AUSTRALIAN RETAIL COUNCIL

Back the retailers that back Victoria



ARC's platform for the Victorian election 2026

Five priorities for the next Victorian government

1. Protect retail workers and customers
2. Reduce the cost of doing business
3. Cut unnecessary red tape
4. Improve freight and deliveries
5. Speed up planning reforms

Get in touch

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Retail is at the heart of community in Victoria

Retailers are one of the state's largest employers; providing jobs for more than 360,000 people. Young people aged 15-24 years account for 21.6% of the retail workforce, making the sector a critical pathway into employment and skills development. Annually, retail generates more than $117 billion for the Victorian economy and retailers contribute millions in taxes and surcharges.

360,000+

people employed by Victorian retail

21.6%

of retail workforce aged 15–24

$117B+

generated annually for Victoria's economy

The retail sector backs Victoria

- Ensures Victorians have access to essential household items such as groceries, medicines and fuel
- Provides jobs including many first jobs for young Victorians
- Supports thriving communities and bustling neighbourhoods
- Generates millions in taxes and surcharges and contributes to the broader Victorian economy.



Retailers are under pressure

Retailers in Victoria are facing a difficult operating environment. Victorian retail crime is at near record levels with 263 offences recorded at retail locations every day and retail theft reaching a new record high[1]. Victorian consumers and retail workers are at risk. Retailers face significant cost pressures from taxes, surcharges, rising energy prices, delayed energy connections, complex and overlapping regulation and planning delays. Collectively these challenges have created one of the most challenging operating environments in the country; squeezing margins and eroding business and consumer confidence.

Victorian retailers are falling behind

The opportunity for the next Victorian Government is clear: restore safety, prioritise growth, support innovation and drive productivity. In short, keep Victoria open and Victorians employed, connected and confident about the future.

[1] https://www.retail.org.au/media/retail-theft-reaches-record-high-as-victorian-stores-face-263-offences-a-day

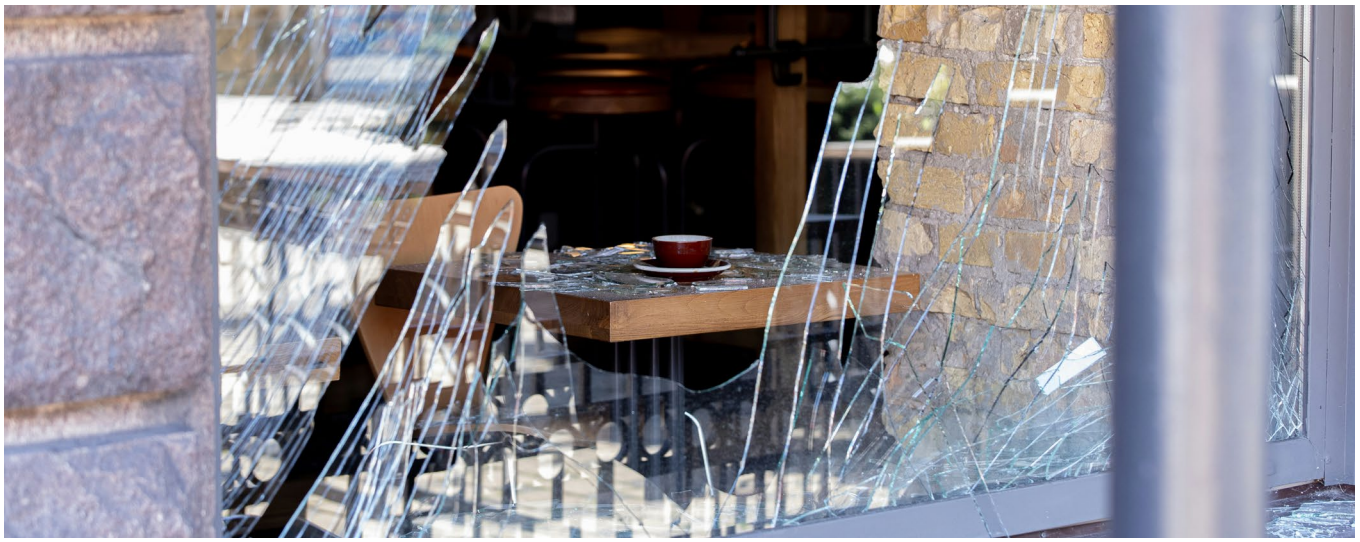
Protect retail workers and customers

The next Victorian Government must address the growing incidence of retail crime and turn around Victoria's reputation as Australia's retail crime capital.

New Crime Statistics Agency figures show 96,008 offences were recorded at retail locations in the 12 months to June 2026. That is equivalent to one offence every five and a half minutes and is the second highest total in the 10 years of reporting. The figures include a record 37,398 steal-from-a-retail-store offences, 102 every day (+2.3%) and 5,120 assault offences, or 14 every day. That compares with almost 90 retail theft incidents a day in New South Wales, despite Victoria having around 1.5 million fewer residents.

Retail crime is not a victimless crime. Customers feel unsafe and retail workers face unacceptable abuse, threats and acts of physical violence. Repeat offenders drive up costs for retailers and undermine safety across retail precincts.

Offenders must be punished and penalties must be supported by practical tools that keep known offenders away from retail locations, ensure a sustained police presence in high-risk precincts and deliver coordinated action across multiple locations.



ARC CALLS ON THE NEXT VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT TO

- **Bring forward the commencement of workplace protection orders and commit to introducing interim order protections** to better support retailers to respond to serious, repeat offending in retail settings.
- **Address the illicit tobacco crisis** by supporting calls for an immediate reduction of the Federal tobacco excise, a focus on stronger enforcement and penalties - including in the emerging illegal trade in alcohol - and greater Commonwealth-state coordination efforts, including through improved intelligence sharing.
- **Implement Operation Pulse** as a permanent statewide police initiative with a specialist coordination focus on prolific and repeat offenders and organised retail crime.
- **Expand visible policing in high-risk retail** precincts supported by investment in a dedicated state operations command facility that collects and shares crime data, incident patterns and leverages local retailer intelligence.

Reduce the cost of doing business

Victoria is the most expensive state in the nation to run a business; discouraging investment, job creation, and preventing business growth.

Victoria has been ranked last by the Business Council of Australia for overall business conditions and the cost of doing business is the top concern of retailers. Victoria has the highest tax burden in the nation, including for land tax which is set at the least competitive rate in the country. The threshold for payroll tax kicks in at $1,000,000 and the mental health and wellbeing levy surcharge and COVID-19 debt levy combined add 1.% on wages over $10m and 2% on wages over $100m.

High taxes, levies and surcharges, rising energy costs, escalating insurance premiums, the cost of managing ever-growing rents and compliance obligations are all adding pressure on business at the same time consumers are becoming more price sensitive.

The next Government must reduce the cost of doing business, restore business confidence and rebuild Victoria's reputation as a great state for investment.

ARC CALLS ON THE NEXT VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT TO

- **Immediately commence a review into the Victorian tax burden on business,** with a particular focus on revising payroll tax settings by increasing the threshold and eliminating both the COVID-19 surcharge and the mental health and wellbeing surcharge.

- **Eliminate barriers to investment by making Victoria attractive to business**, encouraging enterprise and ensuring opportunities for job creation remain top of mind.



Cut unnecessary red tape

Victorian retailers operate in a highly competitive national and global market. Complex and fragmented regulation is holding businesses back and adding to the costs that consumers pay.

Retailers identify complex and cumulative regulatory and licensing requirements, including onerous local government permits and inconsistent rules, as costly and often unnecessary. Burdensome compliance increases operating costs for retailers and consumers and is a major barrier to investment, innovation and growth. Small and medium retailers are disproportionately impacted. Cafes in Victoria have one of the highest licensing and regulatory requirements in the country.

Victoria needs a regulatory system that is efficient and easy to navigate while maintaining appropriate community safeguards.

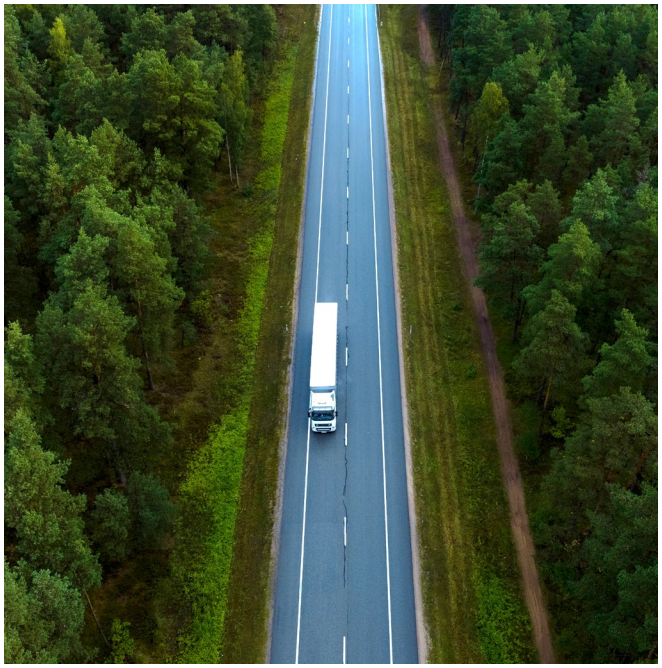
The next Victorian Government must prioritise a real reduction in red tape, move beyond the layering on of new rules and eliminate regulation that hinders investment in retail jobs and growth and adds to consumer costs.



ARC CALLS ON THE NEXT VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT TO

- **Undertake an independent audit of regulation** targeting high-friction compliance and reporting requirements to streamline licensing and deliver a measurable reduction in the compliance burden on Victorian retail.
- **Appoint a dedicated minister** for the Delivery of Red Tape Reduction and Regulatory Harmonisation to:
    - Champion regulatory reform in Victoria by removing unnecessary red tape and simplifying the compliance burden on business
    - Commit to supporting the federal government's national single market reform agenda through active participation in the National Competition Policy reform process.
- **Improve the consistency and quality** of Regulatory Impact Statements and Legislative Impact Assessments to pursue a central view across portfolios to join up regulation, reduce regulatory duplication and unintended compliance burden.

Improve freight and deliveries



Efficient and reliable freight and logistics are critical to the success of retail in Victoria. Without reliable deliveries, the availability of everyday items such as food, medicine and fuel is put at risk.

The next Victorian Government should focus on shoring up road and rail freight resilience and eliminating barriers to efficient deliveries such as unnecessary curfews and inconsistent local rules.

Investment in freight infrastructure, including electric vehicle charging facilities should be prioritised to support more efficient freight movements and reduce congestion. Incentives should also be provided to accelerate the uptake of low-noise, lower emissions vehicles across freight fleets.

ARC CALLS ON THE NEXT VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT TO

- **Strengthen freight corridors and infrastructure** by protecting and expanding key freight routes, including long-term planning for the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road and upgrades to bridges, arterial roads and council assets.
- **Increase investment in transport infrastructure,** targeting port connectivity, freight-critical road corridors and regional rail linehaul capacity to improve resilience, enable mode shift and reduce congestion.
- **Improve heavy vehicle productivity and freight efficiency** by expanding access to High-Productivity Freight Vehicles (HPFVs), enabling more freight to be moved with with fewer trips, lower costs and fewer emissions.
- **Modernise delivery rules and curfews** by driving local councils to harmonise access rules enabling quiet, low-emission late-night and 24-hour deliveries that meet changing customer expectations while protecting local amenity.
- **Support and accelerate low and zero-emissions freight** through investment in practical charging and refuelling infrastructure at depots, hubs, kerbsides and highways.
- **Reform road user and infrastructure charging frameworks** to deliver fair, transparent tolling for Victorian freeways and arterial roads

Speed up planning reforms



Victoria's planning system is imposing unnecessary cost, delay and uncertainty on retailers seeking to establish businesses and expand operations enabling easy access for customers. Accessible retail stores, supermarkets and quick service restaurants are essential to vibrant and liveable communities. Inflexible zoning, slow council processes, duplicative assessment requirements, unreliable appeal and tribunal timeframes, and cumbersome post-approval endorsement are constraining investment, limiting competition and increasing costs. The next Victorian Government must fix the planning system to support business growth, improve consumer access and restore Victorian high streets.

ARC CALLS ON THE NEXT VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT TO

- **Streamline approvals and remove duplication** by setting binding timeframes and incentivising councils to process routine planning approvals such as stormwater, Construction Management Plans and Waste Management Plans; enforce VCAT decision benchmarks; align third-party appeal rights with other jurisdictions; fast track state planning approvals and remove assessment tests that duplicate or conflict with federal regulatory decisions.

- **Unlock land for retail through strategic planning** that identifies and protects space for retail, development, particularly in growth areas, and increases zoning flexibility to accommodate, full-line supermarkets and other retail formats, supporting jobs, investment and economic activity.



About the Australian Retail Council

ARC represents the Australian retail sector. Valued at $444 billion, retail is the nation's largest private sector employer, supporting more than 1.4 million jobs, including more young Australians aged 15 to 24 years than any other industry. ARC's membership is diverse. From family-owned small and independent businesses, comprising 95 per cent of our membership, to large national and international retailers supporting communities across metropolitan and regional Australia. With more than 155,000 retail outlets nationwide and a growing online presence, the retail sector is embedded throughout the economy, playing a critical role in the supply chain of Australian businesses. ARC advocates for policies and reform that drive growth, resilience, and long-term prosperity for Australian retail and the millions who rely on it. At a time of rapid change, from technological disruption and international competition to shifting consumer behaviour and sustainability expectations, effective policy settings are critical for retailers, workers, consumers, and communities.

$444B
retail sector value

1.4M+
jobs supported

155,000+
retail outlets nationwide

95%
of ARC membership are small and independent businesses

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