Statement of Mayor Alex Makin

Name:	Mayor Alex Makin
Address:	Known to the Royal Commission
Occupation:	Mayor, City of Port Phillip
Date:	21 August 2026

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion. This statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

2. The views I express in this statement are based on my personal experience, education and training.

3. The City of Port Phillip has made a submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion which provides context to Council's work, community concerns, and identifies opportunities for local governments to promote social cohesion. A copy of that submission dated May 2026, together with my covering letter dated 4 June 2026, is **Annexure AM-1** to this statement.

Professional background

4. I am the Mayor of the City of Port Phillip and have lived in Port Phillip for over a decade. I was confirmed as a councillor for the Montague Ward in November 2024 and was elected Mayor on 12 November 2025.

5. I was previously a councillor on the Maroondah City Council from 2005 to 2012, serving as Mayor from November 2009 to November 2010.

6. My professional background includes private sector experience in business and marketing consulting, as well as strategic management within the non-profit sector. Since 2016, I have also been a Lecturer, teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students in business strategy, marketing and data analytics.

7. I hold the following qualifications:

   (a) In 2021, I completed an MBA at Swinburne University of Technology;

   (b) In 2004, I completed a Bachelor of Business Systems & Marketing from Monash University.

8. I am of Jewish, Polish, English and Scottish heritage; I was raised in a non-religious household and do not prescribe to any particular religious belief.

The City of Port Phillip

9. The City of Port Phillip is one of Victoria's most culturally rich, vibrant and diverse municipalities, founded upon the lands of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Custodians of the land. It is located within Melbourne's inner south and extends along 11 kilometres of the Port Phillip Bay foareshore, from Elwood in the south to Port Melbourne and Fishermans Bend in the north. It covers 2,058 hectares, including 353 hectares of public parks and open space.

10. The City of Port Phillip has a resident population of 112,669 people and receives almost 3 million visitors each year. The municipality includes a range of cultural, commercial and community facilities and attractions, including Luna Park, the Palais Theatre, South Melbourne Market, the Astor Theatre, the Victorian Pride Centre and the Jewish Museum of Australia. This has made Port Phillip one of the most visited places in metropolitan Melbourne. The community comprises Traditional Owners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from a broad range of cultural backgrounds, people of diverse ages, abilities and LGBTQIA+ identities. Approximately one-third of residents were born overseas, representing 160 countries, and approximately 21% of residents speak a language other than English at home.

11. The City of Port Phillip has a highly visible and diverse Jewish community that has contributed significantly to the social, cultural, historical and economic life of Port Phillip for more than 150 years. We are proud of this, and together with

neighbouring Glen Eira City Council, have the highest population of people identifying as Jewish in Australia.

12. In recent years, concerns about antisemitism within the Port Phillip Jewish community have increased significantly. The attack on the Adass Israel Synagogue in December 2024, together with other incidents affecting Jewish communities locally, nationally and internationally, has heightened concerns regarding their safety, belonging and social cohesion.

13. As Mayor, I have heard directly from community members, faith leaders and organisations about the impact that incidents of antisemitism and related community tensions have had on individuals and families. Many have expressed concerns not only about their physical safety, but also about feeling less welcome and less secure in participating in public life, community activities and public spaces.

14. While a core focus of this Royal Commission is antisemitism, in my experience as Mayor, I have heard concern from community members that acts of prejudice and hostility towards one community can contribute to a broader sense of insecurity among other marginalised groups, including increased targeting of our LGBTQIA+ communities. At the same time, I have observed that sustained partnerships between government, community organisations, faith leaders and residents, as well as with strong community leadership and a commitment to inclusion, can play an important role in building social cohesion and addressing prejudice. Although challenges remain, I consider there to be practical opportunities for all levels of government and communities to further promote belonging, inclusion and mutual respect.

Opportunities for Local Government

15. In my experience, local government occupies a unique position within Australia's system of government as the level of government closest to residents and communities. Councils are often the first point of contact when communities experience incidents affecting safety, wellbeing and social cohesion and, through

their day-to-day relationships with residents, traders, schools, faith groups and community organisations, have a detailed understanding of local needs and the capacity to provide practical, place-based support.

16. While local government does not hold primary responsibility for national security, law enforcement or social policy, it plays an important role in supporting community wellbeing, strengthening social connection and helping communities navigate periods of uncertainty and disruption through community development, civic leadership, place-making, partnerships and inclusive services and programs. In carrying out these functions, councils operate within Victoria's human rights framework, including obligations under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) to act compatibly with, and give proper consideration to, rights such as equality, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion and belief. In my view, all forms of vilification, including antisemitism, undermine these rights and the opportunity to participate fully in community life.

17. In my view, there is an opportunity for any national approach to social cohesion arising from this Royal Commission to more clearly recognise the role of local government within Australia's human rights framework, by ensuring councils are appropriately informed, resourced and supported to fulfil their responsibilities in promoting inclusion, belonging, community safety and mutual respect within local communities.

Responding to critical incidents

18. Local government is often the level of government closest to affected communities and therefore plays an important role in supporting response and recovery following emergencies, critical incidents, and events that threaten social cohesion. Through trusted local relationships, community leadership, and practical assistance, councils can help communities navigate periods of disruption and recovery. While this work is critical, it is also inherently reactive, as it occurs after harm has already taken place.

19. The response to the Adass Israel Synagogue firebombing demonstrated the practical role local government can play following a traumatic incident affecting a local community. Following the attack, the City of Port Phillip worked closely with community leaders to understand immediate concerns and emerging needs. The then Mayor, and two of the Councillors in particular, provided visible support and maintained regular engagement with community representatives.

20. Council established a dedicated liaison function to provide a consistent point of contact for Adass Israel representatives and community leaders. This enabled concerns to be raised and addressed, and assisted those affected to navigate practical matters associated with recovery, temporary worship arrangements, and Council processes relating to permits and approvals for rebuilding.

21. The City of Port Phillip has consistently and publicly condemned antisemitism and recognises the importance of visible leadership in reassuring communities. Following the Bondi attack, I led Council's response through the issuance of a joint statement with Mayor Simone Zmood of Glen Eira City Council. With the support of the Municipal Association of Victoria, I subsequently led the development of a further joint statement involving local governments across Victoria. The statement affirmed the role of local government in promoting social cohesion and fostering inclusive communities. Within days, it had been endorsed by approximately 85 percent of Victorian councils. This collective action reinforced the leadership role of local government as a credible and trusted tier of government during periods of heightened social tension.

22. On 23 and 24 December, I travelled with Mayor Zmood of Glen Eira City Council to Bondi, where we presented the joint statement to Mayor Will Nemesh of Waverley City Council.

23. In the days following the Bondi attack, the City of Port Phillip offered targeted support to Jewish community organisations and representatives through its established networks. These included the Interfaith Network, Council-funded community groups, organisations connected through Council grant programs,

and organisations with facility hire arrangements. Through these networks, Council distributed relevant information, support services and community resources. This demonstrated the value of established community relationships in facilitating timely communication and practical support during periods of heightened concern.

24. These experiences demonstrate the importance of trusted local relationships, clear communication, and accessible support. They also demonstrate how local government can assist communities to navigate practical challenges during periods of significant disruption and distress. But while these experiences demonstrate the value of local government in supporting communities following a critical incident, they also reinforce the importance of investing in the conditions that promote social cohesion before such incidents occur.

25. The initiatives outlined in the following sections reflect Council's efforts to build understanding, inclusion and connection across our community as part of a longer-term, preventative approach. In my view, there is significant opportunity for the Australian, State and Territory governments to further support local government in this preventative work.

Leadership and Partnerships

26. The City of Port Phillip is currently developing its Multicultural Strategy 2026-2031 as a long-term mechanism to strengthen social cohesion and community resilience. Council has deliberately adopted a broad and inclusive approach to the development of the strategy, engaging with a diverse range of multicultural, multifaith and community groups. This has included targeted engagement with the Jewish community to ensure its aspirations, experiences and concerns are reflected in the final strategy.

27. In developing this strategy, Council has sought to balance a whole-of-community approach with the recognition that particular communities may require specific consideration due to their history, demographic significance, or experiences of discrimination. In my view, this approach may provide a useful model for other

local governments by ensuring that multicultural strategies remain inclusive in scope while incorporating actions that respond to the particular needs and circumstances of communities that are significant within their local context.

28. Through co-design with diverse communities, the strategy seeks to establish sustainable approaches to inclusion, intercultural understanding and community participation. It reflects Council's view that preventing discrimination, prejudice and social division requires ongoing investment and deliberate action, rather than responses that are solely driven by crises or critical incidents.

29. Consistent with his commitment, Council has allocated $250,000 annually to initiatives that directly support social cohesion and inclusion, in addition to its significant existing investment in related services, programs and community activities.

30. The City of Port Phillip is incorporating the Victorian Government's Values Statement and Commitment to Social Cohesion, as reflected in the Victorian Common Funding Agreement, into its grants and funding frameworks. This provides a practical mechanism though which Council can establish expectations regarding inclusion, cultural safety and non-discrimination across Council-funded organisations, programs and activities. This approach represents one of the most practical levers available to local government to promote respectful and inclusive community practices. It strengthens accountability and supports a preventative approach to antisemitism, discrimination and other forms of hate, rather than relying solely on reactive responses after incidents occur.

31. Incorporating social cohesion commitments into funding frameworks also provides an avenue for recourse where funded organisations fail to meet those commitments. This may include requiring cultural awareness or capacity-building measures, and in repeated or serious cases, require the reassessment or withdrawal of funding or of other forms of support. While this approach is still emerging, there is growing interest across Victorian local government as to how grants, funding arrangements and partnerships can be used to strengthen social cohesion commitments. Placing such commitments into funding frameworks represents a practical and scalable mechanism that could be more broadly adopted across local government and other sectors as part of a preventative approach to addressing antisemitism, discrimination and other forms of hate.

32. The City of Port Phillip works closely with neighbouring councils and other partners to address issues relating to social cohesion and antisemitism. In particular, Council has a strong and longstanding partnership with Glen Eira City Council, reflecting the significant Jewish communities that reside within and across both municipalities.

33. Both Councils are members of the Victorian Government's Local Escalation and Help Group (LEAH), a high-level co-ordination body established to combat antisemitism and support community safety through direct engagement between Victorian Government agencies, Victoria Police and Jewish community organisations.

34. Council also works collaboratively with neighbouring municipalities, state government agencies and community organisations to share information, identify emerging community concerns and coordinate responses. These partnerships recognise that challenges relating to antisemitism and social cohesion do not align neatly with municipal boundaries and are most effectively addressed through coordinated regional approaches.

35. In addition, Council funds a dedicated Jewish Immersion Program for staff. The program is designed to increase cultural awareness and understanding of Jewish community life and to strengthen staff capability to respond appropriately to antisemitism and related community safety concerns in the course of their duties. The program supports Council's commitment to maintaining a safe, respectful and inclusive workplace while enhancing the organisation's capacity to engage effectively with the Jewish community and respond to issues affecting community safety, belonging and social cohesion. It reflects Council's broader view that preventing prejudice and strengthening social cohesion requires not only community-based initiatives, but also investment in the knowledge, skills and cultural capability of the public sector workforce.

36. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate that the local government extends beyond responding to incidents after they occur. In my view, local government has an important role in building trusted relationships, supporting affected communities, shaping inclusive policies and working in partnership with others to strengthen social cohesion before, during and after periods of community tension.

Community Safety

37. The City of Port Phillip supports community safety regularly through a range of local government functions. These include the management of public spaces, the removal of graffiti and vandalism, supporting community organisations, facilitation of community events, and ongoing engagement with local communities and stakeholders.

38. As part of these responsibilities, Council response to incidents of antisemitic, racist and other hateful graffiti. Council prioritises the prompt removal of such material on the basis that it can undermine community confidence, contribute to feelings of exclusion and fear, and negatively affect perceptions of safety within the community. Where appropriate, Council also works closely with Victoria Police and community organisations in relation to these incidents.

39. In the twelve months to 31 March 2026, Council received 3,273 requests for graffiti removal. Of these, 565 incidents were assessed as racist, antisemitic, sexually offensive or otherwise hate-motivated material.

40. Graffiti on private property remains a challenge as removal requires consent from the property owner.

41. Council's understanding of the impact of antisemitism is not informed only by operational data, but also through ongoing engagement with community members and representative organisations. Through this engagement, some members of the Jewish community have reported modifying their behaviour due to safety concerns, including choosing not to wear or to conceal, visible symbols of their faith and cultural identity. Others have described more significant impacts on their daily lives and sense of belonging within the community.

42. Council also monitors reporting published by the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and the Community Security Group. That reporting recorded 86 antisemitic incidents within the City of Port Phillip in 2024, increasing to 104 incidents in 2025. The 2025 figure represented approximately 18 percent of all antisemitic incidents recorded across Victoria that year.

43. In my experience, local government develops its understanding of antisemitism and social cohesion through a combination of operational data, community reporting and direct engagement with affected communities. These sources provide valuable insights into emerging trends, community sentiment and the practical impacts of discrimination and hate within municipality.

44. I am not aware of any nationally consistent framework for measuring social cohesion at a local government level. Nor am I aware of any systemic process through which local government data is routinely integrated with Victoria Police data, community reporting or information collected by other councils to enable trends to be identified and compared across municipalities.

45. In my view, there would be considerable value in a consistent and shared measurement framework that draws on local government data, police records and community reporting. Such a framework would enable changes in social cohesion can be identified and addressed at an earlier stage, rather than only becoming apparent through larger-scale state or national surveys after community concerns have already intensified.

46. Through its planning and development functions, local government is also able to respond to community need and concerns within the built environment. The City of Port Phillip's development of the Ripponlea Place Plan is one example of how these functions can be used to address community safety and social cohesion. Council's approach has been informed by engagement with local residents, traders, schools and members of the Jewish community. Through this engagement, community members identified safety as an important priority. The planning process has also considered how the design and use of public spaces can improve both actual and perceived safety and better reflect the needs and experiences of the that regularly use and interact with them.

47. Consultation undertaken as part of the Ripponlea Place Plan also included students from local Jewish and government schools. Participants consistently identified safety as among their highest priorities. This feedback reflects the heightened safety concerns experienced by many members of the Jewish community and highlights the importance of addressing those concerns in a manner that supports inclusion, confidence and community participation.

48. The Ripponlea Place Plan demonstrates how local government can use planning and place-making processes to respond to community safety concerns before incidents occur, whilst also strengthening community confidence and a sense of belonging within shared public spaces.

49. Incorporating Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles into the planning and design of public infrastructure provides a practical means of achieving these outcomes. By considering safety during the design phase, measures such as improved lighting and hostile vehicle mitigation can be integrated into projects as part of the overall urban design rather that being added retrospectively in response to identified risks.

50. This approach not only improves safety and security outcomes but also contributes to the creation of public spaces that are welcoming, attractive and inclusive. It enables security measures to be incorporated in a manner that does not erode community confidence and reinforces a sense of belonging, rather than contributing to perceptions of or anxieties relating to exclusion or vulnerability.

Community based initiatives

51. Council's experience suggests that social cohesion is strengthened through regular interaction, meaningful engagement and shared experiences between community members, rather than one-off awareness activities alone. While education and awareness campaigns can play an important role, lasting change is more likely to be achieved when people have opportunities to build relationships, increase mutual understanding and participate in community life together.

52. Local government is well placed to facilitate these opportunities through the provision and support of libraries, community centres, festivals, sporting clubs, arts organisations, faith communities and local events. These settings create opportunities for people from different backgrounds to interact, learn from one another and develop relationships that strengthen trust, belonging and community resilience.

53. A number of initiatives undertaken by the City of Port Phillip demonstrate this approach. For example, Council libraries operate as welcoming and accessibly community spaces that bring people together through multilingual resources,

cultural programming, community events and everyday social interactions. In my view, the role of local government is to support and facilitate opportunities while enabling communities themselves to lead the conversations and relationships that foster understanding and trust.

54. Major community events can also provide opportunities for informal cultural education and engagement. The St Kilda Festival, which attracts approximately 350,000 attendees each year, has provided opportunities for members of the public to engage directly with Jewish faith leaders. This has included the participation of a rabbi, who was available to answer questions and share information about Jewish faith, culture and community life. These interactions help increase familiarity with communities that many attendees may not otherwise encounter in their daily lives.

55. I note, however, that the “Ask a Rabbi” initiative at St Kilda Festival was unable to publicly advertise its specific stall location due to security concerns. More broadly, I am aware that a number of Jewish community events have similarly limited publicity and withheld venue details due to concerns about community safety. In my view, this reflects the extent to which security considerations now influence participation in public community activities.

56. Community events can also provide valuable opportunities for participants to hear directly from people with diverse lived experiences, perspectives, and cultural and faith backgrounds. For example, at a recent International Women's Day event, a female rabbi participated as a guest speaker and spoke about the intersection of her faith, professional experiences and personal background. Initiatives of this kind provide opportunities for community members to better hear directly from people with diverse lived experiences can help challenge misconceptions and foster social cohesion.

57. Small-scale place-based initiatives can also contribute meaningfully to community inclusion and belonging. For example, the City of Port Phillip has facilitated the display of Chanukah decorations and acknowledgements of significant cultural celebrations within public spaces and shopping precincts. While relatively modest in scale, these initiatives have assisted members of the Jewish community to feel visible, recognised and included within the broader community. They have also created opportunities for other residents and visitors to learn about Jewish cultural traditions and celebrations.

58. Council also supports initiatives that facilitate ongoing intercultural and interfaith engagement. For example, Council is providing funding and support to the Port Phillip Multifaith Network to jointly host the Interfaith Festival in November 2026. The festival is intended to create opportunities for residents from different faiths and cultural backgrounds to connect, learn from one another and strengthen relationships across the community relationships.

Building social cohesion through local government

59. In my view, local government has an important role in translating broader policy objectives into practical actions that reflect local circumstances, community needs and local priorities. Based on the City of Port Phillip's experience, antisemitism and other forms of discrimination are most effectively addressed not only through responses to individual incidents, but also through sustained investment in community relationships, local leadership and opportunities for engagement across differences.

60. While the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments have an important role in establishing policy frameworks, legislative response and partnerships with peak organisations, attitudes and behaviours are often shaped through interactions with trusted local organisations, community leaders and peers. By supporting and connecting these networks, councils can help challenge stereotypes, increase cultural understanding and strengthen the social cohesion and resilience that underpin inclusive communities.

61. I am conscious that all levels of government are currently undertaking significant work in this area. At a Commonwealth level, this Royal Commission and the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Anti-Racism Framework represent important steps towards a more coordinated national approach. In Victoria, the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-Vilification and Social Cohesion) Act 2025* was enacted, Victoria's first Anti-Racism Strategy was adopted, and a review of Victoria's multicultural policy settings was commissioned. Council welcomes these developments and the increased focus on addressing racism, antisemitism and social division.

62. In my experience, however, these kinds of reforms have not always been closely connected to the work of local government. Councils are frequently expected to contribute to the implementation of policy reforms at the community level but are not always engaged during their development or provided with the resources necessary to support effective implementation.

63. Greater involvement of local government in the design of policy frameworks, strategies and legislative reforms would assist in ensuring that these initiatives can be translated into practical and effective outcomes within local communities. Engagement with local government at an early stage would also enable governments to draw on local knowledge, established community relationships and operational experience.

64. Drawing on the City of Port Phillip's experience, I consider there to be significant opportunities for governments to further support local government's role in preventing antisemitism and strengthening social cohesion through investment in community development, multicultural engagement, place-based initiatives and local partnerships. Such investments can help create communities that are more resilient, inclusive and better equipped to respond to periods of social tension and community disruption.

65. Local government is the level of government that is uniquely positioned to understand the communities it serves, including the diversity that exists within communities that may be targeted by vilification, discrimination or social exclusion. The local knowledge enables councils to engage effectively with communities, identify emerging concerns and develop responses that are tailored to local circumstances.

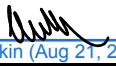
66. Given the importance of community connection, belonging and local engagement in strengthening social cohesion, I consider there to be merit in establishing direct funding partnership between the Commonwealth Government and local governments.

67. In my view, a dedicated funding stream would enable local governments to work more effectively with their local communities to build belonging, strengthen social cohesion and respond to emerging risks of discrimination and hate. Such an approach could support locally tailored initiatives that are scalable and adaptable, not only in relation to antisemitism, but also in addressing other forms of vilification and social division.

68. A dedicated funding stream would empower and adequately resource local government to build social cohesion initiatives either directly or through community organisations. Given the fiscally constrained environments common to local government direct funding streams will enable social cohesion to be seen as a priority outcome, otherwise there is a risk such initiatives could be lost to competing funding demands.

69. Ultimately, my experience is that local government is most effective when it is supported to act not only as a responder to incidents after they occur, but also as a long-term partner in building the conditions that prevent prejudice, strengthen community resilience and support cohesive, inclusive communities.

CONTINUED STATEMENT OF: Alex Makin

Signed: 
Alex Makin (Aug 21, 2026 15:39:06 GMT+10)

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