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## **‘Anti-bikie’ laws will criminalise innocent group activity under guise of government protection**

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Thursday, 8 July 2010

Victorians will be more threatened by any anti-terrorism style laws, seeking to outlaw congregations of people with like interests, than they would be with any bikie groups in the state, the Australian Lawyers Alliance said today.

The Alliance was responding to calls made by the Victorian opposition, for Victoria to follow moves by NSW Police to outlaw motorcycle gangs in the state.

“We don’t endorse violence and criminal activity but we sure don’t endorse anti-terrorism style laws, either. Such laws may well be declared unconstitutional if the current High Court challenge to the SA bikie laws proves successful,” Alliance director, Greg Barns, said today.

“The difficulty with such an approach is it criminalises what might be innocent activity – such as people meeting together; as well as the actions of friends and relatives who associate with bikie gang members,” he said.

“It would make criminal being a member of a group no matter what a person’s role,” he said.

Mr Barns said fundamental threads of our justice system were under threat with such a move – freedom of association, the rule of law and the separation of powers.

“This trend to limit civil liberties started post-2001 when the federal government sought greater control under the guise of protection with the anti-terror laws.

“We have already seen some of the damage, such a policy has created, with the wrongful arrest of Mohamed Haneef and the resulting compensation pending in a wrongful arrest claim currently lodged against the Australian Government.

Now we have the latest push with the introduction of ‘anti-bikie’ legislation, in some states of Australia, and we can expect more innocent people will be locked up as a result, costing Australian tax-payers more in compensation.”

Mr Barns said the best way to protect democracy and strengthen law and order was by protecting people’s civil rights and one of these was the right to associate freely with others.”

**For more details contact: Australian Lawyers Alliance, public affairs manager, Mandy Wyer on 0418 270 656 or Alliance Director, Greg Barns on 0419 691 846.**