

## Canberra police begin dismantling 'sovereign citizens' protest camp near Old Parliament House

*Operation comes as two men allegedly involved in December protest granted bail by ACT magistrate who suggests 'get some good quality legal advice'*



*Police officers stand guard outside the fire-damaged entrance to Old Parliament House in Canberra on 30 December.*

*Australian Associated Press*  
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Police have begun an operation to clear a protest camp near Old Parliament House in Canberra as two so-called sovereign citizen activists allegedly involved in last month's protest when a fire broke out were granted bail in a local court.

The operation on Friday followed a request from the National Capital Authority (NCA) to "remove structures and vehicles that are on commonwealth land without a permit".

Police told the protesters that by 4pm all tents, caravans, vehicles and other camping equipment had to be cleared "or police may remove and take custody of these items". The "sovereign citizens" shouted back: "Shame on you."

At 4.15pm police moved in and began asking individuals to remove their equipment and vehicles. Some people were seen to voluntarily pack their cars.

But officers then began physically dismantling tents and bundling them in a collection van. Some protesters were shouting messages such as “You will regret it” as officers moved in.

The separate Aboriginal Tent Embassy, established in 1972, has a permit from the NCA and was not impacted.

The “sovereign citizens” group has been arguing against Covid-19 vaccinations and calling for the federal government to be “evicted”.

Protesters on Thursday sought to enter nearby Parliament House but were prevented by police, with a number of people arrested in the forecourt.

Earlier on Friday, members of the movement rallied outside a Canberra court where two men arrested over a previous Old Parliament House protest were granted bail.

Bruce Shillingsworth Jr was charged with abetting arson as police allege he blocked emergency services from reaching the doors at Old Parliament House while another man allegedly lit a fire there on 30 December. Shillingsworth has pleaded not guilty.

Dylan Wilson was charged with assaulting a frontline service provider and obstructing a public official after alleged actions at the same protest.

Prosecutor Alexandra Back opposed bail for both men.

But Shillingsworth was granted bail after agreeing not to enter the suburb of Parkes – where Old Parliament House is located – and check-in at Sydney’s Redfern police station three times a week. He’s also agreed to not contact the alleged arsonist.

Magistrate Beth Campbell told the court Shillingsworth’s record suggested he was a man of his word.

“Bail only works if someone gives their word and keeps their word. What are my chances of you agreeing and keeping your word?” she asked. “My understanding is, rightly or wrongly, you hold the view the authority of this court and the laws of the nation do not bind you.”

Shillingsworth replied: “Your honour, you can take my word 100%. I have been an upstanding citizen within your law thus far.”

The interaction sparked anger from sovereign citizens in the courtroom as Campbell asked if Shillingsworth would agree to be subjected to his bail conditions.

The protesters continually interjected saying Shillingsworth had “diplomatic immunity” before angrily leaving the court as he agreed to the conditions.

Wilson was also granted bail after Campbell said police failed to produce relevant evidence relating to new charges.

Police allege Wilson tried to inhibit emergency services personnel from putting out the fire burning the doors of Old Parliament House by joining a line of protesters standing between officers and the fire.

Campbell said while more evidence may be produced to corroborate the fresh charges against Wilson “I cannot be asked to do a job that on this occasion police have failed to do themselves”.

“On the evidence before me, there is no clear evidence of him committing the two offences,” she said. “Standing between [the police and the fire] is not necessarily enough. The officer can just go around.”

Wilson – a self-proclaimed sovereign citizen who does not believe in the rule of law – continually interjected via video link, saying the court did not have legal jurisdiction to charge him.

“You are unlawfully detaining me in a kangaroo system,” he said. “I have not committed any crime, which is why they have come up with these stories.”

Wilson was muted twice.

Back said Wilson’s continual breach of prior bail conditions by returning to protest at Old Parliament House despite not being allowed in the suburb meant he would ignore future bail conditions.

With the breach being a fine-only matter, Campbell granted bail but sternly warned Wilson about future breaches, saying he would be remanded if he continued to ignore the conditions.

Wilson, who appeared without legal representation, said police did not have the jurisdiction to impose restrictions on his movement.

“That’s why you need to get some good quality legal advice,” Campbell said before muting him.

Leaders of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy have previously condemned the actions that led to the late December fire.

“The actions of such protestors conducting a ‘smoking ceremony’ was done so without the knowledge, consent or mandate of the embassy council and traditional owners responsible for the regulation of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy,” it said in a statement at the time.

It has been reported that members of the co-called sovereign citizens movement have been trying to take over the 50-year-old tent embassy.