

Threats of 2 years jail for road disruption and visa cancellations an unconscionable attack on protest rights

Last Thursday, the NSW government flagged that it was seeking to introduce legislation that will make disrupting roads, transport and industrial facilities punishable by up to 2 years in jail and a \$22,000 fine. This comes after new regulations were introduced, without the opportunity for parliamentary debate, imposing similar penalties for protests on all Greater Sydney bridges and tunnels.

Protest marchers on city roads and union groups taking action at industrial sites could come under the umbrella of these draconian laws. Everyone from school kids marching for climate action to anti-war protestors would run the risk of incurring these penalties when they set out on a march.

Such laws are incompatible with the democratic right to protest and our fundamental civil liberties. The 39 undersigned legal, human rights and community organisations call on the NSW government to cease the introduction of draconian penalties for protests.

If new anti-protest legislation is introduced, we urge all members of parliament to uphold our democratic rights by voting against the legislation.

Two protestors participating in direct action in Sydney have also had their visas cancelled on the grounds that their presence posed a threat to the 'good order of the Australian community'. This exercise of the Minister's power does not seem merited in these circumstances and threatens the ability of people who aren't citizens to participate in democratic expression and assembly.

We are also deeply concerned by the Acting Premier's comments criticising protestors for seeking legal advice. Seeking legal advice is a fundamental right and not a basis for legitimate criticism.

These freedoms are a cornerstone of the Australian community. Any crackdown on our capacity to exercise them is a serious threat to democracy.



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DEMOCRACY
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FOR INTERNATIONAL
JUSTICE**



GREENPEACE



South East Region
Conservation Alliance NSW



**GRATA
FUND**





**Medical
Association for
Prevention of War
(Australia)**



Dying with Dignity
New South Wales



Great Southern Forest



AFCA
Australian Forests & Climate Alliance inc.

Legal Observers NSW

counterAct





“The proposed laws are the latest example of an alarming trend of state governments attempting to unnecessarily restrict people’s right to protest. Peaceful protesters should not face prison sentences or fines for standing up for what’s right. Instead of restricting our fundamental human rights, governments should ensure that everyone can exercise their right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.” – Amnesty International Australia

“Everyone in our community should have a right to protest and press for economic, social and legal change without fear of repression. If the NSW Government proceeds with this legislation it would dangerously limit our democratic rights. People should not be imprisoned for having their voice heard or engaging in non-violent direct action.” – Tim Leach, Executive Director, Community Legal Centres NSW

The Australian public has, throughout history, used protest to demonstrate opposition to wars of aggression, conscription, nuclear testing, and nuclear weapons. Our democratic right to assemble and protest is fundamental to progress towards a more peaceful and just society, and must be protected. – Medical Association for Prevention of War (founder 2017 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate ICAN and affiliate 1985 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate IPPNW)

Signees

350 Australia
Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT
ActionReady
AidWatch
Amnesty International
Asylum Seekers Centre
Australian Centre for International Justice
Australian Council of Social Service
Australian Democracy Network
Australian Forests and Climate Alliance
Australian Youth Climate Council
Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility
Bellingen Environment Centre
Bob Brown Foundation
Community Legal Centres NSW
CounterAct
Dying with Dignity NSW
Forest Conservation Victoria
Forest Defence NSW
Friends of the Earth Australia
Friends of the Forest Mogo
Frontline Action on Coal

Goongerah Environment Centre
Great Southern Forest
Grata Fund
Greenpeace Australia Pacific
Human Rights Law Centre
Inner City Legal Centre
Jesuit Social Services
Legal Observers NSW
Medical Association for Prevention of War
Melbourne Activist Legal Support
National Justice Project
Redfern Legal Centre
South East Region Conservation Alliance Inc
The Sunrise Project
WA Forest Alliance
Whitsunday Conservation Council
Youth Support + Advocacy Service