

the South Sydney Herald

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Activists occupy Waterloo South public housing estate to stop demolition

HUMAN AFFAIRS
RACHEL EVANS

HOUSING activists are trying to stop demolition teams from starting to fence off public housing units at Waterloo public housing estate on the corner of Cope and McEvoy Streets, Waterloo.

The Chris Minns Labor government wants to demolish and privatise 150 units in a low-rise section of this post-war estate, after having promised before the 2023 election that his government would preserve public housing.

On Sunday 24 May, around 200 people rallied to highlight the wanton destruction of perfectly liveable apartments in a housing crisis.

Protesters then occupied the corner of Cope and McEvoy Streets for the evening and watched *Waterloo* and *Rocking the Foundations*. In the morning, activists stopped demolition teams fencing in tenants' backyards, assisted by Greens MP Jenny Leong. Police were called but did not arrest or move protesters on.

Karyn Brown, a resident of Waterloo South, told the protest that Homes NSW had letterboxed tenants with the news of the demolition. She said 15 people were still living in those blocks "because they had nowhere else to go."



Photo: Michelle Haywood

Rachel Evans, a housing activist and the Socialist Alliance candidate for the seat of Heffron, said the destruction is "social vandalism".

"More than 67,000 people are on

the waiting list for public housing. Over 150,000 people are homeless across this continent and 37,000 people in NSW alone. One million properties are empty every night and the government is set to fail

in its Housing Australia Future Fund target of 55,000 new social and affordable homes by 2029."

Brown, who is also a spokesperson for Action for Public Housing, said NSW

Labor "is making the housing crisis worse by demolishing my community's homes".

She said that Phase 1, 2 and 3 will evict 750 tenants from their homes, which will be bulldozed for the private developer Stockland to build 3,300 homes; 50% or 1,650 of them will be over-priced, luxury homes.

"They're saying 20% will be 'affordable' housing, and 30% of the 3,300 will be 'social' housing. Only 7% of this 'affordable housing' is in perpetuity. That's not good enough.

When Waterloo tenants get evicted, we get shoved right up to the top of the public housing waiting list and we get a home but at the expense of everyone else who is on the list."

Evans, another Action for Public Housing spokesperson, said while federal Labor is making out that its budget has brought about the most comprehensive housing reforms Australia has seen in generations, it only peels back a small fraction of property investor tax concessions, worth a staggering \$29 billion a year to the public purse.

The occupation of Waterloo South, McEvoy and Cope St is ongoing. The community and unions are encouraged to attend and show support.

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Contact Karyn Brown and Rachel Evans for comment at actionforpublichousing.org/.

SSH

Science and activists on common grounds in Waterloo

ENVIRONMENT
EMMANUELLE BOTTÉ

SCIENCE and the wider population can often seem disconnected from one another. But initiatives enabling people to participate in the scientific endeavour are powerful ways to break this idea. Right now, the Save Waterloo public housing campaign is an example of how social issues often overlap with environmental ones, and how getting people to interact with nature locally can benefit their communities.

The Waterloo renewal project intends to create a new urban area where social housing buildings currently stand. A collective of local residents is actively campaigning for the renovation of old buildings, instead of their demolition. In their fight, they are leveraging iNaturalist, one of the biggest citizen science platforms on the planet, a non-profit organisation allowing anyone to upload a picture to the app and accurately identify a specimen. The plant or animal can then be tracked over time.

As the Waterloo activists fight through the prism of social justice, iNaturalist encourages people to



Photo: Silvia Casolari

visit the area and help record its biodiversity, to expose potential shortcomings in the environmental value placed on the current site by authorities. At the time of

writing, 61 native plant species have already been identified in Waterloo through the iNaturalist platform. This is more than double the number that the NSW Government recognises across the 10.6 hectares of land scheduled to be transformed.

How much weight can this carry in such a large development project? It is hard to tell, and in fact, impossible to predict. But this situation illustrates how science and people can support each other easily. The importance of public engagement for biodiversity assessment has never been greater, worldwide. Platforms allowing non-scientists to report sightings

of natural species are now the biggest contributors to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, and improving the accuracy of species identification on these platforms is the subject of active research in Australia.

As Sydneysiders add pictures of Waterloo plants to the iNaturalist inventory, they might not ultimately save the housing buildings but they participate in a collective action that assesses local biodiversity under precarious circumstances, helping bridge the gap between science and communities and shining a light on important social and environmental questions.

SSH

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Noise complaints: What are your rights?

LEGAL

ANDREW PAVLI

LIVING close together in South Sydney means we all hear some noise. But when does it become unlawful? In New South Wales, the law distinguishes between everyday sounds and “offensive noise”.

What is offensive noise?

The *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 (NSW)* defines it as noise that is so loud or persistent that it is likely to interfere unreasonably with the comfort of others.

Examples include:

music or parties late at night, construction outside permitted hours, barking dogs, or loud machinery.

When is noise restricted?

NSW law sets out times when certain noises must stop. For example:

Music systems: not after midnight on Friday or Saturday, or after 10pm on other days.

Power tools: not before 7am on weekdays (8am weekends/public holidays), or after 8pm any day.

Pool pumps and air conditioners:

not during the night if they can be heard in neighbours’ homes.

What can you do?

Talk first: Often a polite word with your neighbour resolves the issue.

Contact council: Councils can investigate and issue Noise Abatement Directions.

Call the police: For late-night parties or ongoing loud disturbances, police can direct people to stop making the noise for up to 28 days.



Photo: Getty

Mediation: Community Justice Centres offer free mediation if disputes continue.

A little understanding goes a long way, but if noise is excessive, the law is on your side.

SSH

Grand opening of Badumurru Place: What makes a community?

URBAN DESIGN

ANDREW BRINSMEAD

BADUMURRU Place is the new centrepiece of the development at Waterloo station, which officially opened on Wednesday, 6 May.

It represents an ambitious attempt to create a community “third space” for the residents of Waterloo, set within a wide and relaxed plaza. Designed around the works of three local First Nations artists, the plaza cements the relationship of the local Indigenous community into the physicality of the space.

The word *Badumurru* is a combination of the Gadigal words *Badu* (water) and *Murru* (path), a reminder of the waterways and wetlands that once existed in what is now the Redfern and Waterloo area.



Artists Lorna Munro, Nadeena Dixon and Carmen Glynn-Braun at the opening of Badumurru Place. Photo: Andrew Brinsmead

A walkway leading into the site is lined with wooden columns in a piece titled *Matriarchs* by Lorna Munro. Each column is adorned with a line of poetry on one side and the name of a local matriarch who helped to shape and protect the local community on the other side. The columns serve as powerful reminders of the contributions and memories of the women who helped to steward this community.

The main courtyard of

Badumurru Place is inscribed with the ground installation *Yenma Nura (Walking Country)* by Nadeena Dixon, which explores the interconnected layers of land, water and culture through three concentric rings of red, yellow and black that radiate outward from the centre of the plaza.

Dotted around the gardens of Badumurru Place, creating a liminal presence after dark, are the glowing concrete orbs of *Beneath Concrete*

Currents by Carmen Glynn-Braun. Each orb is made from a mixture of concrete, seashells and fibre-optic lights, with patterns that represent cultural stories. They truly come alive after dusk when the fibre optics shine through the polished concrete.

As gentrification continues to push out the local First Nations community, Badumurru Place reads like an elegiac poem written in concrete, stone and wood – a message from the community’s recent past to the future communities of Waterloo.

It is a bittersweet installation for the creators. “It’s a really important time to mark stories here because, sadly, there’s a lot of gentrification happening,” Glynn-Braun reflects. “Friends that I’ve grown up with here, went to school with and watched them have their own children are about to lose all this.”

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Parliament’s flag flies into Alexandria Park Community School

EDUCATION

TONI O’LOUGHLIN

THE Speaker of the House is accustomed to sitting in his big green chair in Parliament, imposing order on unruly debate, but when he visited Alexandria Park Community School, model citizens greeted Milton Dick.

Year five and six students, high school captains, teachers, the school principal and her deputy, came together to help the person with the most important job in the House of Representatives unfurl the Australian flag that, until recently, had fluttered above Parliament.

When he’s not calling members of the lower house to order, Mr Dick tours the nation’s schools with his Flag Roadshow.

Weighing approximately 22kg and stretching 12.8 metres by 6.4 metres, it requires a winching crew and lift car operators to hoist it over Parliament House.

Unfolding it on school visits entails a series of specially coordinated manoeuvres with the help of many students – but not just because of its size.

Australian National Flag protocols stipulate the flag must



Photo: Supplied by the Speaker of the House of Representatives

not fall or lie on the ground.

“It’s quite a challenge when the flag is as big as a double decker bus but the Speaker has mastered being able to unfurl it without letting it touch the ground,” said the Federal Member for Sydney, Tanya Plibersek, who accompanied Mr Dick to the school. Mr Dick says talking to students is just as important as ensuring all parliamentarians in the lower house are treated fairly within the rules.

“It is my priority as Speaker to increase the accessibility of civics education. Every student in Australia should have the opportunity to learn about democracy and the parliament.”

Parliament has long had a school civics program but the Flag Roadshow, which includes the history of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, is Mr Dick’s innovation.

“It is a piece of parliament that not all students get to experience and this year we celebrate 125 years of proudly flying this flag.”

Before embarking on a trip, he selects one of the carefully stowed flags that fly atop Parliament. They are rotated monthly for maintenance to check for rips and tears.

He tells the students about its history. It’s the only national flag designed by its citizens,

following a competition in 1900 which resulted in three winners – all with the same design.

The original design included a six pointed star but in 1908 a seventh point was added in recognition of the Commonwealth Territories.

“This is the design that has been flown throughout our country for the last 125 years, and above Parliament House 24 hours a day,” Mr Dick said.

Students also learn that artist Harold Thomas, a Luritja man from Central Australia and a member of the Stolen Generation, designed the Aboriginal flag in 1971 and that the late Bernard Namok from Thursday Island designed the Torres Strait Islander flag.

“It was an honour to bring the flag that flies above our democracy to share with this wonderful school,” Mr Dick said.

Student Evie agreed. “Honestly, holding that flag is pretty cool.”

School captain Louis added: “It was an honour that people so high up in our government are looking out for us.”

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For more information about the Speaker of the House of Representative’s Flag Roadshow please contact Tanya Plibersek’s electorate office: Tanya.Plibersek.MP@aph.gov.au



MySydney graduate Stephen Bursic celebrates graduation with father Steve and mother Raina. Photo: Fiona Wolf / The University of Sydney

MySydney Scholars Program boosts diversity at Australia’s first university

SPONSORED
MARK SCOTT

AS a high school student, Stephen Bursic had his heart set on studying law at university. But that seemed unlikely after a shock cancer diagnosis disrupted his senior years.

He eventually made it into his dream degree at the University of Sydney, thanks to the MySydney Entry and Scholarship Scheme. He is now one of the first graduates of the scheme, which gives more students the chance to study at the University by offering financial and other support to domestic students from low socio-economic areas.

With the first MySydney scholars graduating this month, the program is coming of age following its launch in 2022 by Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Mark Scott.

Since the first students commenced under the program in 2023, a total of 3,101 have received scholarships. This year, 158 MySydney scholars are due to graduate.

“We’re so proud of our graduating MySydney scholars,” said Professor Scott.

“Many of these students are the first in their family to attend university. Every one of them has

made an important contribution to our community. The MySydney Scholars Program reflects our determination to help talented students succeed and thrive, no matter where they come from.”

Stephen, who is 21 and grew up in Fairfield, studied a combined Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Laws. He graduated with a degree in Commerce this week and will complete his Law studies next year.

“Without MySydney, I wouldn’t have been able to get into the degree I wanted,” he said.

“At the end of Year 11, I was diagnosed with advanced-stage Hodgkin lymphoma. During COVID, after everyone else went back to school, my immune system was compromised so I had to stay away. I’d attend class online from hospital while doing chemo. I’ve always been a nerd, but it was hard to stay on track. Getting a scholarship offer with a reduced ATAR meant a lot to me.”

His cancer treatment was successful and he is now applying for graduate legal roles and clerkships.

As well as \$8,500 annually, the MySydney Scholars Program gives recipients tailored academic and career support, peer mentoring and extra funding to put towards student exchange programs. A dedicated space on campus for

MySydney scholars and regular social events help recipients connect and make friends.

Sarah Hasan, 21, will graduate this month with a Bachelor of Design and Bachelor of Advanced Studies (Interaction Design).

She took advantage of the MySydney support to travel internationally for research trips, exchange programs and internships every year of her degree. She is drawing on her international experience as she prepares to launch her own fashion tech startup.

“I never could have had those experiences without MySydney,” she said.

“When my parents came to Australia from Bangladesh, they spoke no English and worked whatever jobs they could find to make ends meet. They’re so excited about the things I’m doing.

“I’m now graduating with a lot of MySydney friends and we’re all thrilled. The MySydney community really brings people together.”

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Authorised by Vice-Chancellor and President **Prof. Mark Scott.**
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Aunty Yvonne Wright, Aunty Violet West, Aunty Doreen Webster and Aunty Jean Carter of Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation attended the National Sorry Day Stolen Generations community gathering in the Royal Botanic Garden. The event brought together survivors, families and community members for a day of storytelling, music, dance, culture, connection and healing. The women are survivors of the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls, which operated from 1912 to 1969. Photo: Michelle Haywood

JENNY LEONG MP

MEMBER FOR NEWTOWN

Evicting residents will not solve the housing crisis

Before the last state election, the NSW Labor Minns Government promised to end the Coalition’s privatisation agenda and stop the evictions at the Waterloo South public housing estate.

Local Member for Heffron (the electorate which includes Waterloo South), Ron Hoenig MP even sent emails and text messages to residents in the local area claiming that only NSW Labor would stop the demolition of public housing.

Now in Government, Labor have an opportunity to keep their promise to the community. Instead, they are forging ahead – evicting public housing residents in the middle of a housing crisis when they know that **no new homes will be delivered at the site until at least 2035.**

With over 1,000 households on the waitlist for public housing in the inner city alone and with homelessness on the rise, the Labor Government should be fast-tracking the construction of public homes on public land so that we can get more people into housing sooner.

Instead, they’re fast tracking the bulldozing of much-needed housing that people already call home – and adding even more people to the waitlist in the process.

There are still tenants living in Waterloo South who were not informed demolition works were imminent and have not been offered suitable new homes.

The Greens have written to the NSW Housing Minister Rose Jackson requesting urgent support for these tenants, whose safety and housing security must be a priority.

The Greens will continue to stand with the Waterloo community, local activists, public housing tenants and advocates for housing justice to oppose the demolition of public housing in Waterloo and beyond, and do everything we can to stop Labor from evicting even more people in the midst of a housing crisis.

Defending and extending public housing in our city is the only way to ensure our city remains accessible and affordable for all – not just the mega wealthy few.

Tell NSW Labor to stop the sell-off of public housing by signing our petition – scan the QR code below or head to jennyleong.org/save_public_housing.



Jenny Leong MP

Greens Member for Newtown

Authorised by Jenny Leong MP. Funded using parliamentary entitlements.



Dear SSH readers

The Albanese Government's top priority is looking after Australians today and setting us up for a more secure future. Our 2026 budget delivers **more tax cuts, a fairer system for home buyers and an economy that works for everyone.**

Supporting Australians

We're investing:

- An extra **\$11.8 billion so that social security payments keep up with the cost of living.** Since our election in 2022, per year **pensions** are up more than **\$5,500**, **Youth Allowance** is up more than **\$3,800**, **Jobseeker** payments are up more than **\$4,300**, and we've delivered the biggest increase to **Rent Assistance** in 30 years, now worth an extra **\$1,900**.
- \$182.6 million to reform the child support system so more children get the financial help they need.
- \$1.57 billion – a **12% boost – to support more programs for families in need.**
- \$218.3 million over four years to deliver Australia's **first ever dedicated plan to end violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.**
- \$61.5 million to double the number of people we can help through financial counselling for gambling.
- **Record investments in Medicare**, delivering more bulk billing as well as Medicare Urgent Care Clinics, free walk-in Medicare Care Mental Health Centres, 1800Medicare, our free medical advice service, and our Medicare Mental Health Check-In.
- **Record funding** - \$25 billion - **for public hospitals.**

Affordable Housing

We are undertaking Australia's biggest ever home building program, delivering 1.2 million homes, including 55,000 social and affordable homes. In the **Sydney electorate** this includes **699 social and affordable homes**, of which **74** have been **built in Waterloo** and **160 in Redfern**. We've also built **35 units** in the electorate for **people impacted by domestic violence and at risk of homelessness.**

Delivering a Progressive Tax System

We're **making our tax system fairer** so that more Australians can own their own homes by reforming tax incentives that encourage longer term, real investment.

We are:

- Delivering a **new \$250 tax offset** to cut tax bills for 13 million workers, increasing the tax free threshold by nearly **\$1,800**.
- Introducing a **\$1,000 instant tax deduction** from 2026-27 – **you won't need to keep your receipts.**
- Limiting negative gearing for residential property to new builds from 2027, while grandfathering the benefit for existing investors.
- Replacing the 50% capital gains tax discount with a system that means you won't be taxed on inflation-driven gains.
- Applying 30% tax to discretionary trusts so they are taxed similarly to people without trusts.

We've already cut personal income taxes for every single taxpayer and there are two more on the way. In **2026-27 every taxpayer** will receive a **cut of up to \$268**, then **up to \$536 every year from 2027-28**. Combined, **these five tax cuts will give average wage earners an extra \$2,816 from 2027-28**. It's a bit of extra help for every taxpayer.



You can check your tax cut here:

Mobile Office

I'll be out and about in the electorate on **Saturday, 13 June 2026**.

- 9:00-9:45 am The Cannery, Morley Ave, Rosebery
- 10:00-10:45 am Alexandria Park, Cnr Buckland & Phillips St, Alexandria
- 11:00-11:35 am Green Square Library, 355 Botany Rd, Zetland

Please stop by to say hello or share your thoughts about federal matters.

If it's raining please call 9379 0700 to check details.

Tanya



Cartoon by norrie mAy-welby

Joy, Maxine and the women of Darlinghurst who refuse to be looked away from

HISTORY

JOEL O'CONNOR

IRISH band Fontaines D.C. perfectly capture a laconic lean in their song *Favourite*, with the lines: “Shoulder bound to the frame of a door / Chewed into shape like a stone on the shore.”

The statue of Joy, the sex worker, recently returned to her plinth in Darlinghurst after nearly thirty years, embodies exactly that. She stands with one ankle crossed casually over the other, her right bicep holding up her whole weight, expression neutral but with a distinct flicker of “not taking any shit.”

Lose a staring contest with her at your peril.

It's the same look the actress Kerry Mack gives in the music video for Sharon O'Neill's iconic early-1980s sax-driven song *Maxine*, filmed on these same inner-Sydney streets.

Maxine and Joy are bound together, not only as artistic representations of street-based sex workers linked to Kings Cross and Darlinghurst in the closing stages of the 20th century, but also as the creative legacy of the



Artist Loui May and Julie Bates AO, founding member of the Australian Prostitutes' Collective, with Joy. Photo: Michelle Haywood

powerful women who brought them to life.

When you look at Joy today, you can see she is having none of it. And neither is Julie Bates AO, founder of the Prostitutes Collective, as she reflects on the long campaign with sculptor Loui May and her allies to bring Joy back where she belongs.

“We'll put our red light on when we want to. It's none

of your business. We are not victims – sorry, this is our work,” Julie says, taking a swipe at sanctimonious portrayals of sex workers, such as The Police song *Roxanne*.

But rather than dwelling on rebuttals to the endless “You don't have to...” narratives trotted out by Sting et al, Julie prefers to celebrate Joy's return as a symbol of hard-won progress, from

Sin, harm and healing

RELIGION & ETHICS

ANDREW COLLIS

TALK of sin can leave people demoralised rather than healed. In some church settings, sin has sounded like shame, illness, depravity or permanent failure. That can be spiritually damaging. It can make people feel trapped.

But we still need a way to speak honestly about harm.

Our world is wounded by human foolishness and violence. We see it in racism, classism, sexism, colonial oppression, environmental destruction, greed and contempt. We see it in ourselves too: in fear, defensiveness, resentment, avoidance and the many ways we fail to love well.

So perhaps one way to think about sin is as misalignment.

The Greek word *hamartia* is often explained as “missing the mark”. Something is awry. We are out of step: with ourselves, with one another, with the earth, and with God.

Lately, I have been helped by different voices.

The *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* speaks of the soul becoming disordered and estranged from the good. Sin is not simply breaking rules. It is losing touch with the root of goodness.

Søren Kierkegaard, in *The Sickness Unto Death*, describes despair as the self misrelated to itself. In simpler terms, we become anxious, clenched, defensive, hidden. We forget that life is gift.

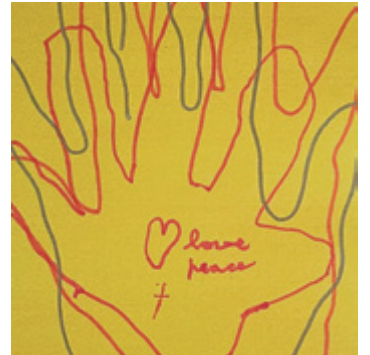


Image: Sapphire Coast Uniting Church, Merimbula Congregation, 2026.

Liberation theology widens the picture. Sin is not only personal. It can be social and structural. It can be built into systems that divide people, exploit labour, dispossess communities, racialise bodies, erase cultures and make poverty seem normal.

Colonialism is sin in this sense: a deep misrelation between peoples, land, power, history and truth. White supremacy, manifest destiny, the erasure of Indigenous cultures, and the destruction of Country are not merely “issues”. They reveal a spiritual disorder made visible in history.

These are some thoughts I am finding helpful.

They suggest that the gospel answers misalignment with reconciliation. Jesus shows us a human life healed and whole: open to God, generous toward others, free for mercy. In Christ, we are realigned to love.

Reconciliation may also mean reconnection: to cultural memory and practice, to family, to shared meals, to meaningful work, to rest – to more responsible and accountable ways of life.

SSH

disposable object to an honoured public figure on a major city thoroughfare.

“It's the cherry on my activist cake, in a way,” she says. “A statue of a sex worker supported by one of the biggest local governments on the planet. It shows we've come some way toward respect and equity.”

Sharon O'Neill, meanwhile, wrote *Maxine* to highlight the injustice and violence facing Darlinghurst's sex workers in the early 1980s.

While the Bechdel Test, which

considers how often women speak to each other on topics other than men, had not yet been coined, Sharon was already attempting something similar: creating space for women to speak to women about life choices and survival amid police brutality and the emerging AIDS crisis.

Sharon says the song still opens doors. “People tell me they're glad I wrote it because they've known someone close going through that,” she explains. “It's made them feel seen. It's made it okay to talk about.”

SSH

Concerns over Australia's response to pro-Palestinian activism as laws face scrutiny

OPINION

JESSICA SHEPHERD

FROM hate speech laws to anti-protest measures later ruled unconstitutional, the NSW government's rushed legislative response following the Bondi tragedy has prompted severe concerns over its impact on protest rights and free speech.

In April, the New South Wales Court of Appeal (NSWCA) ruled that the anti-protest laws introduced by NSW Premier Chris Minns after the brutal attack

on the Jewish community in Bondi were unconstitutional.

The legislation, referred to as the PARD laws, enabled the commissioner of police and deputy commissioner to issue a public assembly restriction declaration (PARD) over a public area if they believed an upcoming protest would cause a reasonable person to fear harassment, intimidation or violence.

A PARD was subsequently imposed ahead of a protest against the Australian visit of Israel's President, Isaac Herzog. Despite the declaration, an estimated 30,000 civilians attended the

protest at Sydney's Town Hall in February, where they clashed with police enforcing the PARD laws.

In a joint judgment, the NSWCA ruled that the PARD laws “impermissibly burdened” the implied right to freedom of political communication protected by the Australian Constitution.

Kobi Shetty, the Greens MP for Balmain and holder of the Greens portfolio of Democracy, believes the PARD laws prove that the Minns Government does not respect the pro-Palestine movement.

“Minns was really keen to link the attack [in Bondi] to the peaceful protest movement,” Shetty said.

The PARD laws, alongside Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's broader federal hate speech laws, have been critiqued as a quick fix mechanism to combat antisemitism. Rushed legislation can lead to the bypassing of vital law-making processes, such as evidence-based research and democratic participation.

“There has been no evidence that what happened in Bondi has anything to do with peaceful protesters,” Shetty said.

While the laws have been overturned and PARD charges against protesters have been

dropped, Shetty fears that a pattern of censorship will continue. She is also worried that the violence witnessed at the Herzog rally has caused lasting damage and instilled a reluctance among the public to protest in the future.

“Protests have been critical for us to win so many things we value, such as the shorter working week and women being able to vote. None of those would have been won without protest,” Shetty said. We can't afford heavy-handed government intervention on protests.”

SSH

Read the full version on the SSH website.

Show me the truth

FESTIVALS

KARINA KREMINSKI

THIS year’s Sydney Writers’ Festival broke the record for sales and attendance. Over 100,000 people joined the events and workshops and bought books during the week-long gathering held at Carriageworks every May.

It certainly felt like there were more people and a greater sense of buzz and excitement this year. It could have been the unusually dreary Sydney weather, perhaps mimicking the gloomy world forecast, that brought so many people together. Or perhaps it was readers making their voices heard above the lament that “People are not reading anymore” by voting with their feet.

Over 250 writers and thinkers presented at over 200 events for the “southern hemisphere’s biggest literary festival”, according to the festival organisers.

This year’s theme was *Show me the Truth*. Many of the interviews, workshops and panels were guided by the underlying question: What is truth today? Philosopher A.C. Grayling spoke about the future of democracy in the context of the rise of authoritarianism. He lamented the polarisation between political parties and communities and our loss of the ability to have civil conversations with one another, creating fertile

ground for authoritarianism. Grayling doesn’t believe society needs to be homogeneous but that harmony needs to be practised continually to preserve democracy: “The price of democracy is eternal engagement.”

In a session titled *The Future of Truth*, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales expanded on this by explaining that the success of the online open encyclopedia was its ability to cultivate trust in the community.

As an example of our inability to find nuance and complexity in conversations, the panel of Jewish authors in the session *Holding up the Mirror* shared how their identity is misunderstood, homogenised and judged by people without the opportunity to share the diversity that exists within the Jewish community.

In another gripping session, *Dark Materials*, authors spoke about the dark side of truth. How do you write about the abuse, violence and hatred we increasingly see in our world today? Where do we find hope in this context? Panellist Michael Mohammed Ahmad spoke about his latest novel, *Bugger*, a work of fiction that draws on his experience of family violence and abuse. Ahmad believes that a writer’s responsibility is to “break the cycle of trauma” through their writing.

Fortunately, other sessions delivered hope in our climate of eroding democracies and fragile ecosystems. In the session *Radical Hope*, two younger authors, Jack Toohey and



Photo: Jacquie Manning

Natalie Kyriacou, said that radical hope today means slow activism – a commitment to acting continually, in small ways, for peace and change.

Finally, in *Wisdom of the Ages*, Indigenous leader Paul Callaghan,

Japanese author Hiroko Yoda and Stoic practitioner Brigid Delaney spoke about their theory and practice drawing on ancient teachings that can sustain us in a world that is weary, fragile yet so full of promise.

Yoda left the audience with a grounding reminder that “nature is cyclical and never-ending”, an encouragement to many of us in a world that sometimes feels on the verge of collapse.

“The book has made me into a different person”

BOOKS

HOLLY HAISMAN

***RAVEN Mother* is a thought-provoking and moving account of navigating family stories in the face of wider, complex historical events. Set across multiple time periods and world events, from pre-war Berlin to Tel Aviv and present-day Melbourne, Jane Messer seeks to retrace not only her own family’s experiences, but also the journeys of thousands of Jewish and Palestinian families.**

In the lead-up to the Sydney Writers’ Festival last month, Jane Messer spoke with Holly Haisman about the themes she explores in the book as well as the rigorous process of writing a memoir.

Was it your intention to write a father-daughter story or did that come about through the process of writing?

“It wasn’t my intention at all. It began with me wanting to find out more about my grandmother and the stories I’d grown up with.

“Very quickly, once I started doing more research, I realised the project was going to be bigger than an essay. I had no idea what form the book would take and I think that’s probably what makes the best memoir writing work. The writing changes you.

“Once I started to get an idea of my grandmother, I realised there were different ways of seeing what had happened. Then it became



Jane Messer. Photo: Supplied

a father-daughter story, when really what I was trying to show my dad was that he had been loved, even if he couldn’t remember it, even if he couldn’t feel it.”

During the research process, you went on three separate trips to Israel. What was that process

like? How did you learn to engage with so many different perspectives and histories in your research and writing?

“The first visit was a discovery, as I’d never been there before. I just got a sense of the place and I liked it a lot; even though I didn’t speak Hebrew, I looked at the people around me and

so many of them looked like me.”

“The second visit was more focused; I worked with a different research assistant. We went to the archives and the Hebrew University, so that was more of a research trip.

“On the third visit, I thought very consciously: ‘I want to know the Palestinian story.’ I had started to become aware of it during my second visit. I went home, did more reading and realised, ‘if I read a Jewish history of Palestine and Israel, they erase the history of Palestinians.’ Because I was a trained researcher, I knew I had to sort this out.

“The research got very tricky because I was translating from Arabic and Hebrew maps or working with English, Israeli and Palestinian history and there were always things missing.

“What I was trying to do was understand. Why are you afraid? Why do you hate the other? What’s the history? Every racism has its own history that we need to pay attention to and once we understand individual histories, maybe then we can find a way to a more peaceful future.

“I did not start the book with these sorts of ideas, the book has made me into a different person.”

***Raven Mother* was published in 2026 by UNSW Press. Read Jane Messer’s full interview on the SSH website. This piece was produced with support from the Copyright Agency’s Cultural Fund – an initiative helping newsrooms to amplify the work of previously unpublished writers – and in partnership with the Local & Independent News Association (LINA).**

Inside the book launch of ‘Homecoming’: A love letter and call for self-compassion

BOOKS

CHLOE FRAGOS

WHAT does home feel like? This is the question writer, activist, founder, and now author, Ratu Nida Farihah explores in her debut book, *Homecoming: The Art and Practice of Trauma Recovery*.

The book weaves together personal reflection and practical insight, exploring how trauma is held in the body and how people can begin to reconnect with a sense of safety, self-trust and belonging. This was no ordinary book launch. Gathering at Gleebooks on Wednesday 6 May, everyone was invited and given permission to breathe in and exhale. From this intuitive act, guests were asked: what is your body telling you? In searching for an answer, attendees were encouraged to consider how they find safety within themselves and experience ‘homecoming’. More than one in four Australians live with complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD). However, Ratu Nida Farihah pushes the conversation beyond trauma awareness. She gifts readers the knowledge and confidence to define personal safety for themselves. In sharing her own journey, she shares her vulnerability and opens about the complex and non-linear process of healing. “I was fluid in going in and out of pain. Safety was still a word I was learning to pronounce.” Homecoming resists reducing trauma to labels that can often



Photo: Scarlett Thompson

carry shame. Instead, it rejects the notion that people do not possess the inner guidance needed to begin their own healing. At the same time, it acknowledges the systemic harm that riddles the human body, shapes self-belief and imposes limitations on personal liberty. When people are given permission to witness their own pain, confront it and sit with it, the body begins to do its own healing work. Speaking about the book’s title, the author explains: “Home is not a place I arrive at. It is when my body exhales and I feel safe. I am most relaxed sitting under a tree, barefoot, listening to birds.” Ratu’s courage in writing this book invites readers to stop asking, “why am I in pain?” and instead ask, “what is my body trying to tell me?” In sharing pain and allowing the body to release, people move closer to their own homecoming – for themselves and for each other.

Film review by Lindsay Cohen



Wolfram
Director: Warwick Thornton
Starring: Deborah Mailman, Pedrea Jackson, Thomas M. Wright
Genre: Under mined

Wolfram and its prequel *Sweet Country* (2017) are fascinating films. While they are based on true Indigenous Australian rural stories in the early 20th century, there’s an American Western feel to them. The Australian cowboys are the same violent mixed bag of characters you get in classic American Westerns. They even look similar! Combined with the complex Aboriginal family and personal dramas caused by the cowboys, the historical portrayals and the Northern Territory scenery, these films are well worth seeing. Perhaps the only irony is that *Wolfram* is better than *Sweet Country* despite *Sweet Country*’s famous actors, Sam Neill and Bryan Brown. *Wolfram*’s little-known actors of all ages and heritages are great, the storyline is more interesting and the historical scenery is more realistic. Maybe that resulted from a better-invested budget. The other great area of interest in the film, admittedly more for me than most people given my background as a geologist, was the historical mining of wolfram in the Northern Territory. Great risks were imposed on the Aboriginal kids who were simply lowered underground to blow up and bash the hard rocks. Many suffered as a result.

By the way, wolfram is now known more as tungsten in Australia, a super-strong metal and critical mineral still mined here. Hence the very clever film title: *Wolfram* is itself a ‘critical’ movie. Rating: Four-and-a-half critiques.

Theatre review by Alky Avramides



Continuity
Playwright: Bess Wohl
Director: Sahn Millington
New Theatre, Newtown
28 May–20 June, 2026

A wild roller coaster of hilarious and at times cutting dialogue, Bess Wohl’s *Continuity* delivers a clever take on how to tell a story while not missing the message, the real message: whether we are sleepwalking into a disaster scenario or if we have what it takes to have a happy ending. Staged on a Hollywood film set, this hilarious and yet sobering theatrical experience has at its core the idea of “continuity”. It’s a concept explored on many levels, each impacting the other: the art of storytelling, the grind of moviemaking, science obscured by conspiracy, patriarchal control of power. Wohl’s use of the theatrical device, a film within a play, was inspired by working on a movie set. She realised that in film, continuity is about control, precision and the illusion that nothing changes between takes. This, of course, is impossible as time moves forward and change

is inevitable. We are never fully in control of the subtle details. There is slippage. This tension is mirrored in the play’s structure and its characters. Their lives and relationships are anything but stable, even as they attempt to impose order on the chaos surrounding them. The play’s Hollywood backdrop is a flimsy décor depicting a frozen glacier when, in fact, they are in the sweltering heat of New Mexico. As the characters struggle to keep the film’s details consistent, the world outside the set – both literal and metaphorical – is shifting in ways they cannot control. The production itself feels fragile, and the natural world refuses to be managed, echoing the broader existential anxiety about climate change. The question at the heart of *Continuity* is whether there can be any true continuity for humanity in the face of such a crisis or whether we are witnessing the beginning of our own extinction. Are we controlling our destiny or our deception? Wohl’s writing is laced with humour and deeply human moments, but beneath the surface lies a profound meditation on the limits of storytelling and the responsibilities of artists. The play does not offer easy answers or solutions to climate change. Instead, it asks how we should respond, both as individuals and as storytellers, when confronted with a crisis that feels overwhelming and deeply personal. Can art illuminate the truth without making it more palatable than it really is? Ultimately, *Continuity* is a play about the impossibility of perfect control, the inevitability of change, and the urgent, unresolved question of whether humanity can adapt quickly enough to survive. It’s a timely, layered work that uses the language of cinema to ask whether the story of humankind will continue.



Photo: Keith Saunders

Newtown cellist plays for feeling and healing

MUSIC

STEPHEN WEBB

NEWTOWN resident, cellist and psychologist Anthea Cottee will join some of Australia’s finest Baroque instrumentalists in June when Bach Akademie Australia presents Collegium Musicum, a three-stop celebration of music and enlightenment.

Cottee has worked as principal cello for Sydney Philharmonia Choirs and performed in many ensembles, including the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Bach Akademie Australia, Orchestra of the Antipodes and Pinchgut Opera. She said, “Bach is always really lovely. In fact, he’s probably my favourite composer. He wrote some of the most profound and gorgeous music around.” And baroque music was special because it was based around the bass line.

“Structurally, with basso continuo, the bass section, we all play from the bass line. It’s very satisfying music to play. You feel like you’re in the engine room of the music.” Cottee said she thought the cello was an emotionally connecting instrument. “Even in films and TV, when you hear the cello solo coming you think it’s love or death, or both, coming your way. “I think the cello has that very human shape and size, and it’s vocally in a really nice register. It seems to have a sort of soulfulness about it that people really respond to.” Cottee said she prepared mentally for high-pressure performances through a lot of visualisation, imagining things going well, and practice. “It’s embracing the adrenaline of it rather than trying to shut it down. Just allowing the excitement and allowing the energy to be there.”

Physical conditioning was also required, she said. “Playing the cello, like playing any musical instrument, is a very specific physical task. It has certain challenges that require working out, listening to the body, working out what it needs, and keeping it in shape. “I’m just delighted to still be playing, and to be playing the kind of repertoire that I like doing, and with people who I really enjoy working with. “I think making music has always been really fundamental to me. I can’t really imagine life without making music. I can’t imagine being without music. Catch Anthea Cottee with Bach Akademie Australia in intimate performances of works by Bach, Telemann, Fasch and Vivaldi at the Mosman Art Gallery (12 June), The Neilson, ACO On the Pier (13 June) and Bowral Memorial Hall (14 June). Book tickets at www.bachakademieaustralia.com.au/events.

Sydney FC through to Grand Final

SPORT

BIG T

SYDNEY FC are heading to Auckland with confidence, momentum and a chance to turn a hard-earned finals run into silverware.

Sydney FC are through to the Grand Final after a dramatic semi-final win over the Newcastle Jets, holding their nerve in a match that swung late and demanded every ounce of composure from both sides. After a tight opening

period, the Sky Blues found their breakthrough when Piero Quispe pounced on a rebound to give Sydney a deserved lead and put them on the brink of the decider. Newcastle pushed hard for a response and created pressure of their own, but Sydney stayed disciplined at the back and looked dangerous whenever they broke forward. The Jets kept battling and, just when it seemed Sydney had done enough, Eli Adams struck in the final minute of stoppage time to level the contest and send the semi-final into extra time.

Neither side could land the decisive blow in the extra period, leaving penalties to decide who would advance to Auckland for the Grand Final. Sydney showed remarkable calm in the shootout, with Garuccio stepping up to finish the job after the Sky Blues had outlasted the Jets under the heaviest pressure. It was the kind of night that keeps reinforcing the feeling around Sydney sport right now. After seeing the Kings win this year, and Sydney FC now moving one step away from the A-League title, it is starting to look like the city is not just chasing trophies, but collecting them.

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Out & About – June 2026

PAT CLARKE

Counterpoint Community Services National Volunteer Week Awards 2026

I was fortunate to attend the 20th Counterpoint Community Services Volunteer Week Awards at Alexandria Town Hall in May. It was a really joyful occasion, with lots of volunteers receiving awards, including myself and photographer Scarlett Thompson. South Sydney Herald’s award was accepted by Geoff Turnbull, norrie mAy-welby, John Lanzky, Murray Gillett, Catherine Skipper and Yvonne Hocothee. Congratulations and thank you to all the recipients. South Sydney and Waterloo are certainly lively neighbourhoods. Thank you to Counterpoint for being so welcoming, providing refreshments and lunch in an atmosphere of conviviality and community.

Vivid Sydney until 13 June

Once again, Sydney puts on a spectacle of light like no other, with the Lighting of the Sails - Opera Mundi nightly from 6pm to 11pm. Circular Quay and The Rocks will have many and varied lights and projections, including *Vaiola* by Samoan-Australian artist Angela Taiatia, at the Museum of Contemporary Art. For 3 nights only, Cristal Palace will have an open-air extravaganza of aerial acrobatics, dance and circus feats from 7.30pm to 8.40pm. Go to vividssydney.com to discover all the magical events to suit everyone.

Sydney Harbour Bridge Museum

Sydney’s newest museum is situated in the South-East Pylon of the Bridge and opened in May 2026. Features include history, engineering and everything about this iconic structure. Tickets are \$39.95 for adults and \$22 for children. Info: bridgemuseum.com.au

Refugee Week, Sunday 14 June to Saturday 20 June

This year marks the 40th Anniversary of Refugee Week

in Australia, with the theme ‘One Million Stories’ marking the milestone of 1 million refugees welcomed to Australia since WWII. **Ron Williams Community Centre**, 5-11 Kepos Street, is hosting an Iraq-inspired Morning Tea with guest speaker Nawfel, a Refugee Ambassador with the Refugee Council of Australia, on 17 June from 10.45am to 12pm. This is a free event, and you can book tickets on 02 9265 9701.

NAIDOC Week, Sunday July 5 to Sunday July 13, 2026

This year’s theme, *50 Years of Deadly* celebrates 50 years of NAIDOC Week. The winner of this year’s poster design is Zaachariah Fielding, a Yankunytjatjara artist and musician with ‘Paralpi’. A Lifetime Achievement Award honoured the late Rhoda Roberts, AM. You can download a free copy from naidoc.org.au/posters. Posters will also be available from KMart and Target from 18 June

The Journalist Code of Ethics

Our Religion & Ethics editor is reading the papal encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, with an eye to its implications for community news reporting. Next month, the SSH will publish a reflective article on artificial intelligence and journalism. In the meantime, this response from The Atlantic journalist Elizabeth Bruenig resonates: “Homogeneity, efficiency, and productivity are not what human life is about: our calling isn’t to operate like computers, but to do exactly what computers cannot, which is to love.” The SSH abides by the Journalist Code of Ethics established by the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance. Point 9 of the code states: “Present content which is true and accurate. Any manipulation should be disclosed.” meaa.org/meaa-media/code-of-ethics

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Community left wanting more after underwhelming 2SER town hall meeting

LOCALS

SEYFI BOSTANCI

PUBLIC radio station 2SER is facing an uncertain future following a crowded town hall meeting on 20 April, where community members questioned management over a looming funding crisis.

2SER had recently announced that Macquarie University would slash its \$300,000 funding, something the station had known since September 2025. A main talking point of the meeting was addressing the fact that 2SER had not begun contacting other universities, such as the University of Sydney or the University of New South Wales until March 2026. The meeting was recorded and streamed online to a total of 350 people in person and online. However, the recording of the meeting was not ultimately made available online in its entirety. The meeting was hosted by 2SER managing director Cheryl Northey as well as board co-chairs Chris Dixon and James Bennett of Macquarie University and UTS, respectively.



Former 2SER host Andrew Chuter, who was in attendance at the meeting, described the meeting as “packed, and while respectful, people were very upset about losing 2SER and determined to keep it on air.” “I started out as a listener around 1988 and grew to love some of the music programs. I took some training and became a volunteer and eventually hosted my own shows, *Biorhythms* and *Dark Energy* until the early 2000s.” “It is very valuable and worth protecting because it provides a voice for the community, and training and experience for student broadcasters.” On a lack of urgency from the 2SER board, Chuter says: “The senior uni management people didn’t really put forward

any new ideas. It was the audience that suggested renewed efforts to ask other unis for funding and for a fundraising drive. At least a fundraising drive could provide enough money to last to the end of the year and give time for the unis to properly consider any requests.” “I put it down to corporatisation and underfunding of universities in general. They would probably rather shut 2SER down and save money. So putting together a prospectus for other institutions to become funding partners was not given the urgency or priority it needed.” UTS says it will continue funding 2SER so long as a sustainable model and a new funding partner is found. This comes after major budgetary, staffing, and course cuts at UTS last year. At the end of the meeting, the Love2SER organisation came forward to promote their fundraiser, which aims to hold over the station for long enough to find new donors as well as running a Change.org petition to lobby UTS to support 2SER unconditionally.

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More information on the campaign and petition can be found at love2ser.com.

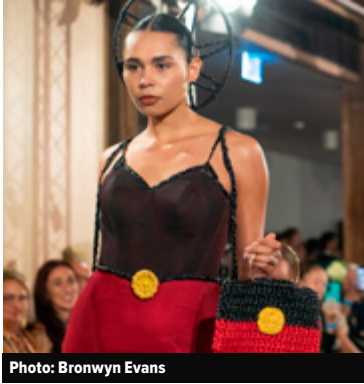
First Nations Fashion Design reclaims the runway

FIRST PEOPLES

SOPHIA POOLE

In a fashion system historically built on the exclusion of First Nations representation, *Reclamation*, staged on the eve of Australian Fashion Week (11–15 May), sought more than just permission to be seen. This was a runway to assert sovereignty over Indigenous creative agency.

A serpentine queue lined up outside Artspace in Woolloomooloo on Sunday evening, 10 May, to honour the visionary creativity of six Indigenous designers: Tjarlirli & Kaltukatjara Arts, Nungala Creative, MumRed, Merrepen Arts, KingKing Creative and Grace Lillian Lee. Collectively, their work foregrounded culture, resistance, innovation and future-focused fashion.



The designs, showcased on Indigenous models, incorporated striking prints and a mix of earthy and kaleidoscopic colours. Silhouettes ranged from figure-hugging dresses and edgy power suits to ethereal lace skirts and forms that opened out like the fins of a stingray. Alongside the models, dancers moved fluidly and agilely to the

earthy hum of the didgeridoo in costumes from Grace Lillian Lee’s collaboration on *Flora*, presented by The Australian Ballet in partnership with Bangarra Dance Theatre. The show’s zenith was reached with the display of Lee’s work, *The Guardians* – the collection which made her the first First Nations designer to independently show a collection at Paris Haute Couture Fashion Week. The models emerged one by one in vibrant shades of the rainbow, gracefully snaking their way down the runway to trance-inducing music. The intricate weaving, iconic to Lee, was nothing short of breathtaking. *Reclamation* was held by First Nations Fashion Design (FNFD), a 100% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-run not-for-profit organisation founded by Lee.

The organisation supports the growth and development of First Nations designers and creatives by cultivating ongoing access to opportunities, representation, skill development and industry engagement. The night was a statement of FNFD’s vision to build an independent First Nations fashion sector grounded in cultural integrity rather than industry validation. Malyangapa/Barkindji artist and ARIA Award-winning rapper BARKAA capped off the night with a lively performance, followed

by a powerful oration igniting a tidal wave of pride, unity and passion through the room. It was clear the runway did not end there – a burgeoning path lies ahead where First Nations creatives aren’t just included in the fashion industry but define it. “Reclamation was never about visibility within existing systems,” said Lee. “It was about dismantling those systems and rebuilding them on our terms. Our culture is not a trend, a reference point or a resource. It is sovereign.”

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