

# Addressing knife-crime in the wake of horrific events



BY KERRIE DAVIES

**T**HE alarming surge in knife-crime this year has instilled fear and anxiety in the community, prompting calls for urgent action from law enforcement agencies and policymakers.

The NSW Government has announced a package of what they call “common-sense reforms” to target possession of knives, particularly among young people and reduce knife crime and boost community safety.

The government will:

- Develop legislation modelled on Queensland’s Jack’s Law which will give police powers to “wand” or “scan” people for knives without a warrant in designated areas, including transport hubs, shopping centres and other crowded places:

- these powers will be made available in circumstances where a relevant weapons offence/knife crime has occurred within the past 6 months

- an authority can then be issued by police, enabling them to “wand” or “scan” people, and
- the authority will last for 12 hours, with an option to extend as required.

- Make it illegal to sell knives to a child under the age of 18, with provisions for exemptions for retailers selling to young people who need a knife for their work or study.

- Increase penalties for people selling knives to young people under the age of 18.

Premier Chris Minns said the package of reforms will help address knife-related crime, get knives off streets and keep the community safer.

The new “wandering” laws will be based on Jack’s Law and adapted for the NSW context with details



being finalised ahead of legislation to be introduced to parliament.

Their aim will be to keep the community safe, targeting areas where there have been increasing issues related to knife crime or knife possession offences, which could be on public transport or in nightlife, entertainment, or shopping precincts.

“The reforms send a strong message about the seriousness of knife related violence and the NSW Government’s commitment to take immediate proactive steps to prevent future tragedies, while also addressing longer term challenges such as serious mental health issues and the broader incidence of violent crime,” Premier Chris Minns said.

“In recent weeks and months, we have all borne witness to the devastating outcomes of knife related violence.

“I know that many in our community have followed the devastating media coverage and heard the stories of victims and families – tragically there have been so many recent examples.

“Our communities are still in mourning, but it’s essential that we step up to take immediate action to send a clear message that NSW will simply not accept these kinds of crimes.

## Police target knife crime in Operation Foil

Last month, Operation Foil saw more than 800 officers from every Police Area Command and Police District in NSW, assisted by specialist officers from Youth Command, Police Transport and Public Safety Command and Traffic and Highway Patrol Command target knife crime and anti-social behaviour.

During the high visibility operation 51 knives / weapons were seized with 145 people charged with weapon related offences, including seizure of a firearm.

Detective Superintendent Darren Newman, Operations Manager North-West Metropolitan Region said the aim of Operation Foil was to remove weapons from the streets and make the community safer.

“Operation Foil was established to get these dangerous weapons out of the hands of those individuals who may potentially use them to target other people,” said Det Sup Newman.

“People need to understand that carrying a knife is illegal unless you have a justifiable reason. If you are armed with a knife and become involved in an altercation where someone is injured or even killed, you can face a substantial prison sentence.”

“Operations of this nature will continue to be run by police,” said Superintendent Newman.

## What can we do to protect ourselves

**E**VIDENTLY, the Police and the NSW Government are focussed on addressing knife crime in our state. But the tragic event in Bondi Junction has many of us asking ourselves what would we do if in that situation? Of course many would fantasise about taking the perpetrator out single-handedly or earning the “Bollard Girl” title; but the reality of being faced with an armed person on a mission is pretty confronting.

We posed the question to local security expert Gina Field, who has owned and operated Nepean Regional Security for 26 years.

“Easier said than done, but try and remain calm at all times would be my first piece of advice,” Gina said.

“Most active attackers are extremely unpredictable and ensure the element of surprise. Most of these attacks can be well pre-planned, however there are also the ones that just take the opportunity for what ever reason.

“Personally and on a business level, it is time to be ready and more aware, not only for individual safety, but the safety of staff.

Gina believes it is important to pre-plan and educate yourself on your surroundings and whether the site you are at has security, exits, open spaces, and evacuation points.

“It is really important from a business perspective that responding to active attackers is on the training list- particularly in situations of mass gatherings, shopping centres, festivals, and sporting events; however, the more open, the better the prospect of survival is,” Gina said.

### Leave if it is safe to do so

“The priority is to get away from the offender the best you can. Next is to attempt, if safe to do so, to leave the site. If possible, use items around you, chairs, banners, tables, or whatever is available for a shield as you evacuate the site.

“If, in the case of a shopping centre, never run with an extreme amount of shopping bags, these will slow you down. Leave the bags behind.

“Turn your phone on silent as soon as possible – a ringing phone is a give away for where you are.”

### Hide and take cover

“If you cannot leave safely, find a spot to take cover and hide for your safety. Finding a secure spot with lockable doors is best – never use a fire cabinet or similar because there are no locks on the doors. Continually reassess the situation, to see if you can leave safely.

“Never place yourself in a situation, that you have cornered yourself in with limited escape opportunities.

“Make sure you keep reassessing and please remain calm. Attackers love the look of fear in people, and showing a lack of fear really does put some of them off.

“Only if safe, and the opportunity arises, take the attacker down. This of course is the last resort to save YOUR life – pick up anything to keep the attacker away.



### Report and try and remember as much as you can

“Remember that the Police and authorities have to piece all of the incidents and occurrences together, so the more you can tell them, the better. The times, locations, actions, words, conversations.

“Take note of the time. Usually there is a lot of screaming; what are people saying?

“Where safe to do so, call 000 – give them as much detail as possible, what the attacker looks like, whether they are armed, and what they are screaming out; police need as much detail as possible.

“Be clear, know the address of where you are at, and do this in your pre-planning.”

We all want to get about our business and enjoy life without being on high alert, but as Gina points out, being prepared and knowing your surroundings doesn’t take a lot of time or effort. It is really just being consciously observant. You never know when that could be critically important.