



Submission to the

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security
(PJCIS) inquiry into extremist movements and radicalism in
Australia

11 February 2021

1. Introduction

1.1. All Together Now – a nationally-focussed racial equity charity – welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security. Given All Together Now’s remit of challenging racism, this submission focusses solely on far-right extremism. As such, this submission highlights the broad and deep-rooted nature of the problem of far-right extremism in Australia and the urgent need for more support for preventive and community-based programs, research and interventions that promote community resilience on a structural and systemic level and through an intersectional lens.

1.2. All Together Now has been working to undermine far-right extremism in Australia since 2012. Formerly known as EXIT White Power, the Community Action for Preventing Extremism (CAPE) project¹ has been spearheading All Together Now’s ongoing work in promoting resilience to far-right extremism by: undermining recruitment processes; promoting counter-narratives and alternative narratives; and by enhancing the capacity of people in the community to respond to and challenge far-right extremism.

1.3. In 2016 CAPE was awarded multi-year funding from the NSW government, as part of Multicultural NSW’s COMPACT Program.² The objective was to increase community resilience against the threat of far-right hate and extremism by training and supporting a NSW-wide network of frontline workers who work with vulnerable young people who might be at risk of engaging with far-right extremism.

1.4. Since mid-2018, the CAPE project has facilitated a total of 23 specialised urban and regional training programs and trained over 258 frontline workers in NSW. The project has also developed and distributed updated training and support resources to over 6000 people through its

¹ For more information, please refer to the project’s website: <https://cape.alltogethernow.org.au/> (accessed 9 February 2021)

² See: <https://multicultural.nsw.gov.au/compact/> (accessed 9 February 2021)

website and newsletters. In February 2021, All Together Now published a report detailing the results of the last two years of the COMPACT-funded CAPE project (2018-2020).³ This report included an independent evaluation by researchers from Macquarie University’s Department of Security Studies and Criminology. In their report, the Macquarie University evaluators concluded that that the CAPE program had “in all cases met and surpassed” expectations, as well as established “a high degree of institutional expertise, experience, and capacity that is world-leading in the space of countering far-right extremism”.

1.5. All Together Now would like to focus its submission on the following points included in the terms of reference of the inquiry:⁴

- “the nature and extent of, and threat posed by, extremist movements and persons holding extremist views in Australia” (cf. “1”);
- “the role and influence of radical and extremist groups, which currently fall short of the legislative threshold for proscription, in fostering disharmony in Australia and as a conduit to persons on a pathway to extremism” (cf. “3c”);
- “further steps the Commonwealth could take to reinforce social cohesion, counter violent extremism and address the growing diversification of extremist ideology in Australia” (cf. “3e”).

2. Far-right extremism produces a broad spectrum of hate and violence

2.1. Based on our experience working on countering far-right extremism projects, programs and research,⁵ as well as our extensive experience monitoring Australian far-right extremist

³ All Together Now, ‘Building Community Resilience to Far-Right Extremism: A Case Study of the Community Action for Preventing Extremism (CAPE) Project’, February 2021: <https://alltogethernow.org.au/cape-report-2020/>

⁴ See: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/ExtremistMovements/Terms_of_Reference (accessed 10 February 2021).

⁵ For example, in 2019-2020, All Together Now contributed data, expert advice and analysis to a Macquarie University led research project funded by the NSW government that aimed to map online far-right extremist networks and narratives in NSW. See, for public report and executive summary: <https://www.mq.edu.au/newsroom/2020/10/09/rise-of-online-right-wing-extremism-mapped-in-landmark-nsw-study/> (accessed 9 February 2021).

groups and networks,⁶ All Together Now posits that the problem of far-right extremist hate and violence in Australia is both deeply rooted in and connected with broader issues of racism, the history and continuing impact of colonialism, and white privilege.

2.2. Far-right extremism produces different forms of hate and violence that are both deep-rooted and intersectional. The spectrum of hate and violence that far-right extremist behaviour and activity, both offline and online, produces can range from micro-aggressions, verbal abuse, hate speech, hate crime, direct physical violence, and terrorism. This spectrum of hate and violence is experienced on a daily basis by targeted communities and groups and includes but is not limited to racist, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, misogynist, homophobic, transphobic and ableist forms of hate and violence.

2.3. Far-right extremist hate and violence is produced both offline and online. Online it is prevalent both on the dark web and the clear web, and both on mainstream social media platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter) and so-called alternative “free speech” social media platforms that are generally unmoderated and uncensored (such as Gab, Telegram and MeWe) and offer substantive privacy protections for all its users, including far-right extremist users and recruiters. As reported by All Together Now,⁷ the current COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions have not only led to a surge in alarming behaviours including anti-Asian racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and the circulation of hateful conspiracy theories,⁸ but also has created ideal conditions for far-right extremists to recruit more young people online. Young people at risk include those who may be experiencing unemployment or underemployment, social isolation, loneliness and depression, together with spending more time online as a result of the pandemic and social distancing measures.

⁶ All Together Now regularly provides government agencies with expert advice, including briefings and trainings, regarding the activities and capacities of far-right extremist groups, channels and/or platforms and their threat level to the community.

⁷ All Together Now, ‘Right-Wing Extremism and COVID-19 in Australia’, May 2020: https://alltogethernow.org.au/extremism/?utm_source=websitehomepage&utm_campaign=positionpaper (accessed 10 February 2021).

⁸ Other alarming trends of immediate concern observed and reported by All Together included: “messages expressing hope that COVID-19 will spread within different countries or communities to reduce particular minority groups; and anti-government narratives, actively undermining the efforts of the Australian government to implement measures (for example, physical distancing) to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in the country.” Id. at 1.

2.4. Far-right extremist narratives and ideas are also normalised, enabled and produced by some traditional mainstream media channels, outlets and platforms. The research results of All Together Now’s Media Monitoring project, a project funded by the Department of Social Services and conducted in partnership with the University of Technology Sydney,⁹ have consistently shown that social commentary in mainstream media is negatively biased against First Nations people, Muslim people, African-Australians and Chinese-Australians.¹⁰ According to our research findings, a disproportionate amount of this negatively biased content is published in News Corp-owned newspapers, which have high readership numbers as measured by Roy Morgan.¹¹ All Together Now's latest (unpublished) research of readers’ comments suggests that these mainstream platforms are not spaces for healthy debates and critical engagement. A ‘ripple effect’ is created by pieces that frame race negatively, where readers who comment tend to agree with the articles, and engage in non-factual conversations on important topics such as immigration and citizenship, religion, racism and politics, rather than debate the merit of ideas (which is purportedly one of the main roles of the Fourth Estate). A prominent theme in readers' comments is political disenchantment. The evidence shows that negatively biased social commentary published by mainstream media outlets helps maintain discourses that breed racism.

2.5. Many of the formal and informal groups, networks, cells, channels and platforms that are active online and/or offline currently fall short of the legislative threshold for proscription, however they foster serious “disharmony” and indeed offer pathways to further radicalisation and direct extremist behaviour and activity.

2.6. Based on the above observations, All Together Now submits that any “further steps the Commonwealth could take to reinforce social cohesion” and “counter violent extremism” should

⁹ Other project partners include: Asian Australian Alliance; Cultural and Indigenous Resource Centre Australia (CIRCA); Islamic Sciences and Research Academy Australia (ISRA).

¹⁰ All Together Now, ‘Social Commentary and Racism in 2019’, December 2019: <https://alltogethernow.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Social-Commentary-and-Racism-2019-1.pdf> (accessed 10 February 2021); All Together Now, ‘Social Commentary, Racism and COVID-19: A Case Study on Opinion Pieces in Australian Mainstream Newspapers’, October 2020: https://alltogethernow.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ATN-Media-Report-2020_online.pdf (accessed 11 February 2021).

¹¹ See: <http://www.roymorgan.com/industries/media/readership/newspaper-readership> (accessed 10 February 2021).

focus on policies that recognise the deep roots, broad nature and full spectrum of the problem of far-right extremism in Australia and on supporting programs, research and interventions that promote community resilience to far-right extremism on a structural and systemic level and through an intersectional lens. In conclusion, far-right extremism cannot simply be “solved” with a change in legislation alone; it must be backed up with substantive evidence-based policies and programs that address the underlying issues enabling far-right extremism to flourish. This ought to include introducing and adequately funding the implementation of a national anti-racism strategy.

3. Significant knowledge and skills gaps relating to far-right extremism

3.1. As mentioned above (cf. “1. Introduction”), All Together Now has been working to build community resilience to far-right extremism in Australia since 2012, primarily under the banner of its CAPE program. During the evaluation of the last two years of the COMPACT-funded CAPE program,¹² a program which focused on training and supporting a NSW-wide network of frontline workers who work with vulnerable young people at risk of engaging with far-right extremism, highly significant statistical findings emerged. All Together Now would like to draw the attention of the Inquiry to these findings as evidence that the Australian community is grossly underprepared to respond to the growing challenge and threat that far-right extremism poses.

3.2. The evaluation indicated that the CAPE project was able to establish strong project reach in urban and rural areas of NSW through extensive stakeholder engagement and community outreach.¹³ The project reached many frontline workers who work with vulnerable young people who might be at risk of engaging with far-right extremism. Prior to their involvement in the project, these workers felt they had limited knowledge, confidence and skills to respond to the growing challenge of far-right extremism, as evidenced by the result of the pre-training surveys that were issued by Macquarie University as part of their evaluation of the program. The pre-training survey results revealed the existence of the following significant knowledge gaps

¹² All Together Now, ‘Building Community Resilience to Far-Right Extremism: A Case Study of the Community Action for Preventing Extremism (CAPE) Project’, February 2021: <https://alltogethernow.org.au/cape-report-2020/>

¹³ Id. at 1.

perceived by NSW frontline workers in relation to recognising and responding to far-right extremism and at-risk young people:

- 83% of participants believed their **knowledge** of far-right extremist hate and violence was very low, low, or moderate;
- 66% of participants believed their **ability to identify** extremist narratives when they arise in online and offline conversations was very low, low, or moderate;
- 77% of participants felt that their **confidence to respond** to and challenge far-right extremist messages was very low, low, or moderate.

3.4. While the CAPE program was able to achieve success and address and remedy these knowledge and skills gaps with these specific participants,¹⁴ All Together Now would like to submit this data to the Inquiry as evidence of the significant and worrying lack of existing community resilience to far-right extremism and the threat it poses to our communities and as a strong indication as to where the urgent and immediate priorities should lie in terms of any “further steps the Commonwealth could take to reinforce social cohesion” and “counter violent extremism”, as requested by the Inquiry. All Together Now submits that more support should be provided to preventive, resilience building and community-based programs, research and interventions.

4. Conclusion

4.1. All Together Now submits that any “further steps the Commonwealth could take to reinforce social cohesion” and “counter violent extremism” should focus on policies that recognise the deep roots, broad nature and full spectrum of the problem of far-right extremism in Australia and on supporting preventive and community-based programs, research and

¹⁴ Id. at 10: “Post-training survey data indicated that participants’ engagement in the CAPE training course led to an immediate and significant benefit in knowledge, skills and confidence:

- After completion of the training, the level of participants rating their knowledge of far-right extremism as high or very high increased from 9% in the pre-training survey to 61% in the post-training survey;
- 71% of participants ranked their ability to identify extremist messages as high or very high;
- 60% of participants ranked their confidence to challenge extremist messages after training as high or very high.”

interventions that promote community resilience on a structural and systemic level and through an intersectional lens. It is vital that Australia creates the structural social conditions that prevent young people from joining far-right extremist groups, while also building the resilience of individuals and communities to withstand the divisive, hateful and violent behaviours and activities of these groups.

5. Submission details

This submission was prepared by All Together Now and submitted on 11 February 2021.

All Together Now is a racial equity organisation that seeks to educate Australians about racism. We do this by imagining and delivering innovative and evidence-based projects that promote racial equity. We are community driven, we utilise partnered approaches and our work is intersectional. For more information please see our website at <https://alltogethernow.org.au>.

As All Together Now's office is currently unattended due to COVID-19 restrictions, please contact us by email in the first instance:

Email: info@alltogethernow.org.au

Address: PO Box 164, Petersham NSW 2049

All Together Now was established in 2010 and is registered with the ACNC.

ABN 74 144 510 556

This submission was written on unceded Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We acknowledge their Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge that Australia was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.