

New South Wales politics

NSW passes law to make coercive control a stand-alone offence in an Australian first

Attorney general says government could have spent years consulting but instead acted to 'save lives'

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📷 A NSW coroner's court review into domestic violence deaths found coercive control was present in 99% of cases. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

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New South Wales has become the first Australian state to create a stand-alone offence of coercive control after parliament passed legislation on Wednesday amid calls for [further consultation on the bill](#).

Speaking after the vote, the attorney general, Mark Speakman, said the government could have spent years in consultation “chasing the perfect” but instead had passed the law to “save lives”. He vowed to review it within two years.

“Today’s the day we have passed a law to save lives in NSW,” he said. “We know that almost invariably coercive control is a precursor to intimate partner domestic violence homicide.”

Speakman said it would protect people from “domestic terrorism”. “Commonly what is worse than the bruises or broken bones is the pattern of psychological, sexual, spiritual, financial and other abuse that has them trapped in their own homes, trapped at the hands of someone who’s meant to love them,” he said.

Perpetrators use controlling and harassing behaviours including financial limits, repeated communications and restricting social connections to deny their partners’ autonomy and independence.

People found guilty under the new law will face up to seven years in jail.

The stand-alone offence applies to current or former partner relationships but the law will not be retroactive.

Dominic Perrottet said it would deter abusers.

“There is no doubt that these reforms, which are the first of their kind in this country, will help save lives and deter an abusive and controlling pattern of behaviour that is unacceptable,” the premier said.

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The change comes after a parliamentary inquiry heard evidence about how coercive control was affecting women and families across the state.


A NSW coroner's court review into domestic violence deaths found the practice was present in 99% of relationships preceding domestic homicides.

The parents of a Queensland woman, Hannah Clarke, have been **[advocating for coercive control laws](#)** since the death of their daughter and grandchildren at the hands of her estranged husband in 2020.

Despite broad support, many experts from across the domestic violence support sector have raised serious concerns about the amount of time they had to give feedback on the draft legislation.

Domestic Violence NSW's chief executive, Renata Field, urged further consultation, alongside the former Australian of the year Rosie Batty.

Batty said: “If criminalisation is not given enough time for consultation with victim-survivors and experts in the field, the complex legislation has the potential to retraumatise the people it was designed to protect.”

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Speaking after the bill passed, Field said the government needed to get education and funding for the sector sorted out before the law come into effect.

“We need evidence based training that’s in person, for police and the judiciary, to make sure that they understand the legislation and the impact,” she said.

“This is going to, and has already seen, an increase in people reaching out for support because they’re recognising that this is the type of harm that’s happening for them.”

The chief executive of [Wurringa Baiya Aboriginal Women’s Legal Centre](#), Christine Robinson, told Guardian Australia the bill’s relatively narrow definition of relationships did not take into account the experience in Aboriginal communities.

There needed to be “thorough cultural and systems reform, including: police culture, police investigations, criminal court systems and support systems”, she said.

“We do not want to see a new offence that once implemented will harm, not protect, Aboriginal women,” she said.

“If an Aboriginal woman is unable to persuade a police officer that she is the primary victim of physical violence, what hope or incentive is there to try to persuade a police officer that she has experienced ongoing psychological abuse and economic abuse?”

Included in the legislation was an implementation period of up to 19 months before the laws take effect to allow for police, judicial officers and the population to be educated about the changes.

Speakman said education was the next major hurdle. “We can’t have a policeman in living room, in every bedroom around NSW,” he said.

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