



## Senate Estimates opening statement February 2026

Thank you, Chair.

On behalf of ASIO I acknowledge the deep pain and grief of the families, friends and community of those killed and injured in the heartbreaking and senseless Bondi terror attack.

I acknowledge the first responders – both uniformed and civilian – who ran towards danger to help. And I acknowledge my staff and our law enforcement partners who have been literally working around the clock since the attack.

At times like these, it is understandable – and appropriate – for the community to ask questions and demand answers.

How did this happen?

Why did this happen?

Why wasn't it discovered?

Why wasn't it stopped?

Was enough done to address antisemitism? If not, why not?

How can we prevent a similar attack in the future?

These questions and many more will no doubt be addressed by the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion.

That is as it should be – the Royal Commission is the appropriate place and the appropriate vehicle to explore these legitimate concerns.

ASIO will cooperate fully. In fact, we are already cooperating. ASIO expects scrutiny and embraces accountability, and for that reason I welcome the Royal Commission.

As a nation, we are rightly shocked by any terrorist attack. But we should not be surprised.

A national terrorism threat level of PROBABLE means just that: an attack or attack planning is more likely than not.

When we raised the level in August 2024, we warned that Australia’s security environment was degrading. I said we were tracking an increase in extremism:

- more Australians being radicalised
- more Australians being radicalised more quickly, and
- more Australians willing to use violence to advance their cause.

We noted that the most likely terrorist attack would involve an individual or small group, using easily obtained weapons such as guns, moving to violence with little to no warning in a way that would be difficult to detect.

I repeatedly put on the record my concerns about escalating antisemitism in our country, with the general harassment and intimidation of Jewish Australians transitioning to the direct targeting of people, businesses and places of worship.

I told this Committee that antisemitism was ASIO’s most pressing threat to life priority.

The Royal Commission and any future court processes constrain what I can say publicly.

But I'd like to take this opportunity to put several matters on the record.

First, a note of caution about hindsight.

The benefits of hindsight are obvious; as an engineer I know the importance of root-cause analysis.

It's critical to also acknowledge the handicaps of hindsight, though.

Things that might appear obvious in retrospect may not have been obvious at the time, and when individuals made decisions in one context it may not be fair to judge them in a different context.

In the days and weeks after the Bondi attack, assumptions, assertions, hypotheticals and opinions quickly became accepted as facts by some. They were recycled and exaggerated in the following weeks. This resulted in calls for action that were not supported by any fact.

This is why the Royal Commission is so important. It will take time to get the full facts and it is critical these facts are known because that is how the questions I outlined earlier will be answered.

Immediately after the attack, I commissioned a review of ASIO's decision-making around our investigation into Naveed Akram.

The review was conducted internally, but by a reviewer from outside ASIO who received unfettered and unfiltered access to our records.

The Review is highly classified because it contains details about individuals and sensitive capabilities, however I can say that we stand by our 2019 assessment the Akrams did not adhere to or intend to engage in violent extremism at that time.

In other words, many of the claims and criticisms being made about ASIO's handling of the case are baseless.

Of course, these matters will be investigated by the Royal Commission and we will provide it with the full, classified report to assist its inquiries. The Royal Commissioner, of course, will reach her own conclusions.

If ASIO is found to have made mistakes, we will own them and we will learn from them.

ASIO and our law enforcement partners have disrupted 28 major terrorism plots since September 2014.

Tragically, though, we did not know what the perpetrators of the Bondi attack were planning – or indeed that they were planning anything.

It appears the alleged terrorists demonstrated a high level of security awareness to hide their plot. In simple terms, they went dark to stay off the radar.

This is a matter of grave regret for me and my officers. It weighs on us heavily.

But that does not mean intelligence was ignored or my officers made mistakes.

The grim reality is – as I've also said many times – ASIO is not all seeing and all knowing.

We cannot stop every terrorist just as we cannot catch every spy but we work around the clock to keep Australians safe.

I assure this Committee we continue to use all our powers and all our capabilities, overt and covert, to protect Australia.

Thank you.