



Our Plan to get
VICTORIA

**Back
to Work
and
Back in
Business**

**COVID-19
RESPONSE**

May 2020



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THE NATIONALS
for Regional Victoria

COVID-19 RESPONSE



Michael O'Brien MP
Liberal Leader

Michael O'Brien



Peter Walsh MP
The Nationals Leader

Peter Walsh

Dear fellow Victorians,

By working with the State and Federal Governments, we have all achieved an extraordinary outcome in suppressing COVID-19 that makes Victoria – and Australia – the envy of the world.

We appreciate everyone who has contributed to this achievement, especially our essential workers. **You have our sincere thanks.**

This achievement, however, has come at a significant cost to our local economy, our community and to our way of life.

With COVID-19 now apparently under a measure of control, it is urgent that the Andrews Labor Government puts in place a clear plan that enables us to take back our lives and rebuild our local communities.

Many hard lessons have been learnt from the virus outbreak; we now need to take action to deal with these shortcomings, such as our relative lack of local manufacturing capacity.

The Liberals and Nationals have worked constructively during the virus pandemic to provide positive suggestions, and to hold the Andrews Government to account for its actions.

In that same constructive manner we have prepared this Plan: our positive suggestions about what we believe should be the key priorities for the Government in the recovery phase.

This is not a plan for the next election; Victorians can't afford to wait that long. This is our Plan for immediate action by the Andrews Labor Government so that Victoria can rebuild from the damage done by COVID-19 to our jobs, our communities and our lives.

These suggestions are necessarily bold and ambitious, because we don't believe that business as usual is going to be enough to secure our recovery.

Our Plan has four themes – Securing Your Personal Finances, Rebuilding Local Economies, Building Better Communities, and Keeping Your Family Safe.

No single political party has a mortgage on good ideas. With Victoria's future at stake, the Liberals and Nationals urge the Andrews Labor Government to adopt our **Plan to Get Victoria Back to Work and Back in Business.**

May 2020

Getting Victoria Back to Work and Back in Business

OUR PLAN

- 1. SECURING YOUR PERSONAL FINANCES**
- 2. REBUILDING LOCAL ECONOMIES**
- 3. BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES**
- 4. KEEPING YOUR FAMILY SAFE**



Victoria's economy was already underperforming prior to this year's bushfires and the outbreak of COVID-19.

Our unemployment rate was above the national average. We were halfway to recession with economic growth going backwards in the December quarter.

The Budget was in deficit to the tune of \$1.1 billion to 31 December 2019 - that is, before the state faced bushfires and COVID-19.

“ On top of this, **net debt had doubled under Labor** when we were already the highest taxing state in the nation. ”

Bright spots in the economy were testament to the hard work and ingenuity of Victorians prepared to have a go and take financial risks to get ahead.

Now, the actions taken by the Andrews Government to address the virus have smashed local economies.

Businesses, including restaurants, cafes, food courts, pubs and clubs, cinemas, galleries, theatres and even community sport were all forced to shut down.

This has had a devastating effect on our local economy, forcing thousands of small business closures and hundreds of thousands of Victorians into the unemployment queue.

Unemployment spike is the worst in the nation

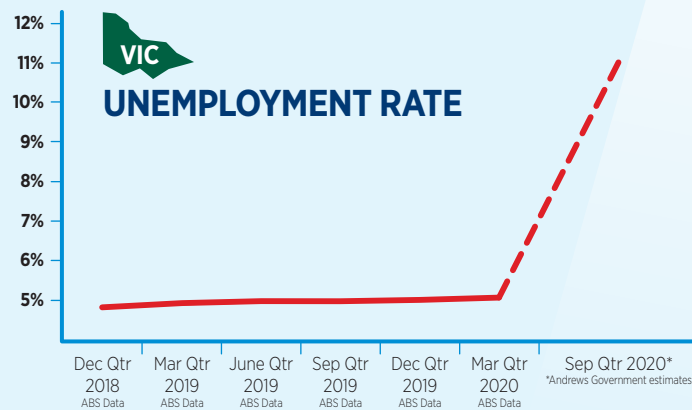
According to weekly payroll jobs data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics between 14 March and 18 April,

the number of jobs in Victoria decreased by 8.6 per cent - **the worst in the nation.**

The Andrews Government admits Victoria's unemployment rate could increase to 11 per cent this year which would see Victorian unemployment more than double and 400,000 Victorians unemployed.

On top of the hundreds of thousands appearing on the official unemployment rate, many more will face loss of income, underemployment or a cut in hours.

Every Victorian who has lost their job was, only a few months ago, working and financially contributing to our shared prosperity.



The way back



The Andrews Government must deliver.

It is the responsibility of the Andrews Government to take strong action to help Victoria recover, not just leave it all to the Federal Government.

But the ability of the Andrews Government to properly fund an economic recovery is compromised by the rapid increase in debt it built up before COVID-19 hit.

Before COVID-19, the Andrews Government had already doubled net state debt.

Now, net debt is on track to more than triple to \$74 billion by 2021.

Despite promising no new or increased taxes, the Government has introduced 28 new or expanded taxes, making Victorians the highest taxed of any Australians.

Too much debt, too high taxes and a budget deficit means there is nowhere to move.

That's why the Victorian Government has announced less support to help businesses survive this pandemic than has New South Wales.

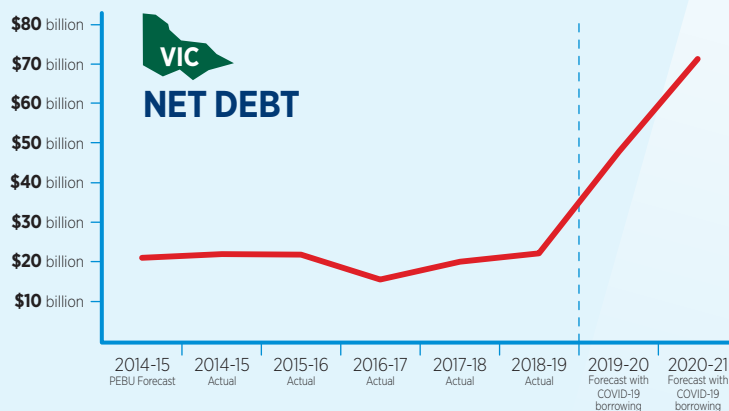


That's why Victoria has only reduced one business licence fee while New South Wales has removed twelve.

Post-COVID-19, Victoria needs a real plan to Get Back to Work and Back in Business.

The time for rebuilding is a time for bold and constructive ideas to transform Victoria into a jobs powerhouse.

Good, well-paid and secure jobs will give people back the income and security that is needed to rebuild their lives.



1. SECURING YOUR PERSONAL FINANCES



“ Personal financial security means financial **peace of mind.** ”

Unfortunately, household finances have been badly hit by COVID-19.

Victoria's unemployment could more than double, with over 400,000 Victorians unemployed. On top of that, tens of thousands of families have seen a reduction in take-home wages.

To help Victorian families with their hip-pocket costs we propose:

■ No new taxes

The Andrews Government has introduced 28 new or expanded taxes despite promising not to do so before it was elected.

The Government must not increase taxes to fund its unprecedented debt blowout.

✓ The Government must not increase or introduce any new taxes.

■ A freeze on transport fees and charges

✓ The Government should negotiate with Transurban and ConnectEast for a freeze on all toll road charges until 1 July 2021.

✓ All metropolitan and regional public transport fares should be frozen at current levels until 1 July 2021.

✓ Registration payments for commercial vehicles grounded because of COVID-19 should also be waived.

■ A freeze on council rates

✓ The Andrews Government should support local government to implement a freeze on all rates categories for 12 months.

■ Real action to reduce energy costs

Policies the Government should implement to reduce energy costs include:

✓ A one-off increase to the energy concession to \$1000 per household in 2020-21.

✓ Implementing the Liberal Nationals' Zero to Landfill plan including supporting new Energy From Waste facilities to create a new, low emission baseload energy supply for Victoria.

✓ Immediately remove the current moratorium on conventional onshore natural gas.

“ Lower energy prices will also help **attract new industry** and manufacturing to our state. ”



2. REBUILDING LOCAL ECONOMIES

COVID-19 has devastated our local economies, with thousands of small businesses forced to shut and hundreds of thousands of jobs forecast to be lost.

The loss of these mainly small businesses has changed the nature of our local community for the worse.

COVID-19 has also exposed massive shortcomings in our local economy, particularly in our lack of local manufacturing capacity.

“Now is the time for bold action to turn this around.”

Get the employment rate back to pre-COVID-19 levels by the end of 2021

- ✓ The Government must reduce our unemployment rate back to 5.3 per cent (pre-COVID-19 level) by the end of 2021.
- ✓ The Andrews Government must commit to delivering 10,000 additional apprenticeship and traineeship commencements by the start of 2022.

Waive payroll tax below \$10 million threshold

Payroll tax can be a disincentive for business to hire.

- ✓ The Andrews Government should raise the payroll tax threshold so that businesses do not pay this tax on the first \$10 million of payroll to 30 June 2021.

Reduce business taxes and excessive regulation

- ✓ The Government should waive fees and charges for businesses to 1 July 2021, including business licensing fees, labour hire registration scheme fees and place a moratorium on the employer levy under the long service leave portability scheme.
- ✓ The Government must also cancel its \$700 million dividend raid from WorkCover and provide WorkCover premium relief to businesses in 2020-21.
- ✓ Enforce statutory timeframes on State Government decision-making.

Bring manufacturing home to Victoria

Over the past 20 years, the number of manufacturing jobs in Victoria has fallen by more than 50,000.

The Government should:

- ✓ Establish a \$1 billion “Bringing Manufacturing Home” fund to encourage manufacturers to locate their facilities in Victoria.
- ✓ Prioritise support for industries of national importance such as PPE manufacture, medical research, defence procurement and rare earths processing.



Strengthening Victoria's economic base

A lesson from COVID-19 shortages is that Victoria must diversify its supply chain. No longer can we rely on just four countries for half of our merchandise trade or any single country for more than a quarter of it. The Government must:

- ✓ Work with the Federal Government and the business community to unblock supply chain choke points.
- ✓ Refocus the London Global Victoria office toward the UK and open a new EU-facing office in Brussels.
- ✓ Expand our Global Victoria presence in Indonesia and India by June 2021.
- ✓ Work with business to diversify our import base to ensure we are not dependent on any single country for more than 15 per cent of our merchandise imports.
- ✓ Deliver the Murray Basin Rail Project by December 2021 to revolutionise supply chains in north-west Victoria.
- ✓ Build the East West Link to connect the Eastern Freeway with Citylink and reduce congestion on Melbourne's inner-city road network.
- ✓ Expand free TAFE to make all training free for occupations experiencing skill shortages in Victoria.

- ✓ Work with the Federal Government to facilitate safe entry for international students to rebuild this important sector for Victoria.

Restore local small businesses

The State Government is one of the biggest consumers in our economy and must lead the way in purchasing from and awarding contracts to Victorian firms.

- ✓ The Government must improve Victorian Government purchasing and procurement arrangements to include smaller suppliers, in particular local suppliers in rural and regional areas.
- ✓ The Government should also support tradies and contractors by providing payments on government contracts within seven days.
- ✓ The Government should support local government to waive permit fees on local shopping strip businesses.

Boosting investment in Melbourne's CBD

The Andrews Government has restricted the development of Melbourne's CBD, hurting opportunities for investment and jobs.

- ✓ The Government must repeal C270 to promote flexibility and employment growth.



Supporting creative industries

Creative industries are being seriously impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The cultural and creative sector employed an estimated 289,000 Victorians in 2018-19.

- ✓ The Victorian Government has a responsibility to facilitate the recovery of this sector to pre-COVID-19 employment levels by June 2021.
- ✓ The Government must establish a \$50 million Creative Industries Restoration Fund.
- ✓ This fund could be used to fund events such as a 2020 Virtual White Night.

2. REBUILDING LOCAL ECONOMIES

COVID-19
RESPONSE



▶ Kick-starting regional tourism

- ✓ The Andrews Government must aim to return the tourism sector to June 2019 bed night accommodation levels by June 2021.
- ✓ The Government must establish a dedicated \$200 million Regional Tourism Fund to support country communities.
- ✓ Last year the Andrews Government spent more than \$100 million on self-promotional advertising, such as its multi-million dollar 'Big Build' campaign. All Government self-promotional advertising must be scrapped and redirected into advertising regional Victorian tourism.
- ✓ The Government should also complete projects including the Grampians Peaks Trail, re-open the iconic Mt Buffalo chalet and upgrade nature based facilities to get people back to bushfire-impacted north-east Victoria and Gippsland.

▶ Investing in local transport and other infrastructure

“ Actioning local shovel-ready projects is **essential to generate local jobs** right now. ”

The Andrews Government should fast-track important local transport projects - **to get new construction jobs underway**. In particular it must:

- ✓ Establish a new \$100 million Metropolitan Road and Bike Paths Fund for smaller projects around greater Melbourne.
- ✓ Immediately reinstate the Country Roads and Bridges Program.
- ✓ Begin construction of other major regional roads such as the Kilmore Bypass, Princes Highway (Traralgon to Sale) duplication, Shepparton Bypass, Ballarat Western Link Road (Stage 2) and Princes Highway (west of Colac) upgrade.



3. BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES



Building better local communities needs to be a priority of the recovery plan.

Many local services have been forced to close as a result of COVID-19 and there are fears that they won't return.

“Affordable and accessible hospital and health services, education and childcare are all essential for strong communities.”

Reduce Victoria's elective surgery wait lists

Victoria's elective surgery wait lists have blown out to nearly 51,000 people – the worst in the state's history.

'Elective surgery' is essential.

If we don't invest in this now, the long-term detrimental effects will be significant.

✓ The Government must work to immediately establish daily real time reporting of all hospital wait lists in Victoria.

✓ The Government should aim to reduce the elective surgery wait list to below the June 2019 figure of 40,000 by June 2021.

Quality education and early childhood learning

Our children's schooling has been severely disrupted by COVID-19.

Parents and teachers have done their best but nothing replaces time in the classroom.

✓ The Andrews Government needs to work with the Federal Government to continue providing affordable childcare and kinder once the fee-free period ends.

✓ The Government must also immediately undertake a maintenance blitz of our public schools to improve learning environments and clear the backlog of school maintenance issues.

✓ All scheduled school maintenance spending for the next two years should be brought forward into 2020-21, with an additional \$10 million funded on top of the \$45 million already provided to increase and maintain a deep cleaning program.

✓ The Government should prioritise providing local tradies and small businesses access to undertake these works.



3. BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES

- ✓ The Andrews Government should provide \$25 million for schools to arrange catch-up classes or schedule additional tutorials for students who have fallen behind, particularly for vulnerable cohorts.
- ✓ Funding previously committed by the State Government for improvements to Independent and Catholic schools should be brought forward into 2020-21 and delivered by local contractors, using local materials.

Improving our local environment

A healthy local environment is essential for healthy communities.

- ✓ The Andrews Government should immediately implement the Liberal Nationals' Zero to Landfill plan and prioritise investment in shovel-ready recycling and Energy From Waste projects.
- ✓ Victoria must fast-track implementation of the Container Deposit Scheme.
- ✓ The Government should commit to plant 1 million new trees in Victoria over the next 12 months.



- ✓ Funding to Victorian Landcare must be extended and grants should be expanded to support community organisations or disability support employers to grow, plant and care for trees.

“ **Creating jobs and supporting the economy** through practical environmental action. ”



Ensuring sufficient funds for essential services by cutting Government waste

Now more than ever we can't afford wasteful Government spending.

Every dollar wasted is a dollar that can't be invested into essential services.

The Andrews Government is on track to more than triple State Government net debt to \$74 billion.

More debt means higher interest payments which can't be spent on essential services such as health and education.

- ✓ The Government must establish a cross-party parliamentary oversight committee, with a non-government chair and majority, to scrutinise the Government's unprecedented \$24.5 billion of unplanned debt spending.

The Government's decision to cancel parliamentary sittings in May has allowed it to avoid scrutiny and stands in stark contrast to other parliaments, which have continued to sit regularly.

- ✓ The Parliament should sit for the equivalent of two weeks each month until June 2021 to ensure appropriate oversight and scrutiny of Government spending.

“ Making sure we can deliver **affordable and accessible** hospital and health services, education and childcare. ”



4. KEEPING YOUR FAMILY SAFE

As we enter the recovery phase, it is important that the Government does all it can to keep you and your family safe.

The Government needs to tackle the causes of crime, not just the symptoms.

With unemployment, homelessness, and social dislocation all increasing as a result of the lockdowns, the Andrews Government must act to address these issues.



Supporting community well-being

Mental health issues have increased because of the COVID-19 lockdown and improved resources to support those at risk must be prioritised.

- ✓ The Andrews Government must improve access to mental health services with additional funding to bring Victoria's mental health funding and service access from one of the lowest in the country to at least the national average per capita.
- ✓ The Government must increase clinical support for young people and the acute bed rate to the national average.
- ✓ It is also essential that investment is provided to reduce the number of suicides in Victoria.

- ✓ The Government must commit to scrapping the Mental Health Tax. By cutting wasteful spending and prioritising, the Government can adequately fund Victoria's mental health system without adding another new tax.

Reducing family violence

Family violence is a significant concern during times of social dislocation.

- ✓ The Andrews Government should increase funding to the not-for-profit and community sector to support their work in family violence, homelessness and other home programs.

Reducing homelessness

Under the Andrews Government, the public housing wait list has blown out to about 52,000 Victorians.

- ✓ The Government must work with industry to improve housing supply and affordability via delivery of 'Build to Rent' residential projects.
- ✓ The Andrews Government must set a target of reducing the public housing wait list to 42,000 by June 2021.



Getting police back into local communities

With crime up by 16.9 per cent under the Andrews Government, it's critical that as we emerge from this crisis, Victorians see a strong and visible police presence in their communities.

- ✓ The Government must ensure that Protective Services Officers are returned to our train stations from 6.00pm until last train as soon as possible.
- ✓ The Government must urgently commit to reopening every one of the recently closed police stations to the community as soon as it is safe to do so.
- ✓ The Government must ensure that booze and drug buses are back on the roads as soon as it is safe to do so.

✓ The Government should bring forward a police and emergency services infrastructure upgrade program to give our hard working first responders the infrastructure they deserve, while supporting local builders, tradies and other small businesses.

✓ Key 24-hour police stations such as Narre Warren, Benalla, Pahrnan and Hamilton desperately need rebuilding while growing communities such as Clyde need and deserve their own emergency services hub to keep the community safe.

Keeping justice moving

Before COVID-19 the lack of investment in both physical and virtual infrastructure under the five and a half

years of the Andrews Government meant Victoria's court system was already under extreme pressure.

- ✓ Justice delayed is justice denied and the Government must ensure that the technology and other solutions needed to keep the justice system working are urgently provided.
- ✓ The Government must commit to urgently needed video conferencing and other technology to keep the courts moving and ensure the caseload backlogs for 2020-2021 are no more than those in 2018-2019 in the Children's and Magistrates Courts.
- ✓ The Government must also commit to the return of jury trials as soon as possible.

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Bring manufacturing home to Victoria

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“Our Plan to Get Victoria Back to Work



MICHAEL O'BRIEN MP

Liberal Member for Malvern
Leader of the Liberal Party,
Shadow Minister for
Small Business

michael.obrien@parliament.vic.gov.au



PETER WALSH MP

Nationals Member for
Murray Plains, Leader of The
Nationals, Shadow Minister
for Regional Victoria and
Decentralisation, Agriculture,
Aboriginal Affairs, Bushfire
Recovery

peter.walsh@parliament.vic.gov.au



CINDY MCLEISH MP

Liberal Member for Eildon
Deputy Leader of
the Liberal Party,
Shadow Minister for
Education, Regional Cities

cindy.mcleish@parliament.vic.gov.au



STEPH RYAN MP

Nationals Member for Euroa
Deputy Leader of The
Nationals, Shadow Minister
for Water, Public Transport
(Regional), Gaming and
Liquor Regulation

steph.ryan@parliament.vic.gov.au

Members of the Legislative Assembly



NEIL ANGUS MP

Liberal Member for Forest Hill
Shadow Assistant Treasurer,
Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs,
Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs
neil.angus@parliament.vic.gov.au



BRAD BATTIN MP

Liberal Member for Gembrook
Shadow Minister for Roads (Metro),
Road Safety and TAC, Youth Justice,
Crime Prevention, Victim Support
brad.battin@parliament.vic.gov.au



GARY BLACKWOOD MP

Liberal Member for Narracan
Shadow Assistant Minister for Forestry
gary.blackwood@parliament.vic.gov.au



ROMA BRITNELL MP

Liberal Member for South-West Coast
Shadow Minister for Rural Roads,
Ports and Freight
roma.britnell@parliament.vic.gov.au



TIM BULL MP

Nationals Member for Gippsland East
Shadow Minister for Carers & Disability,
Veterans Affairs, Racing
tim.bull@parliament.vic.gov.au



NEALE BURGESS MP

Liberal Member for Hastings
neale.burgess@parliament.vic.gov.au



MATTHEW GUY MP

Liberal Member for Bulleen
matthew.guy@parliament.vic.gov.au



DAVID HODGETT MP

Liberal Member for Croydon
Shadow Minister for Tourism,
Sport and Major Events

david.hodgett@parliament.vic.gov.au



EMMA KEALY MP

Nationals Member for Lowan
Shadow Minister for Mental
Health, Prevention of Family
Violence, Women

emma.kealy@parliament.vic.gov.au



TIM MCCURDY MP

Nationals Member for Ovens Valley
tim.mccurdy@parliament.vic.gov.au



DAVID MORRIS MP

Liberal Member for Mornington
Shadow Minister for Finance,
Bay Protection, Fishing and
Boating, Ageing

david.morris@parliament.vic.gov.au



JAMES NEWBURY MP

Liberal Member for Brighton
Shadow Assistant Minister for
Wastewater, Freedom of Information

james.newbury@parliament.vic.gov.au



DANNY O'BRIEN MP

Nationals Member for Gippsland South
Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional
Health, Ambulance Services

danny.obrien@parliament.vic.gov.au



RICHARD RIORDAN MP

Liberal Member for Polwarth
Shadow Assistant Minister for
Regional Victoria, Agriculture

richard.riordan@parliament.vic.gov.au

and Back in Business.”



BRAD ROWSWELL MP
Liberal Member for Sandringham
Secretary to Shadow Cabinet,
Shadow Assistant Minister to the
Leader of the Opposition
brad.rowswell@parliament.vic.gov.au



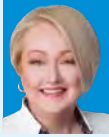
RYAN SMITH MP
Liberal Member for Warrandyte
Shadow Minister for Energy
and Renewables, Resources
ryan.smith@parliament.vic.gov.au



TIM SMITH MP
Liberal Member for Kew
Shadow Minister for Planning
and Heritage, Local Government,
Housing, Population
tim.smith@parliament.vic.gov.au



DAVID SOUTHWICK MP
Liberal Member for Caulfield
Shadow Minister for Police,
Community Safety, Corrections
david.southwick@parliament.vic.gov.au



LOUISE STALEY MP
Liberal Member for Ripon
Shadow Treasurer,
Shadow Minister for Economic
Development
louise.staley@parliament.vic.gov.au



BILL TILLEY MP
Liberal Member for Benambra
bill.tilley@parliament.vic.gov.au



BRIDGET VALLENCE MP
Liberal Member for Evelyn
Shadow Minister for Environment and
Climate Change, Youth Affairs
bridget.vallence@parliament.vic.gov.au



NICK WAKELING MP
Liberal Member for Ferntree Gully
Shadow Minister for Emergency
Services, Industrial Relations and
Workplace Safety, Child Protection
nick.wakeling@parliament.vic.gov.au



KIM WELLS MP
Liberal Member for Rowville
Shadow Special Minister of State,
Shadow Minister for Counter-Terrorism,
Manager of Opposition Business
kim.wells@parliament.vic.gov.au

Members of the Legislative Council



DAVID DAVIS MP
Liberal Member for Southern
Metropolitan Region
Leader of The Opposition in the
Legislative Council, Shadow Minister
for Public Transport (Metro), Transport
Infrastructure, Equality, Federal-State
Relations, Priority Precincts, the Arts
david.davis@parliament.vic.gov.au



GEORGIE CROZIER MP
Liberal Member for Southern
Metropolitan Region
Deputy Leader of The Opposition
in the Legislative Council,
Shadow Minister for Health,
Ambulance Services
georgie.crozier@parliament.vic.gov.au



BRUCE ATKINSON MP
Liberal Member for Eastern
Metropolitan Region
bruce.atkinson@parliament.vic.gov.au



MATTHEW BACH MP
Liberal Member for Eastern
Metropolitan Region
matthew.bach@parliament.vic.gov.au



MELINA BATH MP
Nationals Member for Eastern
Victoria Region
Shadow Assistant Minister
for Public Land Use
melina.bath@parliament.vic.gov.au



BERNIE FINN MP
Liberal Member for Western
Metropolitan Region
Shadow Assistant Minister
for Autism, Small Business
bernie.finn@parliament.vic.gov.au



WENDY LOVELL MP
Liberal Member for Northern
Victoria Region
wendy.lovell@parliament.vic.gov.au



BEV McARTHUR MP
Liberal Member for Western
Victoria Region
bev.mcarthur@parliament.vic.gov.au



EDWARD O'DONOHUE MP
Liberal Member for Eastern
Victoria Region
Shadow Attorney-General
edward.odonohue@parliament.vic.gov.au



CRAIG ONDARCHIE MP
Liberal Member for Northern
Metropolitan Region
craig.ondarchie@parliament.vic.gov.au



GORDON RICH-PHILLIPS MP
Liberal Member for South Eastern
Metropolitan Region, Shadow Minister
for Innovation, Jobs and Trade, Training
and Skills, Higher Education, Aviation
gordon.rich-phillips@parliament.vic.gov.au



Back to Work and Back in Business

Liberal Party

Level 2
60 Collins Street
Melbourne Vic 3000

03 9654 2255

libs@vic.liberal.org.au

vic.liberal.org.au

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The Nationals Victoria

Level 9, Suite 908
343 Little Collins Street
Melbourne Vic 3000

03 9600 1424

vic@nationals.org.au

vic.nationals.org.au

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michaelobrien.com.au



THE NATIONALS
for Regional Victoria