

Annual Report 2024–25

# We're here for small business



Victorian  
Small Business  
Commission



The Hon Natalie Suleyman MP,  
Minister for Small Business and Employment  
Level 36, 121 Exhibition Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Minister,

**Annual Report 2024–25**

I am pleased to present to you the Annual Report 2024–25 on the operations of the Victorian Small Business Commission, covering the period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025.

The report is provided to you under section 16(2) of the Small Business Commission Act 2017 (the Act), in order for you to cause the report to be laid before each House of Parliament as required under section 16(3) of the Act.

Yours sincerely,

A blue ink signature, appearing to read "Lynda McAlary-Smith", written in a cursive style.

**Lynda McAlary-Smith**  
Victorian Small Business Commissioner

**October 2025**

Published by order, or under the authority, of  
the Parliament of Victoria.

This report is available at  
[www.vsbcbic.gov.au](http://www.vsbcbic.gov.au)

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**Authorised by the Victorian Small Business  
Commission**

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# Commissioner's Message



**In August 2024, I was delighted to be re-appointed as Victoria's Small Business Commissioner for a further five years. I'm energised to continue leading the Victorian Small Business Commission's (VSBC) important work assisting small businesses to avoid and resolve disputes.**

This year I received a new statement of expectations of the VSBC from the Hon Natalie Suleyman MP, Minister for Small Business and Employment, which has provided direction on where we'll focus our efforts.

Demand for our statutory alternative dispute resolution services remained very strong and we continue to experience increasing complexity in the nature of the disputes that we receive. In many instances the monetary value of the issues in dispute is also significant and this is seen most clearly with retail leasing disputes with respect to arrears and outgoings, and our Farm Debt Mediation work.

I'm proud of the continued dedication and work of our Dispute Resolution Officers (DROs) who resolved more than a third (33%) of disputes prior to formal mediation becoming necessary. This valuable assistance is of no cost to small business owners. This is well in excess of our Budget Portfolio Performance Measure of 25% and reflects the impact of the services that they provide, particularly in an environment where disputes are becoming more intractable.

Our panel of expert mediators successfully resolved 69% of mediated disputes which is also significantly higher than our Budget Portfolio Performance Measure of 60%.

Our mediation clients continued to hold our mediation services in high regard, rating their satisfaction on average at 80%. I thank our expert mediators for their continued service to Victorian small businesses.

We've continued to encourage Victorian Government departments and agencies to pay small business suppliers in a timely fashion. This year I've decided to increase their accountability by publishing the individual performance of all entities to which the Fair Payment Policy (policy) applies.

I expect that seeing these results tabled in parliament will further encourage all departments and entities to continue to uplift their payment times.

I've also included the penalty interest paid by agencies. While our expectation is the timely payment of small business, we positively acknowledge those agencies who've made penalty interest payments to their suppliers to provide some redress for not being paid in a timely way.

We also re-enlivened the Small Business Friendly Council Charter this year by holding a series of workshops for council staff. I wrote to council CEOs and invited them to report upon the work of their councils in delivering upon the six charter commitments. We greatly value our relationship with councils and are pleased to continue to work closely with them to uplift the experience of small businesses across Victoria.

We updated the VSBC website with a focus upon navigation and information architecture to make it simpler for Victorians to locate relevant information and apply for our assistance.

This financial year Victorian small business owners continued to try and trade their way out of COVID-era debts and tenancy relief arrangements, while also navigating economic headwinds, which included dampened consumer confidence. Hospitality and retail businesses, particularly in the Melbourne CBD, have faced the additional challenge of adapting to dynamic and unpredictable office worker numbers. Conversely, in our suburbs and regional centres, small businesses have benefitted from customers working remotely and spending locally on their lunch, dry cleaning and other services.

Our regional communities are also experiencing the same economic headwinds, but with the additional stress of drought and other weather events. Farming families are making difficult decisions in what are challenging conditions, and their hardship is visible in local towns where visitation and spending is impacted as a result.

Acknowledging the cashflow challenges businesses are facing, and the sustained high number of disputes relating to unpaid monies, our outreach program focused upon guidance on these matters, in addition to common retail leasing challenges and farm debt mediation.

In delivering this work, I've been able to speak to thousands of small business owners, from Castlemaine to Cranbourne.

On a personal note, I underwent spinal surgery this year which required me to take a period of leave and a lengthy period of rehabilitation. This temporarily reduced my ability to travel to the regions but I thank my team for continuing to build strong relationships across Victoria and for exploring digital outreach service delivery. In particular, I thank Ms Elizabeta Galevska, who was appointed by the Minister for Small Business and Employment as Acting Commissioner for the period of my leave. For those I was able to meet in person, I've been continually delighted by the engagement we've had across the state. I'm continually inspired by the cannyness and optimism of our small businesses. I thank our valued peers, peak bodies, industry associations, local chambers and Small Business Friendly Councils who've partnered with us to share guidance, meet business owners and hear what's important to business owners.

I thank the Minister for Small Business and Employment, the Hon Natalie Suleyman MP, and her office for their continued support and engagement with Victoria's small businesses and the challenges they face. I would also like to thank the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions for the ongoing assistance and support that is provided to our office.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank the VSBC staff together with our panel mediators who work tirelessly to support Victoria's small businesses and deliver excellence in all the work that they do.

**Lynda McAlary-Smith**  
Victorian Small Business Commissioner

# 2024-25 at a glance



# About the Victorian Small Business Commission

## Our role, purpose and functions

The position of Victorian Small Business Commissioner, and its office, was an Australian first when it was established with the Small Business Commissioner Act 2003.

The Small Business Commissioner Act 2003 was repealed and re-enacted on 1 July 2017 with the Small Business Commission Act 2017 (the Act) which saw the role of the Commissioner continue, supported by the creation of the Victorian Small Business Commission (VSBC).

This is the legislation under which the VSBC continues to operate today.

The Act charges the VSBC with the purpose of enhancing a competitive and fair operating environment for small businesses in Victoria.

The VSBC's key focus is assisting small businesses to avoid and resolve disputes.

Small businesses are assisted through the delivery of the VSBC's low-cost alternative dispute resolution services. This work informs, and is supported by, an outreach program that delivers information and guidance to aid small business' decision-making and prevent disputes.

The VSBC has additional statutory dispute resolution functions under four acts:

- Retail Leases Act 2003
- Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005
- Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011
- Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017.

While the VSBC continues to assist gig economy disputes, amendments to the Fair Work Act 2009 on 26 August 2024 provided the Fair Work Commission (FWC) with powers to deal with employee-like worker disputes about unfair deactivations. The FWC commenced accepting such applications from 26 February 2025 and the VSBC has referred all deactivation dispute applications from digital platform workers to the FWC from this date.

## Our vision

To help achieve a fair and competitive operating environment for Victorian small business to operate, grow and prosper.

## Our work streams

### Dispute resolution

Providing efficient, accessible, low-cost and impartial alternative dispute resolution services for small businesses.

### Engagement

Connecting with Victoria's small business communities to encourage informed decision making and ensure awareness of how the VSBC can assist them.

### Monitoring

Observing and collecting insights into the impact of market trends, legislation and government policies on small business.

### Advocacy

Speaking up on the issues affecting people in small business and the environment in which they're operating.



# Dispute Resolution

The VSBC provides impartial and confidential alternative dispute resolution services to help resolve a broad range of commercial disputes. These include disputes between:

- Two businesses, where one of the businesses identifies as a small business
- A small business and a government agency or department
- A franchisee and franchisor
- A commercial tenant and landlord
- A gig worker and their platform
- An owner driver and hirer
- A farmer and creditor
- A taxi driver and operator.



The Australian ADR Awards recognised the VSBC as the 2022 Ombudsmen and Commissions Alternate Dispute Resolution Group of the Year.

## Our dispute resolution process

We work with parties to resolve disputes as quickly and simply as possible, with the intention of mitigating potentially expensive and stressful legal action.

### Preventing disputes: guidance for informed decision-making

The VSBC actively delivers information to small businesses about their rights and responsibilities to equip them to have the best chance possible of avoiding disputes. We also share tips on de-escalating disputes themselves directly with another party.

This work is delivered through our engagement program detailed from page 16 in partnership with trusted industry associations, local governments and other influential organisations.

Our website hosts comprehensive information and guidance. It was visited more than 190,000 times this financial year.

6,815 phone and email enquiries were assisted by our team. The most common queries related to:

1. Commercial disputes
2. Mediation
3. The role of the VSBC
4. Retail leasing – outgoings
5. Retail leasing – repairs and maintenance
6. Retail leasing – security deposits
7. Retail leasing – evictions and lockouts.

### Preliminary assistance

When commencing work on an application, our team of Dispute Resolution Officers (DROs) contact both parties, collect information and outline the VSBC’s processes. The team is experienced in providing information on the legislation we administer and endeavour to assist the parties to negotiate a fair outcome that they can both accept.

Our team successfully resolved 33% of matters without requiring formal mediation. This exceeded our Budget Paper 3 target of 25%.

If the dispute isn’t resolved through this process, and the DRO believes it’s plausible that a resolution could be reached through formal mediation, they explain the benefits and features of mediation and encourage both parties to participate.

### Impartial mediation

The core function of the VSBC is to bring parties together to discuss and resolve their dispute with the help of an impartial mediator from our panel of highly regarded and experienced mediators.

The VSBC facilitates mediations online, which has been found to assist parties by reducing the time and expense of travelling to a physical location and minimising stress by enabling mediations to occur in a familiar and comfortable setting (i.e. home or business). Online mediations also significantly reduce the time that a small business operator needs to take away from their business in order to participate in a mediation.

Farm Debt Mediations are still offered in-person and can be delivered in regional Victoria.

The appointed mediator brings the parties together and guides them to put their respective positions forward, discuss the issues at hand and undertake good faith negotiations in a safe, impartial and confidential environment. Our mediators empower parties to take an active role in settling the dispute on their terms, with many walking away with their commercial relationships preserved.

## Mediation outcomes

The VSBC facilitated the mediation of 256 matters during the financial year, 69% of which were successfully resolved.

This represents a 37% decline in the number of matters mediated when compared to financial year 2023-24.

The demand for mediations has remained strong, but now exceeds the VSBC’s resourcing capacity to be able to accommodate at its usual pace. All disputes where both parties agree to mediation, and have paid the mediation fee, will be scheduled for a mediation. The decline in the number of mediations conducted in the reporting period reflects that there is a delay in our DROs being able to make those arrangements as they manage a significantly higher individual workload following the reduction in resourcing available to the VSBC.

Despite these challenges, on average clients rated satisfaction with our mediation service at 80%. This reflects the high quality of our dispute resolution expertise and continued customer centric focus which is deeply valued by Victorian small businesses and parties we assist.

### Mediation outcomes by legislation

| Legislation                                     | Disputes Brought to Mediation | Successful Mediations | Success Rate (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Retail Leases Act 2003                          | 195                           | 126                   | 65%              |
| Small Business Commission Act 2017              | 35                            | 27                    | 77%              |
| Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005 | 4                             | 3                     | 75%              |
| Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011                    | 22                            | 20                    | 91%              |
| Total                                           | 256                           | 176                   | 69%              |

### Mediation fees

VSBC mediations are subsidised by the Victorian Government, which makes the cost to parties significantly less than private mediation.

Each party pays \$300 for a half-day session and \$600 (incl. GST) for a full-day session. Farm debt mediations are currently \$195 per party which reflects funding support provided by Agriculture Victoria during 2024-25.

Applications received

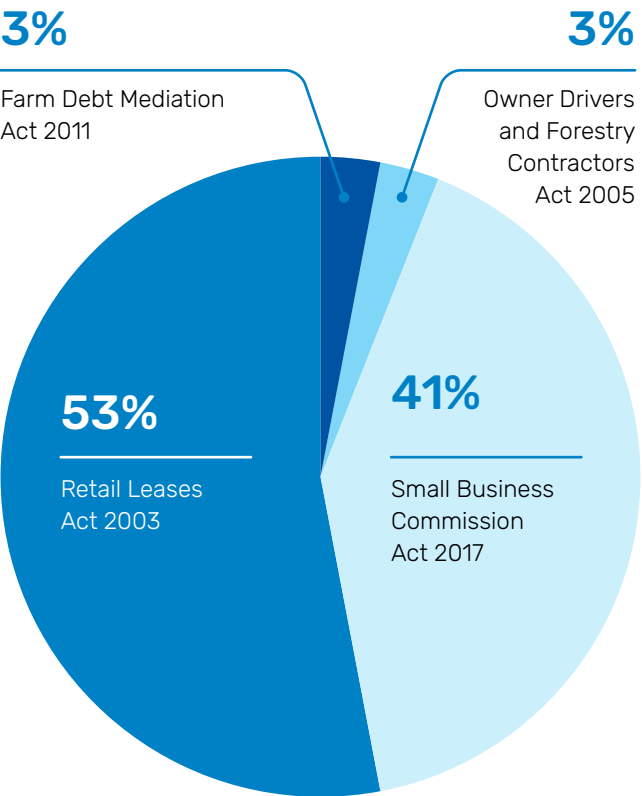
The VSBC received 1,611 applications for our alternative dispute resolution services. On average it took 17 weeks from the time of application to when work on a dispute could commence.

Prior to the reduction in funding available to the VSBC, wait times were 2 business days.

From July to September applicants waited 20 weeks on average, then following the appointment of two short-term contracted Dispute Resolution Officers in October 2024 wait times dropped to 17 weeks as more files could be allocated amongst a larger team. Wait times fell to 15 weeks, but later returned to 18 weeks at the end of financial year as one DRO concluded their time with the VSBC.

Dispute applications by legislation

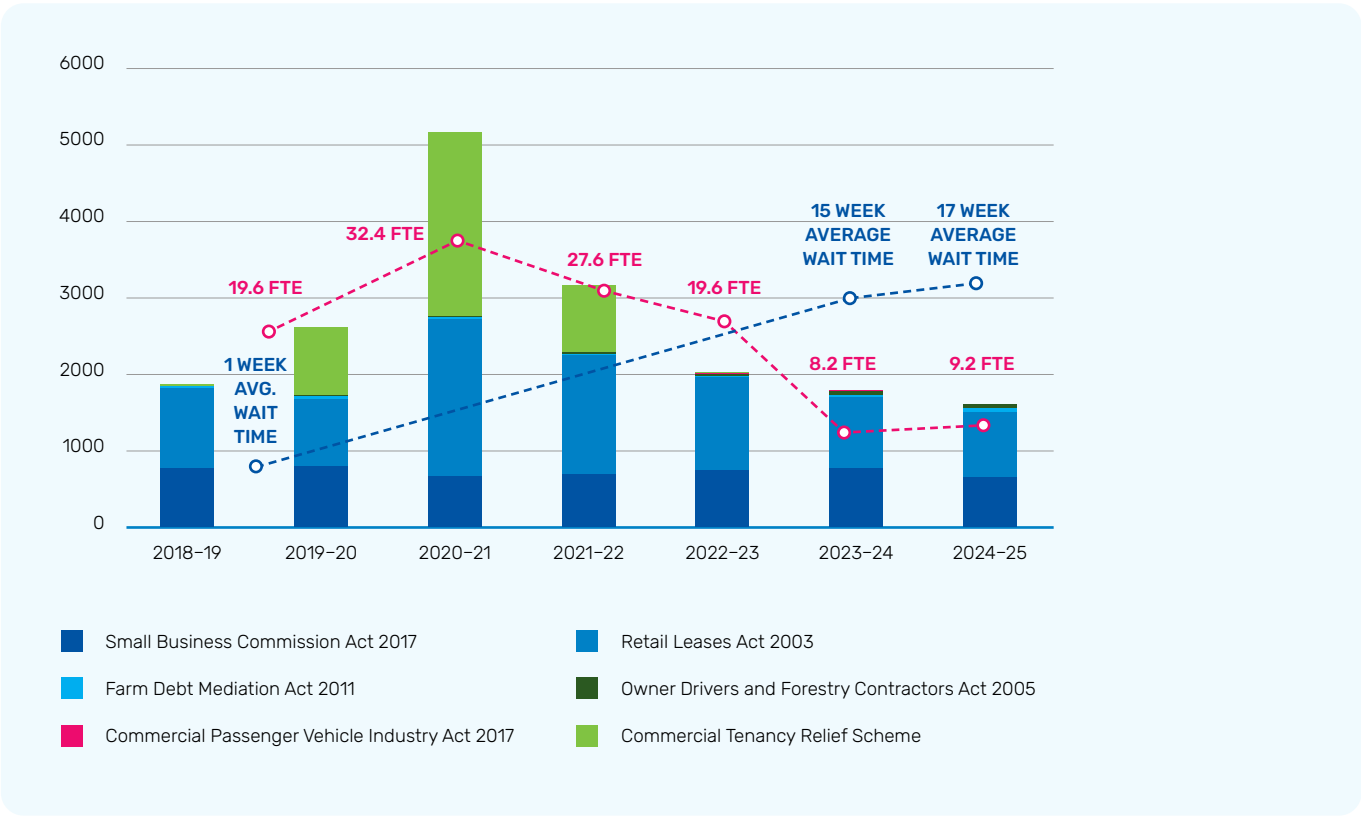
| FY24-25 dispute applications by legislations    | Case count | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011                    | 47         | 3%         |
| Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005 | 47         | 3%         |
| Retail Leases Act 2003                          | 855        | 53%        |
| Small Business Commission Act 2017              | 662        | 41%        |
| Total                                           | 1611       | 100%       |



Applications received from 2018-19 to 2024-25

| Applications received                           | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2024-25 |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Small Business Commission Act 2017              | 785     | 799     | 680     | 701     | 751     | 775     | 662     |
| Retail Leases Act 2003                          | 1040    | 886     | 2056    | 1554    | 1221    | 929     | 855     |
| Commercial Tenancy Relief Scheme*               | n.a.    | 877     | 2407    | 875     | 14      | n.a     | n.a     |
| Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011                    | 34      | 31      | 18      | 20      | 18      | 38      | 47      |
| Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005 | 23      | 26      | 12      | 20      | 22      | 52      | 47      |
| Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017  | 0       | 0       | 2       | 1       | 2       | 1       | 0       |
| Total disputes                                  | 1882    | 2619    | 5175    | 3171    | 2028    | 1795    | 1611    |

\*Commercial Tenancy Relief Scheme includes eligible disputes received under the COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) Act 2020 and the Commercial Tenancy Relief Scheme Act 2021. The Commercial Tenancy Relief Scheme ended 15 March 2022 and therefore no new applications were able to be made in 2023-24.



Alternative dispute resolution, by legislation

Small Business Commission Act 2017

Under the Small Business Commission Act 2017, the top five issues causing the disputes we helped to resolve in 2024–25 related to:

- 1. Unpaid monies – 44%: For example, where a construction sub-contractor has completed work on a residential building but hasn’t been paid by the builder who engaged them.
- 2. Quality of goods and services – 12%: For example, where a farmer purchased farming equipment that they then found to be defective.
- 3. Gig economy disputes – 8%: For example, if a worker who delivers in-home care assistance via a digital platform believes they haven’t been remunerated correctly for their time.
- 4. Contractual rights & responsibilities – 8%: For example, a franchisor repossessing a franchise without compensation.
- 5. Undelivered goods or services – 7%: For example, where a business paid upfront for flooring that was not then installed by the supplier.

CASE STUDY

Unpaid money for services delivered

A sole trader applied to the VSBC for assistance in securing payment for four overdue invoices over a period of four months. The applicant had delivered counselling services for clients of a company providing Employee Assistance Programs, but had not received payment as agreed, despite correctly invoicing the company. After being unsuccessful in following-up the payment themselves, the small business owner applied for the assistance of the VSBC. Our Dispute Resolution Officers (DRO) contacted the company to raise the dispute and seek a resolution. In discussion with the respondents, the DRO clarified that they held no reservations about the quality of services delivered by the sole trader. Pleasingly, they successfully assisted the applicant to negotiate payment of the overdue invoices.

Retail Leases Act 2003

Retail leasing disputes occupy the greatest portion of the VSBC’s dispute resolution time, representing just over half (53 %) of applications we receive.

The top five issues causing the disputes we helped to resolve in 2024–25 under the Retail Leases Act 2003 (RLA) related to:

- 1. Money owed by tenant – 23%: For example, where a tenant has withheld outgoings or rental payment as part of a broader dispute with their landlord. In all cases of monies owed by tenants that the VSBC assists, there are additional retail leasing matters being disputed.
- 2. Repairs and maintenance – 16%: For example, where a landlord is not repairing damage caused by extreme weather or providing compensation to the tenant.
- 3. Security deposits and make good – 16%: For example, where a landlord withholds the security following a lease and there is disagreement over whether the tenant returned the premises to its original condition.
- 4. Outgoings – 12%: For example, where a landlord and tenant are in disagreement over which expenses can be passed onto the tenant as outgoings and the actual cost of outgoings in comparison to the estimate provided.
- 5. Early termination of lease – 7%: For example, where a small business owner is wanting to close their business due to factors such as the continued rise in the cost of running their business and the ongoing difficulties in finding staff.

CASE STUDY

Renewing a retail lease

A retail tenant sought compensation from their landlord when they learned they hadn’t been issued a new lease, impacting their ability to sell their business. This was despite signing a lease that they’d returned to the agent managing the property.

The tenant applied to the VSBC for mediation for assistance in seeking a resolution with their landlord about the matter.

Through mediation, the parties came to learn that the agent had prepared a lease on behalf of the landlord without their instruction.

The landlord wanted to sell the property to fund their retirement. When the landlord received the signed lease, they chose not to sign it, assuming it would become a month-to-month arrangement. The agent didn’t communicate this to the tenant, who didn’t realise they had no lease until they were preparing their business for sale some 18 months later.

In concluding the mediation, the landlord offered some compensation to the tenant, without admitting liability.

<sup>†</sup>Cases of rental arrears alone are excluded by the Retail Leases Act 2003, part 10, section81(2), and are matters for the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). However, rental arrears rarely occur in isolation and are frequently associated with retail leasing disputes, such as repair and maintenance.

CASE STUDY

Lease surrender and security deposit

The former tenant of a retail premises applied to the VSBC for assistance in retrieving their security deposit, 12 months after vacating the premises. Their landlord agreed they could surrender the lease and had entered into a new lease with a new tenant.

However, prior to the lease being surrendered, the former tenant had handed over possession to the new tenant, who conducted substantial renovations without the landlord’s consent or a building permit. These works didn’t meet building codes and required rectification.

The landlord held the former tenant responsible for the unauthorised works, arguing they occurred during their lease, and they had breached the lease terms by handing over the property without their permission.

The former tenant denied liability, stating the works were undertaken by the new tenant.

Following robust negotiation in a VSBC facilitated mediation, the matter was resolved with the former tenant forfeiting 43% of their bank guarantee in exchange for a full release of liability.



Specialist retail valuer appointments

The VSBC has a role under the Retail Leases Act 2003 to appoint a specialist retail valuer where the tenant and landlord are unable to agree on the appointment of a valuer to conduct a market review of the rent.

The VSBC received 104 applications seeking the appointment of a specialist retail valuer.

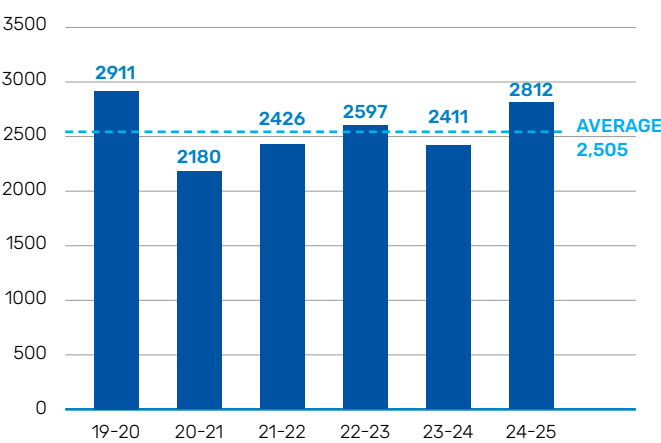
Five-year waiver certificates

Retail tenants have the right to a minimum five-year lease. Should they wish to enter into a shorter term lease, section 21 of the Retail Leases Act 2003 provides that a tenant can waive that right by applying to the VSBC for a certificate and giving a copy of that certificate to their landlord. The intention is to ensure that tenants acknowledge and understand their right and are given the opportunity to reflect upon the choice and its potential implications (such as the risk that they may have to vacate the premises after a comparatively short lease term).

Tenants can apply through the VSBC website via a form that provides an explanation of section 21 of the Act. Upon reviewing that material and completing their application, prospective tenants will be issued their requested waiver certificate.

In FY2024-25 the VSBC issued 2,812 five-year waiver certificates, an increase of 12% over the average number of applications per annum since the 2019-2020 financial year.

Waiver certificate application numbers by financial year



**Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011**

The Victorian Small Business Commissioner has held full administrative responsibility for the Farm Debt Mediation Scheme since the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011 was amended in October 2022. The scheme inhibits creditors from pursuing enforcement action against a farmer in arrears and requires that mediation be undertaken between the parties, facilitated by the VSBC.

The impact of challenging operating conditions, including drought conditions, for some of our Victorian farming businesses and families is reflected in an increase in demand for the VSBC's services.

The VSBC received 47 applications for farm debt mediations this financial year, an increase of 23% over financial year 2023-24.

22 mediations were held during the financial year, 20 of which were successful.

Farm debt mediation certificates

In addition to arranging mediations, the other main function for the VSBC under the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011 is the issuing of exemption and prohibition certificates.

Before a creditor can take enforcement action against a farmer, they require an exemption certificate from the VSBC. Conversely, a farmer can request a prohibition certificate from the VSBC, which prevents their creditor from taking enforcement action until a satisfactory mediation has taken place.

81 applications were made for exemption certificates, an increase of 26% on the 64 applications in the previous financial year.

4 applications were made for prohibition certificates, however none of these progressed to the point of requiring the Commissioner to exercise her statutory power to issue them.

**Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005**

47 applications were made to the VSBC for assistance under the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005. None of those applications were related to forestry.

3 applications were made for waiver certificates were made by owner-drivers.

40 disputes were resolved during the financial year, 29 (72.5%) of which concerned gig economy workers. 41% of the 40 completed matters were settled before mediation, 21% were closed as the respondent was unreachable and 38% were unable to be resolved.

Note that following amendments to the Fair Work Commission Act 2009 (Cth) on 26 August 2024 which provided the Fair Work Commission (FWC) with powers to deal with employee-like worker disputes about unfair deactivations, the FWC commenced accepting such applications from 26 February 2025. The VSBC has referred all unfair deactivation applications from digital labour platform workers to the FWC from this date.

4 mediations were held, of which 3 were successful. One dispute related to contractual rights (remuneration) and the others concerned the termination of contracts. All matters mediated were owner-driver disputes.

**Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017**

Taxi and hire car drivers and operators can access mediation through the VSBC only when:

- The dispute is first referred to Safe Transport Victoria (STV) (formerly Commercial Passenger Vehicle Victoria)
- STV has been unable to resolve the dispute
- STV has issued a certificate to the parties within the past 30 days enabling the dispute to be referred to the VSBC or Victorian Civil Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) for mediation.

No applications were received relevant to the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017 this financial year.

Unreasonable refusal

No certificates of unreasonable refusal were issued in this financial year.

Section 16(4) of the Small Business Commission Act 2017 provides that the VSBC has the power to publish details in its annual report of certificates issued certifying that a party to a dispute has unreasonably refused to take part in alternative dispute resolution with the VSBC, provided that statutory procedural fairness steps have been followed.

Who we assisted

Small business applicants, by legislation and industry sector

Across the VSBC’s dispute resolution services, we most commonly assist those in the hospitality (accommodation and food services), retail and the transport, postal and warehousing sectors.

Industries of applicants for alternative dispute resolution assistance under the Retail Leases Act

- 1. Accommodation and Food Services (34%)
- 2. Retail Trade (28%)
- 3. Healthcare and Social Assistance (6%)
- 4. Arts and Recreation Services (6%)
- 5. Education and Training (3%)

Industries of applicants for alternative dispute resolution assistance under the Small Business Commission Act

- 1. Transport, Postal and Warehousing (16%)
- 2. Construction (12%)
- 3. Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (11%)
- 4. Accommodation and Food Services (6%)
- 5. Retail Trade (6%)

Culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians

One in five applicants for dispute resolution assistance speaks a language other than English at home. Interpreters are available to assist Victorians to speak with our contact centre, and throughout the mediation process.

Languages spoken, as reported by dispute applicants

| Language   | Count |
|------------|-------|
| Mandarin   | 108   |
| Punjabi    | 33    |
| Hindi      | 30    |
| Cantonese  | 26    |
| Vietnamese | 18    |
| Dari       | 12    |
| Arabic     | 10    |
| Spanish    | 9     |
| Greek      | 6     |
| Italian    | 3     |
| Turkish    | 3     |

Mediation and phone translation engagements

| Language   | Total Requests | Percentage |
|------------|----------------|------------|
| Mandarin   | 27             | 54%        |
| Vietnamese | 4              | 8%         |
| Spanish    | 3              | 6%         |
| Arabic     | 2              | 4%         |
| Cantonese  | 2              | 4%         |
| Dari       | 2              | 4%         |
| Farsi      | 2              | 4%         |
| Hazaragi   | 2              | 4%         |
| Punjabi    | 2              | 4%         |
| French     | 1              | 2%         |
| Hindi      | 1              | 2%         |
| Italian    | 1              | 2%         |
| Tamil      | 1              | 2%         |
|            | 50             | 100%       |

# Engagement

The VSBC connects with Victoria's small business communities to hear about their operating environment, inform them about the VSBC's services and to encourage informed decision-making, particularly with regards to our jurisdictions of retail leasing and small business disputes.

The VSBC builds positive working relationships with industry groups, peak bodies, local chambers of commerce and local, state and federal governments, among others, to maximise its opportunities to reach small businesses.

## Stakeholders engaged

The VSBC regularly meets with a range of stakeholders including industry associations, peak bodies, regulators, not-for-profits and government agencies and departments to monitor small business conditions and create opportunities to reach small businesses. Additionally, the Commissioner attends stakeholder roundtables and networking and community events to secure timely business intelligence, share the VSBC's technical expertise, raise awareness of the VSBC services and available for supports for small businesses.



Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC with Commissioner McAlary-Smith following a briefing on the state of small business in Victoria.



Commissioner McAlary-Smith speaking to Small Business Mentoring Service mentors and mentees.



The Honourable Natalie Suleyman MP, Minister for Small Business and Employment, pictured with Commissioner McAlary-Smith following a meeting on reducing red tape for small business.

## Stakeholder meetings held by the Commissioner

Australia and New Zealand Banking Group  
Australian Banking Association  
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission  
Australian Finance Industry Association  
Australian Hotels Association  
Australian Industry Group  
Australian Property Institute  
Australian Restaurant & Café Association  
Australian Retailers Association  
Australian Securities and Investments Commission  
Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman  
Australian Taxation Office  
Better Regulation Victoria  
Beyond Blue  
Bunnings Group  
City of Melbourne  
Civil Contractors Federation Victoria  
Commonwealth Bank  
Communications and Information Technology Training  
Council of Small Business Organisations Australia  
CPA Australia  
Creative Victoria  
Cross Border Commissioner  
Essential Services Commission  
Fair Work Ombudsman  
Fire Rescue Victoria  
Franchise Council of Australia  
Geelong Chamber of Commerce  
Gender Equality Commission

Housing Industry Association  
Industry Capability Network Victoria  
Institute of Public Administration Australia – Victoria  
Jobs and Skills Australia  
Law Institute of Victoria  
Master Builders Association Victoria  
Master Grocers Association  
Master Plumbers Victoria  
National Lotteries & Newsagents Association  
New South Wales Small Business Commission  
Office of the South Australian Small Business Commission  
Post Office Agents Association Limited  
Queensland Small Business Commission  
Real Estate Institute of Victoria  
Resolution Institute  
Rural Financial Counsellors  
Service and Creative Skills Australia  
Shopping Centre Council of Australia  
Small Business Mentoring Service  
Small Business Victoria  
Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce  
Victorian Chamber of Commerce & Industry  
Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal  
Victorian Governor, the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC  
Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority  
VSBC Mediator Panel  
Wage Inspectorate Victoria  
Western Australia Small Business Development Corporation  
Westpac  
WorkSafe Victoria  
Xero



## Small business outreach

The VSBC works in partnership with its stakeholders to deliver a program of information and guidance to equip small business owners to make informed decisions. Drawing upon key insights from its dispute resolution work, the VSBC focused session this financial year upon securing payments, common retail leasing disputes and how to mitigate and de-escalate common business disputes. Commissioner McAlary-Smith delivered 28 presentations during the financial year, 15 of which were webinars. Delivering sessions via webinar supported greater small business participation thanks to its flexibility. Sessions were strongly attended – for example, more than 800 people registered to attend ‘Working for yourself within the arts and culture sector’ where the Commissioner shared ideas and information for sole practitioners in the arts space.



### PODCAST

#### Post Office Agents Association Limited (POAAL)

The Commissioner sat down with POAAL CEO Ian Kerr to discuss alternative dispute resolution, retail leasing and how the VSBC can assist member small businesses.

## Webinars

- Working for yourself within the arts and culture sector – Creative Workplaces – 30 August
- Valuer Training Program – Australian Property Institute – 29 October
- Getting paid on time – 28 January
- Revisiting the Small Business Friendly Council Charter – 3 February
- Farm debt mediation: an overview – 5 February
- Retail leasing rights & responsibilities – 24 February
- How small businesses can avoid, de-escalate and resolve disputes – 3 March
- Getting paid on time – Master Builders Association of Victoria – 13 May
- Specialist Retail Valuers – Australian Property Institute – 15 May
- SBFC forum: promptly paying small business suppliers – 15 May
- Getting paid on time – 28 May
- Retail leasing: your rights & responsibilities – 30 May
- Tips to avoid or defuse a business dispute – 4 June
- SBFC: better managing disruptions to small business – 17 June
- Mediator Information Session – 23 June

## In-person presentations

- Guest Lecture: Melbourne Law School – 1 Aug
- Presentation on retail leasing: Reed Gift Fair at Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre – 3 August 2024
- Armchair discussion
- ‘Stronger Together’ Conference – Franchise Council of Australia – 4 September
- Keynote speaker: Stonnington Small Business Festival – Holmesglen TAFE – 17 October
- Panel discussion: Business Perspectives: Role of the modern regulator – Victorian Regulators Conference – 27 November
- Guest speaker: Small Business Mentoring Service End of Year Celebration – 6 December
- Fireside chat: Coraggio Advisory Board day – 14 February
- Presentation: Retail leasing insights – Retail and Commercial Leasing Review Seminar – 19 March
- Guest Lecture: Melbourne Law School – 16 May
- Presentation: Victorian Skills Authority – 2 June
- Keynote speaker: Cranbourne Chamber of Commerce – 19 June
- Opening address: Female Founder Festival – Melbourne – 25 June
- ‘Money Matters’ Workshop: SME Business Expo Mount Alexander Shire – Castlemaine – 27 June



Commissioner McAlary-Smith pictured speaking at the Victorian Regulators Conference with VCCI CEO Paul Guerra and Ylva Carsone, Executive Director of Small Business and Employment, the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions.

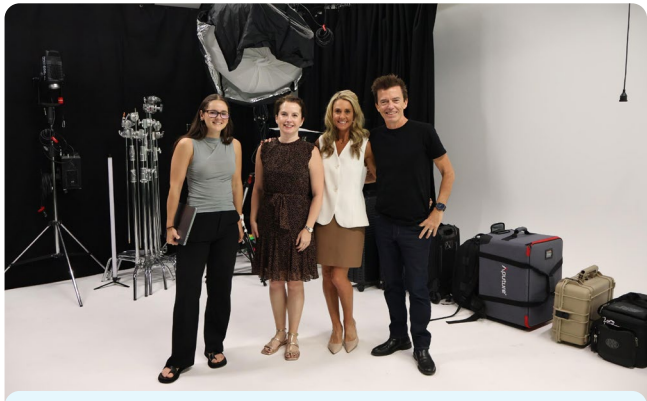


Commissioner McAlary-Smith with Cranbourne Chamber of Commerce committee member Anthony Tassone.



Meeting small businesses

- Trans Space
- Chocolate Studios Advertising Agency
- Queen Victoria Market Traders
- Informale
- Moshie



Isabella Tomas, Sara De Maria and Dave Ellis of Chocolate Studios



Steve Calder, founder, Informale



Lee and Kira, founders, Trans Space

Engaging regional communities

Maryborough, Central Goldfields Shire

The Central Goldfields Village Business Expo brought together local businesses, social enterprises and government for a series of workshops and networking. The VSBC operated a stall and participated in workshops.

Ballarat, City of Ballarat

The Business Day Out attracted hundreds of local business owners for a series of speeches, networking and an exhibitor hall where the VSBC operated a stall where business owners could learn about the VSBC's services.

Castlemaine, Mount Alexander Shire

Micro and Small business Day 2025 was held on the United Nations' World Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises Day and the festival provided local business owners with a program of events, including a panel discussion led by Commissioner McAlary-Smith. The VSBC also maintained a stall in the exhibitor hall.



VSBC staff with attendees of the Central Goldfields Village Business Expo in Maryborough.



Commissioner McAlary-Smith with Lewis, Small Business Victoria Bus driver, in Castlemaine



Commissioner McAlary-Smith speaking to attendees of Micro and Small Business Day 2025 in Castlemaine.



How applicants heard of the VSBC

Almost half (39%) of applicants have heard of the VSBC via its communications and engagement efforts. A further 26% were via referrals from professional and community networks and authorities, which the VSBC engages collaboratively to deliver information and guidance to small businesses.

The VSBC also works closely with the professional associations of trusted advisors (CPA, REIV, Law Institute of Victoria and the Australian Property Institute) to regularly place content and hold tailored webinars to ensure they’re aware of how the VSBC can assist their clients.

| Percentage | Source                              | Source explained                                                                                |
|------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 39%        | VSBC communications                 | Presentation by VSBC<br>Traditional media<br>Social media<br>VSBC website/online search results |
| 31%        | Trusted advisers                    | Accountants<br>Lawyers<br>Other professional advisers                                           |
| 26%        | Professional and community networks | Industry or business associations<br>Local business networks<br>Local councils                  |
| 3%         | Authorities                         | ACCC<br>VCAT<br>ASBFEO<br>ASIC                                                                  |
| 1%         | Other                               | Friends and family<br>Past applicant                                                            |

VSBC communications

Website

The VSBC website homepage, information architecture and navigation menu were collectively revised this financial year to ensure that information was simpler to identify and access.

The homepage now includes more direct links to the most commonly sought information and actions (such as applying for a five-year waiver certificate).

The number of items in the menu navigation was reduced by two-thirds to make it simpler to identify information.

The pathway from visiting the website to lodging an application for assistance was revised to reduce the number of clicks required from seven to just two.

In Financial Year 2024-25 we recorded 190,759 visits to our website and 311,184 page views. 1,611 applications for assistance were made via the website.

The most commonly visited pages during the financial year included:

- 1. Retail tenants and landlords
- 2. Outgoings: other charges under a lease
- 3. Repairs and maintenance
- 4. Disclosure statements
- 5. Applying for our help
- 6. Options and renewals for retail leases
- 7. Five-year waiver certificates
- 8. What are retail premises?
- 9. Premises not covered by the Act
- 10. (Bonds) Security deposits

Media coverage

The Victorian Small Business Commission and Commissioner McAlary-Smith were mentioned in 45 different pieces of media during the financial year.

Broadly, topics included:

Information for small business

“Business Commissioner Offers Advice”, **Horsham Weekly Advertiser**, Lauren Henry, 3 July 2024

“How to choose the ideal retail lease and location for your business in 2025”, **Inside Small Business**, Karl Aguilar, 7 January 2025

“Wyndham businesses urged to check commercial lease terms”, **Wyndham TV**, 30 June 2025

Events and seminars attended by the Commissioner

“Creative Workplaces: Working for yourself within the arts and culture sector”, **ArtsHub**, 16 August 2024

“Why businesses can’t afford to miss SmallBiz Week 2025”, **Business News Australia**, 3 March 2025

“Talking small business”, **Cranbourne Star News**, Violet Li, 26 June 2025 – covering Commissioner McAlary-Smith’s presentation to the Cranbourne Chamber of Commerce

**KLFM (Bendigo) News bulletin** promoting Commissioner McAlary-Smith’s panel discussion to be held in Castlemaine as part of ‘Micro and Small business Day 2025’

Small business challenges

“Businesses show anger”, **Herald Sun**, 1 November 2024

“...nearly half of all applications received by the VSBC relate to unpaid money”, **Triple M Bendigo & Triple M Sunraysia news bulletins**, 5 November 2024

Social media activity

The VSBC published content across its LinkedIn, X, Facebook and Instagram channels. They collectively have an audience of 5,815 social media users. LinkedIn is its most consistently and highly engaged platform, while Facebook has broader reach within business networks. VSBC content was viewed 102,897 times during the financial year.

VSBC News

Four issues of VSBC News were distributed during the financial year – reaching approximately 3,400 subscribers. Each edition featured the VSBC’s program of webinars and in-person information sessions. Newsletter content also included information from small business regulators (ATO, Fair Work Commission, ACCC, among others), guidance on retail leasing and alternative dispute resolution.

# Monitoring

The VSBC observes the impact of legislation, government policies and market trends upon small businesses and their operating environment.

In addition to daily media monitoring of key small business concerns, the Commissioner regularly meets with stakeholders and visits small businesses directly to hear from them first-hand. This work is detailed in the engagement section of the report on page 18.

## Monitoring the Victorian Government’s compliance with its Fair Payment Policy

Since the introduction of the Victorian Government’s Fair Payment Policy in 2004 the VSBC, in collaboration with Small Business Victoria, has actively advocated for departments and agencies to promptly pay small business suppliers.

Initially departments and some agencies were required to pay invoices with a contract value of less than \$3 million within 30 days of receiving the invoice. Then from 1 January 2021, the policy was amended to bring payments forward to ten business days. Fair payment clauses were also required to be added to new contracts.

| 2024-25       | Total number of invoices paid | Average number of calendar days to pay invoices under a contract value of \$3 million | Compliance rate of invoices under a contract value of \$3 million paid within 14 calender days (ten business days) |
|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Departments   | 652,220                       | 7.04                                                                                  | 89%                                                                                                                |
| Agencies      | 1,339,267                     | 13.90                                                                                 | 78%                                                                                                                |
| Overall Total | 1,991,487                     | 10.47                                                                                 | 81%                                                                                                                |

Throughout this time, the VSBC has monitored the compliance of departments and agencies with the policy and published their average results in its Annual Report.

This year Commissioner McAlary-Smith has decided to increase their accountability by publishing the performance of each department and applicable agency.

Penalty interest payments have also been included in the report. Departments and applicable agencies that don’t make payments to their suppliers within ten days are liable to pay penalty interest, in the event suppliers make an application requesting it.

### Departments have continued to improve their payment times

Departments paid small business suppliers, on average, 1.2 days sooner than in FY2023-24, while their average rate of compliance remained consistent at 89% overall.

The VSBC encourages the Departments to work with agencies to share lessons on the systems, business and work practice changes required to make timely payments to suppliers.

| Fair Payment Policy: 2024-25 Performance Report             | Total number of invoices paid | Average number of calendar days to pay invoices under a contract value of \$3 million | Penalty Interest Accrued (\$) | Compliance rate of invoices under a contract value of \$3 million paid within 14 calender days (ten business days) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dept of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions                  | 12,387                        | 2.84                                                                                  | \$0                           | 98%                                                                                                                |
| Adult Multicultural Education Services Australia            | 16,010                        | 5.00                                                                                  | \$0                           | 97%                                                                                                                |
| Australian Centre for the Moving Image                      | 4,413                         | 12.00                                                                                 | \$0                           | 72%                                                                                                                |
| Bendigo Kangan Institute                                    | 20,334                        | 19.00                                                                                 | \$0                           | 69%                                                                                                                |
| Chisholm Institute                                          | 11,894                        | 10.18                                                                                 | \$0                           | 83%                                                                                                                |
| The Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria | 11,792                        | 9.00                                                                                  | \$0                           | 83%                                                                                                                |
| Holmesglen Institute                                        | 16,824                        | 30.00                                                                                 | \$ 1,589.00                   | 38%                                                                                                                |
| Melbourne Polytechnic                                       | 18,245                        | 9.30                                                                                  | \$0                           | 93%                                                                                                                |
| Museums Victoria                                            | 15,433                        | 38.00                                                                                 | \$0                           | 22%                                                                                                                |
| Visit Victoria                                              | 3,294                         | 12.96                                                                                 | \$0                           | 69%                                                                                                                |
| Dept of Energy, Environment and Climate Action              | 85,094                        | 6.70                                                                                  | \$0                           | 82%                                                                                                                |
| Greater Western Water                                       | 26,238                        | 10.00                                                                                 | \$0                           | 87%                                                                                                                |
| Goulburn Murray rural Water Corporation                     | 18,984                        | 18.90                                                                                 | \$0                           | 74%                                                                                                                |
| Melbourne Water                                             | 46,761                        | 16.00                                                                                 | \$0                           | 91%                                                                                                                |
| South-East Water Corporation                                | 14,935                        | 10.00                                                                                 | \$0                           | 87%                                                                                                                |
| Yarra Valley Water Corporation                              | 9,754                         | 11.60                                                                                 | \$0                           | 91%                                                                                                                |

|                                          |         |       |             |      |
|------------------------------------------|---------|-------|-------------|------|
| Dept of Health                           | 11,640  | 17.35 | \$0         | 63%  |
| Alfred Health                            | 147,670 | 9.00  | \$0         | 60%  |
| Austin Health                            | 125,768 | 11.00 | \$0         | 97%  |
| Eastern Health                           | 103,646 | 28.00 | \$0         | 36%  |
| Melbourne Health                         | 109,932 | 15.00 | \$0         | 56%  |
| Monash Health                            | 300,624 | 3.90  | \$0         | 100% |
| Dept of Justice and Community Safety     | 138,802 | 11.47 | \$0         | 86%  |
| Country Fire Authority                   | 55,714  | 3.00  | \$0         | 98%  |
| Fire Rescue Victoria                     | 43,065  | 21.00 | \$ 7,465.90 | 67%  |
| State Emergency Services                 | 11,194  | 7.60  | \$0         | 88%  |
| Victorian Police                         | 185,326 | 30.00 | \$0         | 37%  |
| Victorian Legal Aid                      | 8,056   | 14.00 |             | 64%  |
| Dept of Premier and Cabinet              | 9,030   | 1.94  |             | 99%  |
| Victorian Electoral Commission           | 1,978   | 3.00  |             | 98%  |
| Victorian Public Sector Commission       | 835     | 1.61  |             | 100% |
| Dept of Treasury and Finance             | 5,208   | 2.76  | \$0         | 98%  |
| State Revenue Office                     | 5,411   | 9.00  | \$0         | 82%  |
| State Trustees Limited                   | 2,415   | 30.50 | \$0         | 24%  |
| Victorian Management Insurance Authority | 2,722   | 4.49  | \$0         | 92%  |
| Dept of Government Services              | 14,196  | 2.47  |             | 99%  |
| Dept of Education and Training           | 155,470 | 5.50  | \$0         | 95%  |
| Dept of Transport and Planning           | 72,499  | 10.00 | \$0         | 92%  |
| Dept of Families, Fairness and Housing   | 147,894 | 9.40  | \$0         | 92%  |

# Advocacy

The VSBC, led by the Commissioner, has a legislated responsibility to monitor market practices and small business conditions, and to be a voice in the interest of fairness and competition for small business. As an independent figure, the Commissioner is trusted by many within the business community to hear an unfiltered view of the business environment, legislation, regulatory practices and taxation.

The Commissioner provides fortnightly updates to the Minister for Small Business and Employment, highlighting the key issues and opportunities that Victoria's small businesses are navigating. Commissioner McAlary-Smith also regularly meets and shares these insights with Small Business Victoria (within the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions) to inform its policy work and program delivery.

In October 2024 Commissioner McAlary-Smith provided a briefing to Victorian Governor, Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC, on the state of small business in Victoria.

Commissioner McAlary-Smith also meets with interstate peers and Commonwealth authorities to contribute to policy, and to advocate for positive change. As part of this work the Commissioner contributes to the:

- Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA) Member and Stakeholder Roundtable
- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Small Business and Franchising Consultative Committee
- WorkSafe Occupational Health & Safety Advisory Committee Meeting
- Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) Victorian Regional Liaison Committee Meeting
- Australian Taxation Office (ATO) Small Business Stewardship Group
- Institute of Public Administrators Australia (IPAA) Victoria CEOs Connect.

Issues raised by the Commissioner during this financial year included, but weren't limited to:

- Perceived inability among small business to pass on rising costs due to low consumer confidence and spending
- Persistent cashflow issues linked to COVID-era debt, soft consumer demand, rising inflation and taxation
- Victorian Government taxes (e.g. Congestion Levy, Land Tax and the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) causing financial strain and concern
- Record numbers of small business insolvencies
- Small business' over-representation in ATO debts and the stress of debt recovery
- Farming families navigating the financial challenge and mental hardship of drought
- Regional communities impacted by reduced visitation and spending due to drought and the broader economic downturn
- Ongoing regional challenges: labour shortages, housing, electricity costs and reliability
- A shortage of planners in regional councils delaying housing and business development
- CBD hospitality and retailers affected by unpredictable foot traffic due to remote work culture
- Retail aggression and anti-social behaviour
- Disruptions to small business from road and infrastructure projects
- Small business potentially missing the opportunities that AI presents.

## Advocating for small businesses experiencing disruption

VSBC staff assisted in eight instances where small business trade was impacted by infrastructure projects and road works.

When a project could disrupt small businesses, the VSBC expects at a minimum:

- Sufficient notice to support business planning
- Clear communication of the scope of works and how it'll likely impact businesses
- The opportunity for small businesses to provide feedback on proposed work schedules
- A point of contact within the project team, and an escalation pathway for business
- Regular updates on project delivery, including potential or actual changes to the work schedule
- Direct and clear communication about opportunities for compensation.

The VSBC provides impartial assistance to facilitate communication between small businesses and project teams.

### CASE STUDY

#### Road closure in Victoria's north

Small businesses in a regional community in Victoria's north applied to the VSBC for assistance when the highway their shopping strip was accessed via was closed for road rehabilitation works. The alternative route added as much as 40 minutes to travel times, leaving most businesses without customers. Take-away food shops were also unable to deliver to their customers in a timely manner.

The community was impacted by the flood events of 2022, where business owners had lost trade and had to re-fit their stores. This road closure, which occurred during the busy summer holiday period, directly inhibited their ability to trade their way towards economic recovery.

The Commissioner wrote to the Department of Transport requesting they investigate the project's communications and planning, as local businesses weren't provided sufficient notice of the closures and didn't have the opportunity to provide feedback on the scope of work.

Following the intervention of the VSBC, the work schedule was revised to reduce the impact to traders. While this was a positive outcome, it could have been mitigated – as the impact to small business should have been incorporated into project planning, and business should have been afforded the opportunity to provide feedback and make plans for the disruptive period.



## Small Business Friendly Council Charter

The Small Business Friendly Council Charter (Charter) formalises a positive working relationship between the VSBC and 65 local councils, focused upon supporting a fair and competitive environment for small businesses through the delivery with all six commitments.

During financial year 2024-25 the VSBC re-enlivened the charter by meeting directly with the economic development teams of 18 councils and holding three online seminars on the Charter for signatory councils. These included:

- *‘Revisiting the Small Business Friendly Council Charter’* – a webinar on the six Charter commitments and how councils can measure their delivery.
- *‘Promptly Paying Small Business Suppliers’* – an online workshop for council finance teams on increasing the timeliness of payments. Attendees also heard from representatives of the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industries and Regions who successfully implemented the Victorian Government’s Fair Payment Policy.
- *‘Better Managing Disruptions to Small Business’* – an online workshop with representatives from council project, customer service and economic development teams to review, and discuss implementing the VSBC’s Disruption Management guidelines.

### Reporting on Charter delivery

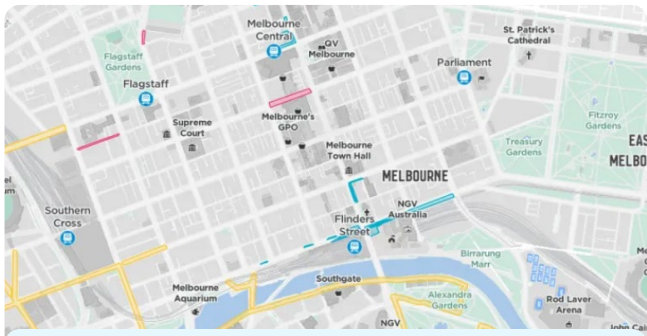
Signatory council CEOs were invited to report on their progress in delivering the six charter commitments. Notable outcomes are reported here.

#### 1. Better disruption management

Ballarat, Manningham, Shepparton and Whittlesea councils reported they’d engaged small businesses through the design and planning processes of projects – with some engagements starting as early as 12 months prior to planned works.

Wodonga council held the North East Food and Wine Festival, which included notifying 25 local businesses in-person as early as 6 weeks prior to the event.

Hepburn Shire reported its officers meet with businesses face-to-face to inform them of planned works. Pyreness and Mitchell Shires reported engagement with infrastructure and road authorities to advocate on behalf of local businesses impacted by their works.



#### ‘Getting around the City’

The City of Melbourne maintains a webpage listing disruptions in the CBD from infrastructure projects, major construction and events. Resources include an interactive map that plots disruptions, in addition to links to Yarra Trams, VicTraffic and Google Maps for live traffic updates for the information of business, residents and visitors.

[melbourne.vic.gov.au/getting-around-the-city](https://melbourne.vic.gov.au/getting-around-the-city)

#### 2. Prompt payments to small business suppliers

Corangamite Shire identifies small business suppliers through its procurement processes and pays all approved invoices within 7 days. Frankston and Melton city councils reported they approved invoices for payment within 7 days.

Mornington Peninsula, Nillumbik, Southern Grampians and Macedon Ranges Shires reported they work to 14 day payment terms.

Brimbank City Council utilises credit cards to make payments to small business suppliers, ensuring instant payment.

#### 3. Support for active and engaged business networks

Frankston City Council supported the establishment of the Frankston Business Collective in 2022 which has more than 300 members and held 16 events, including 6 networking sessions, this financial year.

#### 4. Accessible information for small business

Most signatory councils reported they deliver a monthly email of information and resources for local businesses. Monash City Council’s ‘First for Business’ eNewsletter has more than 12,000 subscribers.



#### ‘Your Business is our Business’ podcast

An Australian first, Nillumbik Shire published a 10-part ‘how to’ podcast to help navigate the planning, start-up and expansion of businesses in the shire.

#### 5. Streamlined permit approvals

Gannawarra Shire processes footpath trading permits on the same day as application and charges a low fee of \$10.

### Business Friendly Council Initiative (Initiative)

Delivered by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, the Initiative partners with local councils to share resources to stand-up a highly skilled Business Concierge function, streamline internal processes and quicken business approvals for hospitality businesses.

The VSBC has actively encouraged signatory councils to undertake the Initiative and contributed to materials and workshops. More than half of signatory councils indicated in reporting that they had undertaken, or planned to undertake, the Initiative.



#### Fabric ReStore by A Fitting Connection

Home-based social enterprise A Fitting Connection sought to expand into a shopfront. It recovers textiles and sewing supplies to be reused, diverting them from landfill. Founder Katrina Naish approached Banyule City Council’s Business Concierge for assistance. On paper, the proposed shopfront could have been misunderstood to be a waste recovery centre (a tip), which could have attracted permitting complexities, additional time and costs. The concierge team explained Katrina’s applications to the relevant departments across council, so she only had to describe the business to council once. Fabric ReStore opened in Ivanhoe East in May 2025.

#### 6. Open communication and advocacy on small business

Northern Grampians shire actively engaged with State and Commonwealth Governments to seek support for communities, including small businesses, impacted by the 2024/2025 Grampians Bushfires. Their work on recovery continues through two bushfire support offices.



# Team and Performance

## Our team

The VSBC is made up of Victorian Small Business Commissioner Lynda McAlary-Smith and Victorian Public Service (VPS) staff, who deliver corporate and business operations, communications, advocacy and engagement, and dispute resolution services.

VSBC staff are employed by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (the department) under Part 3 of the Public Administration Act 2004. Our staff take part in the department’s training, performance management and people and culture activities, and comply with the department’s financial, procurement, information systems and other policies and codes of conduct.

As at 30 June 2025 there were 9 VPS staff (head count) to support the Commissioner and assist in delivering the work of the VSBC.

## Assessing our performance

Our performance framework is defined by the legislative frameworks within which we operate, performance metrics outlined in the VSBC Corporate Plan 2022-26, and the Ministerial Statement of Expectations – the VSBC’s governing document.

The Hon. Natalie Suleyman MP, Minister for Small Business and Employment, issued a new Statement of Expectations on 28 May 2025, which is available to view on the VSBC website.

## Budget Paper 3 measures

We are required by the Victorian Government’s Budget Paper 3 (BP3) to report on how we are delivering our performance targets regarding the quality of the VSBC’s alternative dispute resolution services.

|                                      | BP3 measure (target) | 2023-24 | 2024-25 |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|---------|---------|
| Disputes resolved prior to mediation | 25%                  | 34%     | 33%     |
| Mediation success rate               | 60%                  | 74.75%  | 69%     |
| Client satisfaction rate             | 70%                  | 84.6%   | 80%     |

# Operations

## Financial Statement for period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025

| Appropriation                                                  |             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Victorian Small Business Commission                            | \$2,368,686 |
| Once-off funding from Agriculture Victoria                     | \$126,830   |
| Total 2024-25 funding                                          | \$2,495,516 |
| Expenditure                                                    |             |
| Employee related expenses                                      | \$1,861,020 |
| Consultants and professional services (includes Mediator fees) | \$79,984    |
| IT and telecommunications                                      | \$175,903   |
| Office accommodation                                           | \$131,374   |
| DJSIR (Economic Policy, Projects and Coordination) levy        | \$44,322    |
| DJSIR Procurement fee for mediator panel                       | \$75,000    |
| Other expenses                                                 | \$132,166   |
| Total 2024-25 expenditure                                      | \$2,499,769 |

## Freedom of Information

In 2024-25 we received one Freedom of Information request, which we accepted but declined to undertake a document search under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

## Complaints

We have a complaints process, which is outlined on our website. We received 3 complaints in 2024-25. These were investigated and acted upon by the Commissioner.

## Protected disclosure procedures

The VSBC operates in accordance with the department’s protected disclosure procedures. As at 30 June 2025 we had not received any disclosures made under the Protected Disclosure Act 2012, nor had the Victorian

Ombudsman referred any such disclosures to us for investigation.

## Major contracts

From 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025 the VSBC did not enter into any contracts over \$10 million or engage consultants in that value range.

## Systems

The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industries and Regions provides our corporate support systems including finance and procurement, IT, risk management and record management. The VSBC has a specialised case management system it utilises for:

- Dispute management and reporting
- Preliminary enquiries
- Recording engagement and advocacy activities

