made a fair dinkum effort to get it right this time.

Ms McMAHON: Turning to your submission around the strengthening of storage requirements, you mention that the specifications of steel safes need to be consistent with other states. Do you have any examples of the inconsistencies and how this impacts sporting shooters and competitions and that kind of thing—real practical implications?

Mr Hawkins: Western Australia recently changed their specification they had on the safe. It used to be a three-millimetre door. Then they said you have to have a five-millimetre-thick door on the safe. Safes come in various shapes and sizes and things like that. Depending on what you are trying to store, if someone has a single-shot .22 or something like that, there is probably not as high a requirement to have it stored as a high-capacity centre-fire rifle or something like that. There is going to be a significant demand now if we go from timber storage to steel safes. To straight out buy 10,000 gun safes or something in Queensland, it will take a little while.

Ms McMAHON: Forgive me—I am not really up on storage requirements—but is there a national standard, like an ANZ standard?

Mr Hawkins: There is no national standard that I am aware of. In Queensland, at the current moment, the container must be made from steel or solid timber—hardwood or something like that—and if it weighs less than 150 kilos it must be bolted to the wall or the frame of a permanent building. If we change it to a steel safe, it is going to make it potentially a bit more difficult for people to break in, but is it going to be 100 per cent secure? I do not know.

Mr FIELD: I have a question with regard to your members in general with the 3D printed firearms. Is there talk about that with your members or is that more so the other side of the coin, basically, where your members are more those sporting shooters who do not really go into the 3D printed things?

Mr Hawkins: I have been in the game for a very long time. I have never seen a 3D printed firearm, with the exception on a movie show where someone was trying to shoot the President of the United States. Personally, I would never hold something that was made out of plastic and, given with a lot of rifles you have about 40 tonnes per square inch pressure in them, anything that is printed on a 3D printer is going to be bits and pieces. I would not want to be within 100 miles of the damn thing. But people use all sorts of gear for different things. Probably the only 3D printed type thing I could see happening would be someone trying to make something on a clandestine basis to do something wrong. If you have a good system in place, a licensed person can go to a firearms shop, buy a tool or a bit of sporting gear for whatever they want and use it safely. It is only when they try to circumvent the process that those sort of things come to light.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, I thank you, Mr Hawkins. We appreciate you coming today to talk about firearms legislation. That is our last formal witness. We will now move into community statements, but we will take a five-minute break first. If you have registered for a community statement—I think we have a list—we will call you up one by one. The intention is for that process to be a bit quicker, not lengthy like with the previous witnesses. If you would like to have a say and you have not registered, just see Greg over to my right here during the break. Can I get a quick show of hands who is registered to speak, so we have an idea of numbers and time? We have seven or eight registered. If you have not registered but you would like to, just see Greg during this quick five-minute break.

Proceedings suspended from 10.33 am to 10.43 am.

CHAIR: We will now move to our community statements session, where we invite people to make short statements of up to three minutes on any aspects of the bill. Generally the committee does not ask any questions during these sessions, but I will give members the opportunity if there is anything pressing. We have had a lot of people complete the registration form on the committee's webpage. Some people have indicated they would like to make a statement while others have indicated that they would like to observe and listen. To assist the committee, what I intend to do is go row by row. That is the easiest way of doing it. If you would prefer to give your statement in private, please let the secretariat know so that can be arranged. We would do that at the end if you would prefer to speak privately. I will close the session at the end and then we will hear private submissions, if there are any. We will endeavour to hear from everyone during the session. The committee is limited by time. We are scheduled to finish at midday. I encourage everyone to keep their statements concise and to allow those making statements to share their views with the committee uninterrupted. We will start with the first row.

ALLEN, Mr John, Private capacity

Mr Allen: My statement is more in relation to things that I have picked up today as well as, I suppose, an administrative aspect of things. On the administrative aspect of things, as a retired or semi-retired engineer, I am used to dealing with updates to documents and amendments, and it is a really shitty process doing that.

CHAIR: Sir, I cannot allow that that language, I am afraid. I ask you to withdraw. Say, 'I withdraw.'

Mr Allen: I withdraw. It is a terrible process that does not facilitate easy reading of the new bill by the community. Having to go through and add this into that document is a terrible way to invite the community to read and understand a document. You can do better. In today's context of electronic formats on websites and things, you can provide the amended documents with highlighted sections showing the amendments. That will facilitate community access to the new bill. As it is, I was unable, in the timeframe, to go in and look at anything sensible of what you guys have put forward for community consultation. You have utterly failed in terms of delivering to the normal members of the community, who are not specialists in areas, the capacity to read and understand what the new legislation being proposed actually is. That is my first point.

CHAIR: Can I ask you, sir, are you aware of the explanatory notes? On the website where the bill is there are the explanatory notes, which is a plain English version.

Ms MARR: It tells everything.

CHAIR: I will not interrupt you. I will let you continue.

Mr Allen: On the website, perhaps it was written by the same people who have programmed the BoM website. It did not lead easy access to those web notes. They were not obvious to the general members of the public that that information was there.

CHAIR: You have another 40 seconds, so I will not interrupt you again.

Mr Allen: The legislation—and I know this is not a Queensland government thing, but it partially is. The hate within the community and bringing in hateful philosophies and things like that, as I see it, is the major underlying issue that has not been spoken about today. We have spoken about the peripheries of things. We have not spoken about community cohesion, the hate and the religious documents that inspire hateful thinking. We have not spoken about governments bringing into the community people who follow hateful philosophies. We will never make the community safe by restricting free speech and restricting firearms when we are bringing in hateful people.

CHAIR: Thank you, sir.

WRIGHT, Ms Amanda, Private capacity

Ms Wright: My name is Amanda Wright and I am reading a submission this morning from Helen Taylor, who, unfortunately or fortunately, has work on Magnetic Island. We are both Jews from Magnetic Island. I am reading hers first and then I have some comments of my own that I would like to make afterwards.

‘Dear members of the parliamentary committee. I am a resident of Magnetic Island, Queensland, and I am writing to share a personal account of anti-Semitism and hate crime that has deeply affected my family here in Queensland. In 2021, my children were targeted with anti-Semitic remarks at their high school—Northern Beaches State High School in Townsville—a series of events that left them feeling isolated and unsafe. The details eventually reached Queensland parliament via the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies and so began the change of hate crime and vilification legislation.’ She included images. I do not know if you have them or whatever. ‘In September of 2024, I reported that a well-known vocal artist had performed at the North Australian Festival of Arts—NAFA. This is an annual event spanning a few weeks in Townsville and is well attended and supported. The attached email summarises the content of the complaint.’ I will come back to that and read that later, if you do not have it.

‘More recently in October 2024 we discovered hateful graffiti at the local skate park on Magnetic Island. This had to be removed three times by council. It was cleaned and came back again, and I believe that the perpetrator was caught on a covert camera installed by local police. I have to date never seen an update or been informed who was responsible and what the outcome was, which, once again, made myself and my children fearful in their everyday lives. On an island 12 kilometres from one end to the other, they were surely walking amongst us.’ Again, there are images 4, 5 and 6 that go with that—of the graffiti in the park. It was vile.

‘In 2025, I saw a surge in these incidents online on social media, with explicit hate being shared on Facebook, Instagram, Threads and others. I have included a couple of screenshots of Facebook posts that document the lies and fantasy that are being spread by members of our island community. Keep in mind that our permanent community is only approximately 3,000 and, as a large proportion, our people that were not born on the island has attracted many from other communities and other countries across Australia. It had a sense of multiculturalism and welcomed any background or culture. However, I believe it has become a microcosm of 2024-25-26 Australia and has shown some of its residents to be divisive and hateful, and since October 7th have felt that the situation in the Middle East has given them permission to show their innate hatred of the Jewish people. Lastly, I am proud to be a Jew, but I am also a proud Australian who considered themselves very blessed and privileged to live here, but, with a heavy heart, I am deeply saddened that not only have we lost members of our community in Bondi and have had to grieve in an unimaginable way, these events have profoundly shaken our sense of safety, and I urge the committee to take immediate action to prevent further hate crimes, try to stop the spread of malicious, out-of-context narratives perpetrated by the media, and protect our vulnerable community. Respectfully submitted for your attention and inclusion, Helen Taylor.’ I would just like to read—

CHAIR: Ma’am, we have run past three minutes, but I was going to give you some extra time because you wanted to make a statement as well.

Ms Wright: I will use my three minutes to finish reading her submission if that is all right.

CHAIR: That is not the intention of giving everyone a go.

Ms Wright: My submission is a lot of the same things that she spoke about. One of the other incidences that happened on the island was that a local bakery hosted an event to raise money for the poor children in Gaza. This was publicised multiple times on the community Facebook post, which had its administrator with the supposed Palestinian flag. We responded to this and the responses to our response were vile. I am not going to speak them out because I do not want to speak such disgusting abuse—just lots of Nazi vitriol and that, the same old thing—‘baby killer’, you know, whatever. Somebody from the island who obviously had a bit more of a brain commented, ‘If this money is being sent to UNRWA, you might as well be handing it straight to Hamas’ and, ‘Why are you raising money for terrorists?’ Consequently or subsequently, all of the comments were then stopped and they have now all been deleted. They went ahead with this event and then proudly posted that they had X amount turn up, they raised \$3,000 and it has been sent to UNRWA. We did approach one of the venues, the ones that showed the film, and they said they do not care who does what as long as they are paying money to be there, which we do not think is good enough.

There is graffiti in the public toilets: 'Free Palestine', the normal stuff. I have spoken to some local MPs and the mayor about it, and it has not been cleaned. Unless we clean it ourselves—nobody seems to care too much. I have a whole list of other instances of anti-Semitism that I could sit here for a while and share with you, but I won't. One of the comments that was sent to NAFA was about being residents and ratepayers and Jews and that they feel that it was not appropriate. We did get a letter back from them, but in terms of what the police have been doing about the other things on the island there is nothing going on.

CHAIR: Ma'am, that is over six minutes so I will have to pull you up there. I will let you know, and anyone else making a contribution today know, that if you do not get it all out we do take contributions in writing to the secretariat that the committee can consider as well. You can get that information from the secretariat after the hearing.

Ms Wright: Thank you, because I also have something to say about the hospital, but I will save that for later.

CHAIR: Put it in writing. Thank you.

NORVAL, Mr William, Private capacity

Mr Norval: My name is William Norval. I am married to Dr Sarah **Kleinman**, a member of the Jewish community. This is a really quick statement. As a serving officer in the Australian Army, I have dedicated my career to defending the values that underpin our nation—fairness, safety, democracy and respectful people. It is deeply disheartening to see factions within Australian society abandon those same values by promoting rhetoric that undermines social cohesion and fuels division. The uniform I wear represents service to every Australian, and it is painful to watch that commitment taken for granted or actively disrespected.

Chants have explicitly supported extremists or repeat slogans historically tied to violence, terrorism or the eradication of people—not harmless political statements. They normalise extremist ideology, create fear for Jewish Australians and erode the sense of safety that every community deserves. Freedom of expression is a core Australian value, but it is not a blank cheque to intimidate, vilify or endorse organisations responsible for terrorism. Our laws and our shared moral standards draw a clear line between legitimate political advocacy and speech that causes real-world harm.

In response to a request that the arts be exempt from the legislation, the arts also cannot claim immunity under the banner of creativity. Artistic expression is vital to a healthy society, but it does not override legal and ethical responsibilities. When art crosses into hate speech, incitement or the glorification of violence, it ceases to be protected expression and becomes a vehicle for harm. Creativity does not exist in a vacuum. It carries consequences and those consequences matter. That is it. Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you, sir, for that powerful expression of how you feel. I invite the second row.

THOMPSON, Ms Lori-Anne, Private capacity

Ms Thompson: My name is Lori-Anne Thompson. I have been a teacher most of my life and spoken to literally hundreds of diverse people as I have lived in or visited every state in Australia. I have degrees in education and psychology. Right now, there are a lot of emotions being expressed, and that is very understandable and everyone deserves to be heard. We have just had a very sad tragedy and that understandably heightens the tendency to perhaps feel a bit panicky and jump into things, so I am trying to be the voice of calm here and to speak up for going into things very carefully and patiently.

I also believe that Australia already has tried and true, well-balanced anti-discrimination, anti-vilification and anti-defamation laws and that these do not need to be changed or added to a lot, really, because censorship will not prevent the rare unhinged individual or individuals going on a rampage. Tighter gun laws will help in a practical way, but we have to be careful not to let our legislation become oppressive. Our rights and freedoms are important, but we are not going to prevent insanity through censorship.

There is something that deeply disturbs me. I have heard that these new laws will allow a small group of politicians to basically bypass the usual healthy and transparent debate in parliament in the decision-making process. Then crucial decisions that affect us all may simply be able to be made by a small group behind closed doors, so to speak. Any potential erosion of democracy is deeply troubling to me.

At a personal level, I believe that all of these new restrictions and legal threats are now creating a culture of fear in Australia that did not exist before and I do not believe it should exist in a country like this. Primarily, we now have the fear of being misunderstood and unjustly accused of things when it was not our intention to offend or whatever. This then prevents healthy debate and constructive criticism. It discourages critical thinking and dialogue and open communication between diverse peoples. This also creates divisions within society and not social cohesion.

I am also disturbed that I am not seeing Islamophobia addressed yet. Arabic peoples are also Semitic by definition. I am worried that the new censorship laws will make it almost impossible to speak about Palestinians or show concern for them. I know a number of Palestinian Australians and Jewish Australians in Townsville personally who are also concerned for Palestinians. Are we not to discuss these things anymore? Are we not allowed to have an opinion or express it or have concerns?

What also disturbs me is that Australia has a track record of being one of the most peaceful countries in the world. We can virtually count on one hand the number of unbalanced people who have attacked others like with the Christchurch shootings, the Port Arthur shootings and the Bondi shootings.

CHAIR: I am loath to interrupt, but we have gone quite a bit over that three-minute threshold. As I invited other witnesses, if there is some more you would like to submit in writing I invite you to do that.

Ms Thompson: Will you tell us how to do that because I would not know how.

CHAIR: The secretariat will advise. Thank you for participating today.

GOLDWATER, Mr Aaron, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to make a statement.

Mr Goldwater: By way of background, in 2017 I took my wife to Israel, to Jerusalem. Amongst many other places we visited the Holocaust museum, Yad Vashem. At the end of your trip through Yad Vashem there is a room you can go into and print out a list of your relatives who went through the Holocaust. I had four pages of names from the town that my family came from and it was a small town. That is my background.

I am a member of the Jewish community. My wife is not Jewish but is supportive of me and the community. What I am going to read is what happened to me a couple of months ago at a dog park. I was at my usual dog park on Thursday, 2 November when a guy who was in the military, an NCO, started talking about Nazis. He was honouring them, explaining how members of his unit are Nazis, how they dress up, how they have Nazi flags and how they disguise them. After a bit, another chap who is friends with the first guy stood in front of me doing Sieg Heil salutes. They know that I am Jewish. I have been going to the park for 18 months. Rabbi Ari actually took it up and reported it to the Army. I personally have heard nothing, so I assume it is just in the mist. That is really all I have to say, just what happened to me on that particular occasion.

CHAIR: Thank you. I appreciate you coming along. Would anybody else like to speak?

COHEN, Mr Lior, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you make an opening statement.

Mr Cohen: I did not intend on speaking; it just builds up. I have a lot to say so I will try to be concise and I will try to control my language.

CHAIR: You have three minutes.

Mr Cohen: Basically, this bill should be scrapped. It seems like it was written a while ago and they were just looking for the right time to introduce it. It is counter to its intention.

We did not have an anti-Semitism problem before 7 October. What happened after 7 October has just been showing that the people who have been imported into Australia have been given the freedom to do what they want and basically preach for terrorism and celebrate terrorism on the street. The government has just accommodated it and said, 'That's okay.'

I served in the IDF during the second intifada particularly in the Gaza Strip. We did not have an anti-Semitism problem in Australia. I have been here for almost 20 years and it has only been the last three years that we have seen it skyrocketing. It is an issue that was not here before and all of a sudden it has appeared. Under this government—it had sustained itself—it has been allowed to flourish. We are sort of used to this hate. We had it for thousands of years. We can survive it. We are not victims. I do not like this idea that Australia needs to feel sorry for us, like it is not an acceptable feeling for Australia. We were invited here, we let it happen and now we have people chanting 'globalise the intifada'. I have been there; I know what it is. I fought against it. I lost friends; I lost family members to that. We now see it celebrated in Australia—we have an Australian of the Year chanting 'globalise the intifada'. We have a Prime Minister who basically celebrated with terrorists from the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Where this country is heading is not the right place. This anti-Semitism bill does not do anything except try to shut people up; it basically tries to shut up people who have guns and take their guns. The blame will be turned around: it is because of anti-Semitism; it is the Jews again. Instead of doing something, it is actually counter to the whole idea of this bill. Again, it is rubbish; we do not need it. We had plenty of laws beforehand and they worked. What you need to do is enforce what is existing already rather than create something new that will be turned around back onto us. That is all I have to say without pushing it too hard.

CHAIR: Thank you. I appreciate that.

GAY, Mr David, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to make a submission.

Mr Gay: I am an ex-serviceman; I spent 25 years in the ADF. I am currently retired. I have not prepared a written submission but I have taken some notes along the way. First of all, I will give my background. I represented Australia both overseas and at home in the Australian Defence Force shooting team and at points in time I was given medals for my shooting and was lauded by the government. The minute I would take off my uniform I would then be treated as a second-class citizen with regard to the firearms.

First of all, I want to bring up some points. As a firearms owner you have to be trained—you do a training course—you are then police vetted and your storage is checked. You are already vetted to a high level. Whether you have one firearm or a plethora of firearms, what is the difference? You can only use one at a time. It does not matter what type of firearm it is, either.

Firearms, hunting and shooting are my chosen lifestyle and a continuation of my cultural heritage. I am going to say that again so you can understand it. Firearms, hunting and shooting are my chosen lifestyle and a continuation of my cultural heritage. Constantly in the media there are narratives that attack firearms owners and vilify them. If I was a member of the LGBTI community that would not be appropriate, but because I am a firearms owner it is okay to constantly have a crack at us in the media. Now that I have that off my chest, you asked a number of questions earlier about the types of firearms and quantities, so I will give you some background knowledge and you can do with it as you will.

I do a lot of culling for local farmers, both locally and hours and hours away from here. It is my passion. I am out in the field doing things that I am comfortable with using the skills I have and it gets me close to nature. I save the farmers thousands of dollars by doing the job that they do not have the time and resources to do. I have a plethora of firearms. It depends on which property I go to as to which ones I will take. That will depend on the terrain—whether it is flat or hilly—the vegetation and the target species of feral animal that we are going to attack. Other states have said, 'Okay, as a hunter you can only have four or five firearms.' That is absolutely ridiculous. I do not know how they came up with the number of five or four given that you can only use one at a time. If you are going to be serious about public safety, do it properly, not offer the tokenism we have now.

The old classic . 22 is great for small things like rabbits at close range. The . 223 is good for dogs and cats and other small feral animals. It has reasonable hitting power. It has the same cartridges that the military uses. I will use a . 22-250 if there are dogs or cats at a distance, as in more than 200 metres. It has more punch and it shoots flatter. If I am going to be expecting dogs or pigs at a distance in the training sense, I might take a 6.5 Creedmoor, which shoots fairly flat at a distance and retains reasonable hitting power to effectively engage and terminate those pests. I use a . 308 bolt action for medium-range pests, but if I want to get in close in a creek line and hunt mobs of pigs sleeping under shady trees near creeks where engagement ranges could be anything from a couple of metres to, say, 50 metres I might take a pump action .308 so I have plenty of firepower to take out as many of those pigs as quickly as possible and also minimise the threat to myself as they charge me.

CHAIR: I am sorry, I am going to have to wrap you up there. I take your point in terms of the number of firearms required to assist primary producers et cetera, and I assume you welcome our laws that do not restrict that.

Mr Gay: I do. I do have to commend the Premier on his approach to it, compared to other states, which is a very considered approach. I just wanted to get that point across.

CHAIR: Thanks for coming along today. As with the other witnesses, if there is anything you would like to add, you are welcome to write to the secretariat and the committee will consider that as well.

RICHARDSON, Mr Reuben, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to make a three-minute statement.

Mr Richardson: How do we protect our society from hatred without eroding the very freedoms that define us as Australians? I value individual freedoms, our cultural heritage and fair laws. I support real measures against terrorism and firearm misuse by high-risk individuals; however, I oppose the prohibited expressions offence in section 52D(a) and the related vilification rules. They risk overreach, vagueness and unequal enforcement and could stifle legitimate debate.

The bill aims to fight anti-Semitism but does not define it, as far as I can tell. We have seen how this term extends from the hatred of Jewish people to labelling anti-Zionism or criticism of Israel's Gaza policies and concerns regarding the influence of foreign lobbies 'anti-Semitic'. We risk the same here—policy critique becoming prohibited expression. Worse, the bill ignores root causes. Unchecked mass migration without real assimilation has fuelled ethnic and civilisational tensions in Australia. We saw this in 2025: foreign flags on landmarks, our flag burned, war memorials desecrated and calls for the abolishment of Australia prompting Australian patriots to march across the country as they realised what was now at stake. Suppressing discussion does not fix the issue; it lets the problem fester. Tragic events like the Bondi mass shooting highlight the urgent need to address underlying tensions through honest discussion rather than just treating the symptoms.

As the saying goes, demographics shape destiny. In 1901, about 20 per cent of the population boasted fourth-generation roots. By 1980, at 15 million, the fourth-generation population has swelled to 45 per cent, forging a strong Australian identity, but today, in 2026, this has collapsed to 25 per cent fourth-generation Aussies. Why does it matter? Mass migration from incompatible cultures erodes the deep ties that bind us together. Without a solid ethnic majority, national pride wanes. Surveys show that 65 per cent of Australians feel strong pride today, down from 85 per cent in the 1980s—no strong and shared 'us', no lasting cohesion.

We are seeing a similar but more severe breakdown in Britain, our motherland. Ethnic tensions have led to similar extreme hate speech laws to the ones that are currently being rammed through here aimed at stamping out dissent. This has contributed to an immune response from the British population and the rise of patriotic leaders such as Rupert Lowe, who launched Restore Britain. He stated—

The time for half-measures on immigration is SO far gone. It's over. It's done. That may have worked in 2010.

It's 2026 and the barbarians are already in the gates.

We will be unapologetic in our push for mass deportations ...

Restore Britain calls for reversing mass immigration through enforced removals, a hostile environment for non-contributors and an unyielding focus on cultural cohesion.

How many more ideological mass shootings and machete attacks must Australia endure before we can have an honest discussion? The threshold is dangerously low. Take 'from the river to the sea': a call for equality for Palestinians. It is menacing to some yet there have been mirror claims from some—not all—Israeli groups who say between the sea and Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty; one is banned, the other is not. That is not equality; it is selective censorship. Overseas, similar logic has been weaponised. In the UK, government programs like Prevent have flagged cultural nationalism; concerns that Western culture is threatened by mass migration and poor integration have been labelled as extreme right-wing terrorism, not violence, just defending cultural survival.

CHAIR: I invite you to make a submission in writing as well. Thank you for coming along today.

Mr Allen: Could I just say that it was very helpful when you gave me 30 seconds notice? That was extremely helpful.

CHAIR: I would like to acknowledge the presence of two of our local councillors who have entered the room. Thank you for attending today. I understand you had a council meeting today and the desire to attend was there.

HUGHES, Mr Peter, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to make a statement.

Mr Hughes: I am a registered firearms owner, a member of Townsville SSAA shooting complex. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak briefly at the assembly to hear what others have to say about lived experiences regarding this bill, particularly for me in relation to firearms ownership. From the outset I would like to acknowledge Premier Crisafulli and his team for the balanced and respectful approach when considering how to make Queensland a respectful and a safe place to live.

My primary school years were lived in the bush. I served in the military for 23 years and now I have just completed 20 years as a classroom teacher. I am heading into that sweet reward of retirement. Firearms have always been a part of my life. In the bush they were an essential field tool; in the military they were truly more so. As a teacher, on the weekend and on holidays target shooting and competition shooting provided a welcome distraction to what is a very demanding job. In retirement, I hope to continue my association with shooting sport and like-minded people who will keep me entertained, challenged and rewarded.

I want more Queenslanders to gain an appreciation that firearm ownership is more than just about having guns; it is more than about just the gun itself. To many firearm owners, that construct of steel and walnut may very well be a facet, even a linchpin, to their social fabric. It may well be the key to their health and wellbeing—like golf clubs are to a golfer, like a tennis racquet is to a tennis player, like a wave is to a surfer. Take away the wave and the surfer is diminished. Our range to the west of here is viewed by many as a 'people shed'. Q22 is a place of camaraderie, friendship and connectedness. It is our 'Are you okay, mate?' place. It is a place that through firearms promotes history, literacy, numeracy, sciences, information technology and land care. Every Wednesday is given over to a working bee where members maintain the grounds and machinery. On some weekends, elements of our range look like a campground covered in tents and caravans. Sporting shooters travel vast distances to attend competitions. It is not unusual when Townsville hosts competitions that competitors come from Western Australia, Tasmania and Victoria.

It is worth saying again: firearms ownership is not just about the gun; it can be the very centre of an individual's social fabric, their hobby, their way of being and their lifestyle. The government has done well, taking the social depths and extension of firearm ownership into account but with new laws there can be unintended consequences. One of the areas of the application that I hope to be reviewed is the area of mental health reporting by professionals. The government needs to be clear in what they expect of professionals as to stipulations, requirements and processes. Moreover, firearms owners need to be educated on what these processes are. As it stands now, the ambiguous nature of the professional reporting does little to encourage a firearm owner to self-report for mental health. Beyond Blue informs that in our current social construct only 37 per cent of men reach out for mental health support when they need it. For a firearms owner, this bill may well have reduced that percentage to zero. Why would a sporting shooter seek assistance when they suspect that the medical profession will be complicit in removing the very pathway to their enjoyment, their wellbeing and their betterment?

In conclusion, apart from the mental health reporting concerns that must be addressed, firearms owners in Queensland should be well pleased with the raising of this bill. We were consulted through our various sporting organisations, we were listened to, we were treated respectfully and, of particular significance, Queensland law continues to follow commonsense principles where the detrimental outcomes are for those who break the law, not for those whose lives are devoted to upholding it. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, sir. Is there anyone who has not spoken who is ready to speak? I will throw the floor open. If anyone else wants to have a say, the floor is open. Thank you everybody for the considerable interest that Townsville has shown with regard to this bill. It was great to get some correspondence from your local members who are here today. Adam Baillie has returned; Janelle Poole, Wayde Chiesa and Natalie Marr are here. The Townsville members are very passionate about their area and wrote to the committee on your behalf seeking the committee to come here. Whilst we had a short time with this bill—two weeks is what they call an urgent bill to get it through quickly—to get this level of interest in such a short time is a remarkable thing and I want to thank you for that. Thank you to the local councillors as well who have attended and shown their interest today.

That concludes this hearing. Thank you to everyone who has participated today. Thank you to our Hansard reporter. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. Before I close, I give a reminder that if you wish to make further submissions in writing you should see Fran at the end of the hearing and she will give you instructions on how to do so. Thank you for your attendance. I now declare this public meeting closed.

The committee adjourned at 11.26 am.