



POLICING OF SYDNEY PROTESTS AND COUNTER-PROTESTS ON 31 AUGUST, 7 SEPTEMBER AND 13 SEPTEMBER 2025

Legal Observers NSW fielded teams in Sydney CBD and Bondi Beach during rallies taking place on 31 August, 7 September and 13 September. This report summarises the policing of these rallies based on observed police-protestor interactions and media reporting. Key points include:

- NSW Police granted authorisation to the March for Australia rally despite its organiser calling for violence similar to the Cronulla riots. Previously, NSW Police have sought a court order to refuse authorisation to three Palestine Action Group rallies, with two of these applications primarily relying on safety issues and concerns that violence would ensue. The organisers of Palestine Action Group have not been recorded to call for violence.
- NSW Police did not send officers to assist two people who called the police after March for Australia attendees shoved, hit and followed them on Broadway.
- NSW Police allowed a counter-protest to a solidarity action for the Gaza Freedom Flotilla at Bondi Beach to move from its original location in a park away from the protest to a location right next to the protest. A total of 20 officers were observed to be deployed on the ground for this protest, which is far lower than the average of 50-100 Legal Observers NSW records at most protest actions. This is despite the counter-protest plans being publicised online by prominent groups with large followings, including the Australian Jewish Association and StandWithUs Australia.
- NSW Police were not observed to take action to address threats and racist statements yelled at attendees of the Freedom Flotilla action by counter-protestors. These included “I hope you’re all killed”, “no dogs on the beach”, “get off our beach”, “deport you all”, “white Australia”, “go back to Lakemba” and “you’re all terrorists”, as well as accusations that all Palestinians were rapists.
- NSW Police were not recorded to have exercised their powers to apprehend attendees at the March Against Corruption rally who were reported by the ABC to have been wearing patches featuring symbols associated with Nazism.

31 August

Three rallies occurred in Sydney CBD on 31 August:

- The March for Australia, starting from Belmore Park and marching to Victoria Park.
- The 'United We Say No To Racism' march, starting from Prince Alfred Park and marching to Hyde Park.
- The Palestine Action Group counter-protest to the March for Australia, starting from Hyde Park and making a loop through the CBD before returning to Hyde Park

March for Australia

The March for Australia (MFA) was an 'authorised assembly' under the Summary Offences Act. NSW Police received and did not challenge the application from MFA organisers to conduct the march. On August 21 it was reported on 2GB that the person who lodged the application for MFA to be an authorised assembly, Bec Freedom, had called for violence at the rally on a livestream, saying "We need violence, I'm sorry but we need f**king violence," similar to the 2005 Cronulla riots.¹

NSW Police have previously sought to challenge the authorisation of protests on the grounds of potential violence, including challenging protests by the Palestine Action Group on October 15 2023 and October 9 2024 in the Supreme Court. The basis for the October 15 2023 challenge was that at a previous rally on October 9 a few individuals had chanted antisemitic slogans, before event organisers intervened, with the Premier making comments that the protestors had "proven they're not peaceful."² The basis for challenging the October 9 2024 rally was that the police were "not satisfied that the protest could proceed safely," with the grounds of this assessment remaining undisclosed except for the mention of expected crowd size at Town Hall and adjacent hazards like "the recent addition of over a dozen planter boxes."³ Both challenges were abandoned by police after negotiation with organisers.

In summary, NSW Police did not exercise their discretion to challenge the authorisation rally given a public call for violence coming from its organiser, where they had previously sought to refuse authorisation for rallies on an equal or lesser risk basis.

¹<https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/leftwing-groups-call-for-antifascist-mobilisation-to-take-on-racist-august-31-antiimmigration-rallies/news-story/3d60151ecc3f74efaf7eb2b28308bd20>

²<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/11/pro-palestine-rally-sydney-sunday-protest-march-nsw-premier-chris-minns>

³<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/oct/02/sydney-pro-palestine-rally-police-ban-push-october-7>

NSW Police responded to at least one incident of violence and another incident of breaching the peace on the part of MFA attendees. At Bar Broadway, police attended an incident where MFA attendees were yelling abuse at people and loudly singing the national anthem, with a police officer sustaining an assault in the process of responding to this incident.⁴ A woman was arrested in Hyde Park for breaching the peace after yelling at the PAG rally.⁵

Legal Observers NSW received a report of two cases of abusive conduct by March for Australia attendees against counter-protest attendees following the protests' conclusion, to which there appears to have been no police response despite police being called.

In one case, a group of MFA attendees ran up to a group of people who had attended the counter protest and one of whom was holding the Palestine flag. One of the MFA attendees began making a fist and lunging at the person holding the flag and more people joined him, with some trying to hold him back and others joining in by jeering or yelling, including saying things like "go back to where you came from," and "fuck off you asian dog." One of them spat at the Palestine flag. After the group walked away, one of the MFA attendees ran up to them and apologised saying he'd thought that the person with the Palestine flag had spat on one of his friends and had been coming after him for this reason.

After this incident, two people from the group continued walking to Broadway. There was a big group of people wrapped in Australian flags drinking at a pub, The Green Room. One of them grabbed the Palestine flag from the person holding it as they were walking past and tried to throw it into traffic. As he did so, another person grabbed it to stop him. The man shoved and yelled at the person. The two people continued walking down Broadway but several people from the pub followed them, jeering "this is Straya." They surrounded the two people and twice smacked the hand and phone of one of them who was holding a phone out to film their behaviour. The other person called the police and told them they had been shoved, hit, had things grabbed and were being followed down the street and threatened. The MFA attendees dispersed soon after this. The two people sat in Victoria Park and waited for the police to arrive for about an hour. When the police didn't turn up after this time, they went home.

'United We Say No To Racism' March

Prior to the beginning of the rally, police were observed questioning a houseless person at Central Station and asking them for paperwork.

⁴<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/ugly-brawls-erupt-after-sydney-anti-immigration-protest-20250901-p5mrhj.html>

⁵<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-08-31/anti-immigration-rally-march-for-australia-august-31/105717552#live-blog-post-218081>

Legal Observers NSW recorded about 40-50 police officers at the 'United We Say No To Racism' March in Prince Alfred Park. This included PORS units, undercover police and detectives. Police stayed on the outside perimeter of the rally during speeches. An interaction was observed between a group of 4-5 protestors and police when the group started walking from the rally towards Central. Within about a minute of beginning to walk away from the rally, the group was stopped by police and told not to approach Central due to the March for Australia occurring nearby in Belmore Park.

Police followed along the perimeter of the march as it proceeded towards Hyde Park. As the march was passing the tunnels leading to Belmore Park, several MFA protestors had lined up along the tunnel edge and were shouting oppositional things to the march. One MFA protestor with a US flag followed the march for a few minutes. Police approached him and issued him a direction to not continue following the march.

Palestine Action Group counter-protest to the March for Australia

Legal Observers NSW recorded police arresting an individual showing signs of mental distress near the PAG rally in Hyde Park. The person had been present at the counter-protest at Prince Alfred Park and was observed sitting calmly near the stage at the PAG rally. According to eyewitnesses, the person had made an attempt to get on the speaking lineup to speak about police violence, but this was being handled by the organisers. Seeing the organisers speak to the person, police apprehended him, violently tackled him to the ground and lent on his back. The organisers communicated to police that he was not a problem and that they didn't wish for him to be arrested, but police continued to detain him. Police refused to state the reason for arrest, relying only on the fact that the person was acting agitated and were not observed to ensure a paramedic was present to assist.

The person arrested showed signs of previous police-related trauma and was in severe distress whilst being detained. Police dragged and carried the person during the arrest before forcing them into a custody van. Qualified medics were denied their request to access the person to assess their condition.

High visibility policing at protests is not only expensive and escalatory, it also heightens the risk for people vulnerable to police violence. Police acting as mental health first responders in these instances led to injury and distress. The police response did not appear to be guided by best practices for mental health assistance.

7 September

On 7 September, several community groups, including Jewish groups, Uniting Church and local pro-Palestine groups, held an action at Bondi Beach in solidarity with the Gaza Freedom Flotilla. The action involved releasing paper boats into the water and speeches from speakers including members of Parliament.

Prior to the action, several organisations called for a counter-protest to occur. On 3 September, StandWithUsAustralia issued a call for people to “stand united” at Bondi Beach against what they called a “provocation”, bringing flags and voices, with the accompanying messaging “No, Not In Our Backyard. They bring hate and support for terror to our community. We will not stay silent”.⁶ The Australian Jewish Association also posted on 3 September: “The Jewish community is not going to sit by and allow a bunch of troublemakers to bring their hate to Bondi Beach... Members of the Jewish community have plans to confront this hate.”⁷

When the Flotilla Solidarity action began gathering at Bondi Beach at around 9.30am on 7 September, the organiser was notified over the phone that there were 1,000 counter protesters coming from the park and the police presence wasn't large enough to maintain the crowd. We observed around 20 uniformed police officers at Bondi Beach, including 9 general duty officers, 6 PORS officers, 3 ODIN officers and two higher ranking officers. This is far lower than the average of 50-100 officers Legal Observers NSW records at most protest actions, including at the previous weekend's 'United We Say No To Racism' counter-protest to March for Australia. At least one black naval boat unit was also deployed in the water, although it was not clear how many officers it contained and it did not approach the shore. Three helicopters marked as Police Helicopters were also observed hovering above Bondi Beach throughout the action.

When legal observers arrived at Bondi Beach around 9.45am there was no police line separating the Flotilla Solidarity action on the beach and the counter protest which had formed in front of Bondi Pavillion. At 9:54am there was a loosely formed police line that did very little to keep the two groups apart. By 9:59am the PORS and ODIN officers arrived but there was still a very loose formation of police between the two groups. By 10:15am the groups had been separated by a solid police line at the top of the stairs in front of the Bondi Pavilion. This is in contrast to the approach of police at previous counter-protests observed by Legal Observers NSW where police form lines to separate protests and counter-protests before the protests begin.

⁶ <https://events.humanitix.com/no-not-in-our-backyard-bondi-beach-gathering>

⁷ <https://x.com/AustralianJA/status/1963030832890970472>

NSW Police were not observed to take action to address threats and racist statements yelled at attendees of the Freedom Flotilla action by counter-protestors. These included "I hope you're all killed," "no dogs on the beach," "get off our beach," "deport you all," "white Australia," "go back to Lakemba," and "you're all terrorists," as well as accusations that all Palestinians were rapists. Video posted by the Australian Jewish Association shows someone from the counter-protest lunging at a man with a keffiyeh and police intervening to bring the counter-protestor back behind police lines.⁸ No arrests were recorded from the protest.

There were multiple occasions where highly visible counter protesters made their way onto the beach to antagonise the participants of the action. These people were initially removed from the beach by participants of the action who would lead them back towards the counter protest line. Riot police would then intercept them and take them back across the police line. During these occurrences the police didn't touch the counter protesters. On one occasion, an officer held his arms out in front of him to stop one counter protester from moving back towards the beach, as the counter protester was brandishing both rude fingers and saying "fuck you," directly into the police officers face. The counter protester was gesturing at the people behind the officer and clarified that after gesturing multiple times. This counter protester was not apprehended, removed from the protest, or asked to leave the protest - he was allowed to walk directly back into the counter protest crowd. This counter protester was later seen again agitating protesters as they were being led off the beach by riot police.

Police did not allow legal observers to cross the police line due to perceived lack of safety amongst the counter protesters. Observers heard yelling and boo-ing coming from the counter protest - it appeared someone with a keffiyeh had entered the rear of the protest. Observers tried to cross the police line in case of an interaction between the participant and police but were told by an officer "I don't think these people want your legal advice."

13 September

Two rallies took place in Sydney CBD on 13 September:

- The Australia Unites Against Government Corruption rally starting in Hyde Park, marching through Sydney CBD and returning to Hyde Park
- The Racism and Fascism Not Welcome rally starting in Belmore Park and marching to Victoria Park

⁸ <https://x.com/AustralianJA/status/1964524356136272317>

Australia Unites Against Government Corruption rally

The organisers of the rally originally submitted an application for the protest to occur as an authorised assembly on the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Police applied to the Supreme Court to refuse the rally authorisation. Organisers chose to negotiate with police for an alternative location, partially due to not being able to find legal representation.⁹ The protest occurred in Hyde Park and took a route through Sydney CBD past the Queen Victoria Building and back to Hyde Park.

The ABC reported that several people at the rally were observed to be wearing patches featuring symbols associated with Nazism.¹⁰ No arrests were reported to have been made in relation to this. One person was reported to have been arrested for a breach of the peace, but the circumstances of this are unknown.¹¹

Racism and Fascism Not Welcome rally

The rally occurred in Belmore Park with around 80-100 officers present, including general duty, PORS and ODIN officers, and 8 mounted police. The mounted police followed the back of the march and one horse was observed to be nervous and acting up during the march. Police told march attendees to walk more quickly during the march, including issuing this direction near attendees with mobility aids.

A police officer approached a group of people holding a 'Fuck the Police' sign and stated that it was unfair, before leaving.

⁹<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-08/nsw-australia-unites-sydney-harbour-bridge-march-court/105747316>

¹⁰<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-13/rallies-blog-live-australia-marches/105769856#live-blog-post-222594>

¹¹<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-13/rallies-blog-live-australia-marches/105769856#live-blog-post-222901>