Brisbane Times

This was published 6 months ago

# Huge rally shouts the six-word chant Queensland plans to ban

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Updated February 10, 2026 — 1:47pm, first published February 9, 2026 — 8:47pm

"From the river to the sea" chants echoed through Brisbane's CBD on Monday evening, just a day after the Queensland government promised to outlaw the phrase in a bid to fight antisemitism.

Well over 1000 protesters descended on King George Square outside City Hall to show their opposition to Israeli president Isaac Herzog's Australian visit, but the LNP's laws were front and centre at the Queensland rally.

"We will not stop communicating the message of justice and peace upon which this movement is built," organiser Remah Naji told the crowd that gathered from 5pm.

Brisbane protesters were furious at the LNP government's plan to ban the phrase "from the river to the sea," with the phrase written on banners and chanted through the CBD. WILLIAM DAVIS

The Queensland government will introduce legislation this week criminalising public use of the phrases “from the river to the sea” and “globalise the intifada”, making it the first Australian state or territory to take such action.
The laws would also toughen penalties on the use of symbols such as swastikas, Nazi emblems, the Hamas and Islamic State flags, and the Hezbollah emblem. But the decision to ban the chants is more controversial, as they are widely used at frequent pro-Palestine rallies.

Naji argued on Monday night that the phrase called “for equality for all people”, while speaker Malaak Seleem said the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea should be a “free and just land for its rightful people”.

Organiser Remah Naji told the crowd she believed the phrase was a call “for equality for all people.” WILLIAM DAVIS

The Greens’ sole Queensland MP Michael Berkman said the chant’s meaning was being distorted.

“Whatever you do, don’t let anyone tell us what our own words mean. Don’t let them change the meaning of such basic phrases,” he told the crowd.
“Where the f--- is free speech Pauline [Hanson] through all of this?”

Naji revealed she was planning a possible court challenge against the legislation.

Well over 1,000 protesters descended on King George Square outside City Hall on Monday, as Israeli president Isaac Herzog met dignitaries in Sydney. WILLIAM DAVIS

## What the LNP and Jewish leaders said

Announcing the new laws on Sunday, Attorney-general Deb Frecklington said "from the river to the sea" was "horrific", "offensive", and "there to incite hate".
"[It means] to get rid of all Jews in between," Frecklington said. "I don't even like to say it out loud."

Premier David Crisafulli did not provide his definition or interpretation of the slogan but said "there is no way it's about liberation … it's about eradication".

Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies president Jason Steinberg with Premier David Crisafulli at the Queensland Holocaust Museum on Sunday. COURTNEY KRUK

Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies president Jason Steinberg, who was at the government's press conference, said the phrase called for the "slaughter [of] Jews" and denied it was used to fight for Palestinian freedom and human rights.

"'From the river to the sea' is from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, there will be no Jews. That is the Hamas battle cry, no Jews," Steinberg said.
"Israel is the land of the Jewish people, the ancestral homeland of the Jews."

## Chant's meaning debated in NSW

Following the terror attack on Bondi's Jewish community in December, a NSW parliamentary committee also considered laws to ban the "from the river to the sea" slogan.

Several organisations, including the Australian Jewish Association, the Australasian Union of Jewish Students and the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy, supported a crackdown, with the latter saying it "effectively calls for the ethnic cleansing of Jews at a minimum, and their genocide at maximum".
Other groups did not accept such definitions, with the Muslim Legal Network NSW arguing it was widely used in the context of peaceful protest, and the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network saying scrutiny of the words "places Palestinian identity and solidarity under special surveillance".

A submission by academic Dr Finola Laughren quotes a Canadian court ruling that says the phrase “has been used by both Israeli and Palestinian politicians on the far ends of their respective political spectrums to claim the land ‘from the river to the sea’ as belonging exclusively to either Jews or Palestinians and by more moderate camps … as reflecting a desire for a political solution that would allow both groups to live in freedom in either one or two states”.

In her submission, Laughren said there was no evidence that the slogans had been “used in themselves as an endorsement or expression of sympathy [for] any terrorist organisation or extremist group”.

The committee ultimately accepted that the meaning of the phrase was contested, and did not recommend a ban.

## What did protesters say?

Shane said he chose to protest on Monday night against the Albanese government for inviting president Herzog to Australia. COURTNEY KRUK

Protesters on Monday night were furious at the LNP proposal.

“It means, the Palestinians, their land was from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean and they had their land stolen by the United Nations, gave it to the Israelis for their homeland,” Shane said.

“The Israelis have behaved like Nazis really towards the Palestinian people who are the Indigenous people of that land.”

Dane and Zandy travelled from the Gold Coast for the Palestine rally, saying the federal government’s decision to invite the Israeli president was “grotesque.” COURTNEY KRUK

Dane said the phrase to him was a “simple call for freedom”.

“We’re calling for the freedom of Palestinian people and for their right to dignity and self-determination,” he said.

Rashan Ahmed, meanwhile, expressed concern the government was twisting the words’ meaning.

"They're trying to frame it like it's some sort of antisemitic phrase … but it's not," he said. "It's literally just telling them that they can't kill innocent children or families and invade."

"Our government wants to stop us from saying from the river to the sea, such a, a harmless gesture which is meant to demonstrate freedom from the oppression that Israel has put on Palestine for many years," Mak said, pictured here with Jamie. COURTNEY KRUK

## What comes next

The Crisafulli government said it consulted the Jewish community, the Queensland Police Service, the Crime and Corruption Committee and the Queensland Human Rights Commission about the proposed laws.

Muslim and Palestinian groups were not consulted.
The legislation is expected to be introduced this week, when parliament returns for the first sitting week of the year.

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**CORRECTION** — An earlier version of this story incorrectly attributed a quote from an Ontario Supreme Court ruling to Dr Finola Laughren. The quote was drawn from the ruling in her submission to the NSW inquiry.

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