

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Extremism in Victoria

Melbourne—Tuesday, 14 June 2022

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr Samantha Ratnam ¹ —Chair	Ms Cathrine Burnett-Wake
Ms Nina Taylor—Deputy Chair	Mr Mark Gepp
Dr Matthew Bach ²	Ms Sheena Watt ³

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Ms Fiona Patten—Chair	Ms Tania Maxwell
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Mr Enver Erdogan	Ms Sonja Terpstra
Mr Mark Gepp	Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela
Mr Stuart Grimley	Ms Sheena Watt

¹ Substitute for Ms Fiona Patten

² Substitute for Mr Craig Ondarchie

³ Substitute for Ms Jane Garrett

WITNESS (*via videoconference*)

Mr Nick McKenzie, Journalist, the *Age*.

The CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone. I declare open the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Extremism in Victoria. All mobile phones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to begin by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of the Wurundjeri land from which I am joining you today for this online hearing and all the First Nations lands we have variously gathered on today online and pay my respect to their ancestors, elders and families, past and present, and Aboriginal elders of other communities who may be here today.

I would like to begin with a round of introductions. I am Samantha Ratnam. I will be chairing this session today. I am joined by the Deputy Chair of the committee, Ms Nina Taylor; Dr Matthew Bach; and Ms Cathrine Burnett-Wake, all members of the legislative LSIC.

By way of explanation around parliamentary privilege and the Hansard transcript, all evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and published on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you please state your name and any organisation you are appearing on behalf of. Welcome, Mr McKenzie.

Mr McKENZIE: Good morning, everybody. Thanks for having me. I will start my appearance with just a brief outline of some of the issues key issues as I see them and then welcome any questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Would you mind just outlining your name and any organisation that you might be representing.

Mr McKENZIE: Sure. My name is Nick McKenzie. I work for the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. I am an investigative journalist. My invitation today is due to my ongoing investigations into extremism and far-right extremism in Victoria and Australia. Most notably, last year some colleagues and I infiltrated Australia's largest right-wing extremist or Neo-Nazi organisation, the NSN, for a number of months, filming and secretly recording inside that organisation, and gained some insights that may not be news to police or security agencies but certainly were news to the public and, I think, lawmakers. Drawing upon that experience and my dealings with counterterrorism agencies across the country, I am here to pass on that information and answer any questions that I can.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much, Mr McKenzie, for being with us today. Would you like to provide a short opening statement in terms of your investigation of up to 10 minutes, and then from that time we will open up for questions and discussion with the committee.

Mr McKENZIE: That would be my pleasure. I guess, from my perspective, journalists are outsiders, but we can peer into different problems with a unique perspective, and that is a perspective informed by dealing with, in this case, policing agencies, security agencies and people who are themselves part of extremist groups, academics and NGOs. I think we offer a perspective that is not constrained by any one vested interest or political prerogative, so we come with an independent and sometimes quite frank view which might be useful, and I hope it is. I will start with my statement.

There is no doubt that far-right extremism is growing in Victoria and across the nation. The lead agency in this space, ASIO, made it clear as recently as March that issues-motivated extremism is on the rise. It also said that its terrorism case load is down. So to put it in the language of this committee's terms of reference, there are less

far-right extremists right now who are suspected of plotting an actual terror attack but there are more Australians becoming radicalised and therefore prone to making the next step to terror suspect, in connection to a range of issues that we might lump into the far-right extremist category, which extends to issues such as COVID vaccines and various other conspiracies.

Certain key conspiracies that drive these extremist groups should be understood. A critical one is called accelerationism. It is a belief that societal collapse is inevitable and can be sped up by what these groups call 'direct action'. Another is replacement theory—the idea that the white race is being replaced. There is no doubt that right now some Victorian extremists are embracing both these ideologies while turning repeatedly back to the Christchurch terrorist as inspiration, using him as a rallying point—and I should say that I have seen that happening in the last few days. We are monitoring Victorian extremists as we speak, and they are continually referring to both theories and referring to the Christchurch terrorist as somebody whose actions should be followed and whose beliefs should be used as inspiration. Understanding these conspiracies is critical if we are to make sure that young people being radicalised have the tools to call these conspiracies what they are: racist and violent conspiracy theories.

The biggest concern right now is the number of minors getting radicalised. I am talking about that being a concern amongst state and federal agencies and those who watch this space. I am also talking about children as young as 10. Our infiltration last year of the National Socialist Network really highlighted this clearly. The NSN is dedicated to recruiting young, impressionable Victorians and is having some success in doing so. Minors are very, very hard for police and other authorities to deal with, but they do present an opportunity for early interdiction. It is a job for schools, for parents and not just for security agencies. It costs money and requires expertise, and this is money and expertise I would say that schools and policing agencies likely do not have. They may not say it publicly right now, but the Victorian police are overwhelmed with the level of threatening language on the internet from Victorians, especially young Victorians, as well as other intelligence product that identifies those who talk big and very violently but who may or may not do much else.

In a space of very limited resources, this requires police to make daily decisions about when a threat should be responded to in order to preserve public safety. It is a fact that police are prioritising threats against politicians, which are no doubt growing, but it means there is a big cohort of young people who are conducting themselves online or making threats in ways that do not cross a clear legal or police line but still indicate they are on a rapid path to radicalisation. It is my belief Victoria is not doing enough to identify and help these young people. On that note, it should also be said that deradicalisation programs are not perceived by many in law enforcement to be actually working. Our experience infiltrating the NSN shows that the NSN itself believes deradicalisation programs, including those offered in jail, are a joke to be studied and to be exploited, and I would urge this committee to conduct a proper audit of deradicalisation efforts in Victoria implemented by the state government so far to see what is working and what is not.

It is also an obvious fact that the internet is a key incubator of radicalisation. Encrypted communications are the biggest form of communication by these groups. Our undercover operative was directed to use multiple encrypted channels, especially those belonging to companies overseas that do not care if they become hubs for extremism. While holding tech companies to account is perhaps primarily a commonwealth responsibility, Victoria should be urging much more action in this space, and it should be said as well that our success as a nation in holding tech companies that host these platforms to account is fairly hopeless to date.

Extremist groups are at the moment planning for things like proscription—they being outlawed or banned—and the banning of symbols. I think the application of proscription laws and the banning of things like the swastika are good things, but if groups like the NSN are actively planning on how to adapt to such legislative steps they can only be seen as small or mere tools in one big toolbox. Another issue rarely raised is the fact that while police Counter Terrorism Command has a great deal of expertise, local police stations, local police—those who are likely to encounter lots of far-right extremists—lack the skills and knowledge to deal with this issue appropriately. Let me give you two examples. When the NSN went hiking in the Grampians, a hike or an activity of some infamy now, there is no doubt Counter Terrorism Command was well briefed, but no-one told the local police and opportunities like setting up roadblocks and conducting a community policing intervention were missed. Another example: neighbours of the NSN headquarters in suburban Melbourne, since shut down or moved, have also spoken to me confidentially about the difficulty of getting any interest from local police about the NSN's local activity—again, another missed opportunity. Victoria Police can do better, spreading the knowledge and expertise that sits with its Counter Terrorism Command across the force, although this will cost time and money.

Another key troubling issue, as I see it, is some of these groups in Victoria have members with gun licences. I would urge the committee to seek answers about whether we need to make it easier in Victoria to have a gun licence stripped. At the moment the informal feedback I get from authorities is it is hard to get a gun licence, to pass the test, but it is even harder to strip a gun licence off a person even if it is known they are a member of a group like the NSN. At the moment there is no doubt that some far-right extremists in Victoria do have access to firearms and do talk, at least online, about using those firearms to ill effect.

In closing, if the internet cannot be effectively policed, and I suggest of course it cannot, if minors are being increasingly radicalised, if deradicalisation programs in this state are not working and if laws and policing are not offering a total solution, as of course they are not, what better can we do in Victoria? I think the critical conversation should be had around the role of schools and of early intervention programs targeting young people. They must be front of mind in any package of solutions. They tend to be put up every now and then—funded—but I do not see a great deal of discussion and testing about whether these programs are working. And if they are not, what is an alternative remedy? So that ends some opening comments, and I would be delighted to answer any questions you may have.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much, Mr McKenzie. That was a really insightful account of the work you have done to date—and welcome, Ms Maxwell, who is a member of our committee as well, to the proceedings. If I may begin the questions, I am interested to know, Mr McKenzie, in terms of investigating the rise of far-right extremism—and unfortunately it is not new; it has been with our societies for decades and so many years—what piqued your interest to investigate it more deeply now? And I am interested to know from those investigations: what threat do you think the rise of these movements poses to Victoria?

Mr McKENZIE: I think you must look back to the Christchurch attack as the changing point in Australia and Victoria. Up until that point it is a fact that policing and security agencies, which have one role—not the entire role, but a critical role in this piece—were not doing enough to tackle the problem. Now, I would say ASIO is an exception to that, but certainly policing agencies had not regarded the far right, if you want to call it that, as the critical threat that it is. That changed after the Christchurch attack, and then we had several years of upskilling, trying to understand the problem and develop better tools to assess it.

Why did I form an interest? After policing agencies did begin to take it seriously and get a lot more intelligence and understanding of the problem, that sort of drifts in time to people like myself. The confluence of that expanded knowledge plus lockdowns, the explosion of the internet as an incubator, the explosion of encrypted applications as communication tools and the increase in the ability of these groups to use disparate issues—around COVID lockdowns is the obvious one but also a whole range of other conspiracies to recruit members—all of that came to a sort of climactic point, I think, where last year for the first time our security agencies, led by ASIO, were saying the right-wing threat—that is not their words; they talk about issues-informed extremism—is a greater threat now than perhaps it has been for many years.

So our job in the media is to test that. How do we test that? We did many things. One of the things we did was look at one of these groups up close. We chose the biggest group. We did get access to it, and certainly what we found validated those concerns that we were hearing across the security agency framework, which is these groups are extremely active. They are dedicated to recruiting young people. How dangerous are they? I mean, it is fair to say the majority of people in these groups are idiots. They are sloppily organised. The fact that we could infiltrate them with relative ease speaks to their failure to implement proper security measures themselves, countersecurity measures. Yet just because they are, if I can use the term crudely, idiots does not make them less dangerous. I mean, the good thing about what we learned in infiltrating the groups, and this is backed up by police and the agencies, is most people in these groups are not dedicated terrorists. The terrifying thing is that there are those in the groups or on the fringe of these groups who may take some of the ideology these groups have around accelerationism, around replacement theory, and then go do a lone actor attack, and we certainly saw, I think, very clear indications that that was entirely possible. And who is more likely do something like that? What was most concerning, and I think what I am hearing more and more as I deal confidentially with law enforcement officials across the country, is the number of minors that are subscribing to or deep diving into this ideology. These are people who are very susceptible to, I think, perhaps taking the next step, some form of more overt action, and are very difficult for law enforcement to target because they are sometimes below criminal age. So they sit in our society as young people that are very hard to deal with. Now, how can we better reach them?

The CHAIR: Thanks very much, Mr McKenzie—really useful to know. I will hand over to Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Yes. Thank you for coming today. Really interesting discoveries that you have been making. The first question was just: do you think that far-right extremism is becoming more prominent because of the important reporting—and there is no criticism in that; we need to know—of professionals like you or do you think they are just becoming more blatant? I was wondering, you know, so we have an accurate perception of what is happening.

Mr McKENZIE: Listen, the media's role in this is vexed. We looked very carefully at, 'How do we report on the National Socialist Network without leading to a recruiting drive? We don't want to give it any free publicity. We don't want to create the perception of a bigger issue, a bigger problem, where there is none'. I think we did thread that needle. One indicator is that its online adherents via its Telegram channel dropped after our reporting, and part of that is our reporting showed the group for what it was, which was a disorganised, conspiracy theory driven, very ugly outfit. We cut through its mythology. It is dedicated to propaganda, to making itself appear more effective, more powerful, than it is. We cut through that propaganda by showing it for what it is and what it remains to be. I think that proper exposure, which is not sensationalised and calls out the groups for what they are and also gives a clear message as to exactly what a threat they do pose, is extremely useful. We must be having this debate in our open society to deal with it.

Is the media a generator of this activity? I would say absolutely—well, I cannot rule it out—no. These people are not dealing with the mainstream media to find their inspiration. They are dealing in the dark corners of the internet, which are much bigger than they ever were. And whether we report something or not I think is irrelevant. The internet sanctuaries have become great recruiting grounds. They were at the height of their powers when they were not just congregating on the internet, but they were at the large protest movements around vaccines, lockdowns et cetera, which gave these groups an ability to get together and to have a sense of shared purpose and direct action. So I think they grouped around both things, the internet and the real protest movement as it was growing—it has lessened somewhat of late—to expand their numbers. Last year or this year, are we seeing the greatest number of right-wing extremists this country has ever seen? I mean, certainly the last few years we have, and it is the media's job to show that, and I hope that answers the question.

Ms TAYLOR: Very thoroughly. Thank you. The second question was just with regard to an article that I think you put together regarding a young Liberal who was exposed as a Neo-Nazi in burning an Aboriginal flag and trying to incite terror. You have spoken to some extent about where and how people who are perhaps of that persuasion are infiltrating. Do you think that is a bigger, broader issue there? I am just interested to understand.

Mr McKENZIE: I am not quite sure I understand the question. This fellow is a classic case study of a problematic person for our security agencies to deal with. Right now this person is still spreading the ideology of the Christchurch terrorist. He has made appalling comments about a Greens federal parliamentarian that are absolutely threatening and improper. He has also made it an art form to stay just within the bounds of the law, so he cannot be easily charged; he cannot be easily dealt with. How does our society deal with an entity like that? Well, there is constant monitoring, albeit we must still respect his right to free speech. But more importantly I think it is understanding how this person is building his networks and inspiring others. It is a fact that I have been aware of this guy's activities up until today. He is still recruiting, pushing his ideology, spreading manifestos online that incite violence and political terrorism. ASIO's director-general has talked of big talk versus action, and at the moment the fact that he has not been arrested suggests that he is assessed as all talk and no action. Does he remain a massive threat? Yes. Then how do we deal with that threat? It is extremely difficult.

Again, Victoria Police is faced in this finite resource environment with the challenge: who do we raid? Who do we arrest? If someone says they are going to murder the Premier and has firearms, we will knock on that door. But if someone has a lesser threat, given there are so many such lesser threats, at what point do we take action? Police cannot take action all the time, so then as a state how do we ensure we give ourselves the best chance that these people making such threats are not going to make them in the first place, and that is again going to early interdiction, awareness raising through school and other societal levers that perhaps we can pull.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Ms Burnett-Wake.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE: Thank you very much. Thanks for coming along today, Mr McKenzie. Some of the things that you spoke about were in relation to social media and the spreading of replacement theory, direct

action and acceleration. I am just wondering what your thoughts are in regard to how we can go to—I am trying to find the words—minimise that when the tech companies, and you also talked about the tech companies needing to be held to account, are actually not doing much in that regard. I am just curious to know what your views are on what we could do as government to look at that? I know you talked about that it is a federal responsibility, but just at a state level.

Mr McKENZIE: What is the extent of the problem? Number one—and I am sure police, intelligence agencies and divisions are doing this—is measuring which platforms are being used and in what manner. When you look at an entity such as Telegram, which is a popular outlet—and there are a range of other encrypted communication channels, forums and networks, at what point are they being used predominantly, or in large part, for the spreading of hateful ideology? So number one we have got to assess it, measure it and then what we do not hear from our agencies—they do not want to go out and call out tech companies by name. Perhaps there is a reluctance to do that in Australia compared to some other overseas jurisdictions. But at the very least our politicians should be knowing which are the worst offenders, and once we get a sense of that, then we should be making sure that our law enforcement agencies have every tool to be able to penalise a company that does not take immediate action to remove hateful content and remove those who use their platforms to propagate it. The reason I say it is a commonwealth responsibility—sure it is, but if the states are firing up on this and the Attorneys-General et cetera are using various platforms to make it a key concern, then that will no doubt help. But even if the commonwealth have the impetus, they are going to have to be working with their overseas partners, because lots of these entities are frankly impossible to police. If you have got a company based in Russia or some other place, how do you actually extract a fine and deal with them in a way that is going to deter them? So that is a very, very difficult issue, but at the moment we have seen zero effective state or federal agency or government action in this area. We should see more, and it should be spoken about more.

But again, shut down one platform and another will take its place, so we go back. Why are parts of our society heading to these dark corners and using them? What are kids being taught at school about the fact that they will come across these dark corners of the internet, what to expect and how to deal with it? How do we steer them away from that? So it is a massive, massive problem, and there are no easy solutions.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Ms Maxwell.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Mr McKenzie, for attending today to view some of the extremely important points that you have made. We have previously talked about that early intervention at schools and becoming aware of those behaviours. And I always think it is imperative to work with the family—not only the young person but the family. I am really interested—and it may be a little off topic from what you have been talking about: do you have concerns that reducing the age of criminal responsibility will increase the likelihood of recruitment of those young people? Do you think that they are more likely to be targeted?

Mr McKENZIE: No. I do not think so. My point is simply that criminalising this conduct and capturing younger people by reducing the age is not going to be a solution, because so much of the conduct is actually not clearly criminal—you know, the big talk not necessarily followed up by action that is criminal. We are talking very broadly about some massive issues here. Where can Victoria actually offer some practical solutions? I guess at the front of my mind is that question. Are our deradicalisation programs in the prison system? Are they targeted at schools? Are they actually working? I think what state governments are good at is coming up with a big bunch of money when something terrible happens and a bunch of nice titles—deradicalisation, community bonding, multicultural harmony. But measuring the success of those sorts of programs we are not good at, and being honest about whether those programs are failing or working we are also not very good at.

Anecdotally at least I think our deradicalisation programs are not working in Victoria. That is what I get—I have not done the due diligence, but certainly talking to contacts across the law enforcement space, they regard it as a bit of a joke. And we need such programs to work. Whether or not we abandon the term ‘deradicalisation’ itself now that people say maybe that is not the right term, those programs have not worked. Do we need another form of social and societal intervention? Are they education programs? But testing what we have done to date, trying to really measure its success or not and then tailoring those programs or coming up with new ideas that might work that might help those minors, those young people, to not go down those paths would be a critical outcome that this committee could perhaps achieve.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Bach.

Dr BACH: Thanks, Chair. Thanks a lot, Mr McKenzie, for coming along and being with us. Can I ask you some more about exactly what you were just talking about. You started talking a bit more, in response to Ms Taylor's question, about that appalling example of that individual who obviously has behaved so shockingly and yet, you say, does not meet a threshold with the police. I am a former schoolteacher myself, and I am not aware that we run any deradicalisation programs in schools. I am also very interested in what happens in our youth justice facilities. I do not think anything happens there, notwithstanding your point that the vast majority of young people you are talking about here do not come into the youth justice system or certainly are not incarcerated. I am always sceptical, especially about calls to increase particular types of programs regarding threats in our school system. As a former schoolteacher I agree with what you just said utterly, Mr McKenzie, that oftentimes we have a response to a particular issue, throw a bunch of money at it, do not necessarily evaluate it very well, and yet it limps on maybe doing some good, maybe not. I am not aware—are you aware of any deradicalisation programs, or using whichever name that we should, that are operable in schools or in other community settings where we could capture large groups of young people who are potentially at risk of radicalisation and ultimately perhaps extremist acts?

Mr McKENZIE: No, I am not, but nor have I checked, and I suspect the people who would be best placed to look at whether those programs exist are those in that space in the state government at the moment. Calling it deradicalisation, that is probably the wrong term; I used that term and it has since been used by the committee, but that is for people who are radicalised. We are talking about people who are yet to be radicalised but who we fear might go down that path. Is it something that would go through all schools? Is that going to be effective? I am not sure. Is it about targeting those at the greatest risk?

Now, police and intelligence services at the moment are actively trying to identify who are these young people going down those paths and finding ways for them away from those paths. That is happening on a case-by-case basis. But there is also no doubt that there are many more people who are not getting picked up or that the agencies simply lack the resources to interact with, and it is about capturing those other people that we should be talking about. So then, are there school programs, and how would you tailor them? I am not entirely sure. The director-general of ASIO said last year this is a problem for schools, this is a problem for parents. So this is where a state government can have some impact by saying, 'What can we do better?'

I do think it is really important, though—there have been funding packages in Victoria around deradicalisation in prisons et cetera, and the feedback I am getting informally is that a lot of them have failed or are failing, and if they are not working, then that should be really exposed and remedied because there are bunches of money that could be used in a more effective fashion. Prisons, youth justice and the adult prison system—the National Socialist Network told our undercover entities that they were using Victorian prisons as recruiting grounds, that there were Neo-Nazi gangs in prisons, that their members were getting targeted for deradicalisation programs or different programs in those prisons, and they were simply undertaking those programs to learn how the state would try to interact with them to make sure those programs were not effective. So what are we doing in our prisons? I do not know the answer to that, but that is another critical question. I suspect whatever we are doing is not working. So better programs, measuring their success and making sure that if we need to put them more broadly in schools or prisons we are doing so would be key questions to be asking.

Dr BACH: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much, Mr McKenzie. I might ask another question, and committee members, please raise your hand if you have got some follow-up questions.

I am interested to know from the time you began this kind of deeper investigation into what is happening—as you have mentioned, one of the things that catalysed your work was the moment of the pandemic as well. We have had evidence presented to the committee around the moment of the pandemic, such a time of incredible destruction, which exacerbated the factors that we know can create fertile ground for recruitment—you know, the dislocation from work, the social isolation, the misinformation and conspiracy theories that were rife, people spending much more time on the internet because of restrictions et cetera. I am keen to know, and this might be anecdotal from your observation, which is fine, if you have you seen any changes in the activity. Was there a moment over the last two years when it kind of accelerated, and has it diminished somewhat? Are you hearing feedback about the level of activity, and how is it continuing and how is it morphing in this next phase post the pandemic?

Mr McKENZIE: I can only offer anecdotal comments.

The CHAIR: Of course, no problem.

Mr McKENZIE: It is a quantitative measure that counterterrorist enforcement agencies and ASIO would be best to answer. I would suspect that if the pandemic and the explosion of online conspiracy theories and encrypted communication hubs were catalysts for these groups recruiting and expanding, they have not gone away. Yes, the call to action—'Let's get out on the streets of Melbourne and have a crack at the police or the state government'—those immediate things that people can cling to are not so obvious anymore, but the hubs they have formed, the groups they have formed, they have learned about how to recruit, they have learned how to communicate, and that will not be going away. I do suspect there has probably been a drop-off. But the thing to understand and the biggest takeaway for me, having infiltrated through undercover and by dealing with agencies et cetera for a long period of time now, is just how committed some of these extremists are. They are whole-of-life Neo-Nazis. The full whole-of-lifers, there are not hundreds of them, but there are enough of them and they are that dedicated to recruitment to be of constant concern. We will not stop them. How do we stop the huge pools that they recruit from?

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: I was just interested in pursuing further the issue of education in schools, noting that our government is funding Holocaust education for year 9s and 10s specifically because there are many who unfortunately have been found not to even be aware of what happened with Hitler et cetera. I would not define that as deradicalisation, but it is specifically targeted to reduce judgement and hopefully create generations that are less likely to be radicalised in the future. I am not saying that deals with the acute situation, but is that the kind of thing you are looking for? Because the only thing I was going to say is that—I did teach briefly in my life—there is a lot of burden on teachers; they do an incredible role, and would it be third parties coming in or the teachers themselves? I am just looking at how that would be unpacked, that is all.

Mr McKENZIE: I offer no easy answer, nor do I have any education expertise to draw upon. I think, though, there is a tendency that we go to the police and ASIO and federal and state agencies, 'Your job is to keep these guys at bay. Identify them, arrest them, deal with them'. Last year we had ASIO's director-general saying, 'Whoa, whoa, whoa. This is not just a problem for us. This is a problem for the whole of society', and he named schools and parents. What we are hopeless at, because it is complicated, is: how do we influence the syllabus, influence teaching, to get to as many young people as possible in the shortest period of time? Our schools are obviously great platforms for doing that. It is easy to say, but then how to make the teaching meaningful? I suspect that there is a real lag between what agencies are seeing and filtering through government systems into schools to have programs that are relevant and meaningful and engaging where young people can go, 'Oh. Well, yes, this is a conspiracy theory. This is misinformation. I might be confronted by a recruiter via the internet, via this in the future'. But we should be thinking about having those sorts of teachings spread among younger people. Is it happening? I have got no idea, but it certainly should be. I suspect it is not happening. I mean, it would actually fit quite neatly into a syllabus around misinformation, the internet, polarisation of our society—all those sorts of things. Actually if people can be taught about this huge misinformation—propaganda, right-wing, all those sorts of issues—as part of a school program, I mean, that may give them the tools to deal with recruitment attempts later on in life.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Are there any further questions from committee members? No? All good. Well, we will draw this session to a close. Thank you so much, Mr McKenzie, for your evidence and your work thus far today. It has been very illuminating, if not chilling at some parts, to understand the nature of the problem that we are dealing with.

Witness withdrew.