

08/10/2019



Dear Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Summary Offences and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019.

I am writing to convey my deep concern and anxiety about these new laws. I fear these laws can be easily used to silence and criminalise dissent and thus allow greater authoritarianism to take root within our democracy.

Further, these laws are disproportionate, overreaching, and appear to have no evidential basis.

The immense danger we currently face as a people is from the fossil fuel industry and its influence over the political establishment. Citizens who oppose destruction of the planet while upholding the traditions of non-violence and respectful engagement is to be encouraged if our democracy is to remain vital. Citizens who, in the absence of government action, are blockading or otherwise protesting deepening climate crisis, already face a great personal cost in the form of heavy fines, disproportionate charges and punitive bail conditions. The new laws will allow the police greater discretion and give the police essentially greater powers to decide what constitutes lawful protest. This is deeply concerning for two reasons: 1) matters relating to what constitutes lawful should be determined by the justice system and 2) protestors already operate within an hostile environment and the new laws may allow greater violence towards citizens who trustingly put themselves in vulnerable positions in acts of public service.

These proposed laws are not based upon evidence but appear to be motivated by prejudice and a troubling investment in continuing business as usual which will lead to an assured marginalisation of an increasing swath of humanity and accelerate extinction of non-humans.

I trust that the committee will work to ensure that our hard-won civil liberties remain intact by rejecting these laws and that we can all be allowed to live in a peaceful and safe world where dissent, and obstruction, if the situation demands it, is not criminalised.

Kind regards,
Abhijeet Swami