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# Year in Review 2007-2008

Objectives	Achievements
<b>Reforms and Research</b>	
<p>Contribute to the Productivity Commission's review of the consumer policy framework in Australia</p> <p>Pursue the goals of the Victorian Government's Reducing the Regulatory Burden initiative</p> <p>Lead the Department of Justice Better Business Regulation project to improve how regulators make, operate and review regulations</p> <p>Work with industry to make contract terms fairer, take enforcement action against traders when talks break down, research consumers' experience</p> <p>Conduct research to inform our work</p>	<p>Made three substantive submissions to the Productivity Commission inquiry. Along with other jurisdictions, continued to work with and advise national ministerial bodies on ways to improve the framework, including on issues regarding a new national consumer law.</p> <p>Created an online system for occupational licence applications</p> <p>Tested the Better Business Regulation framework we developed on two regulatory schemes, finding the framework effective and transferable</p> <p>Worked with numerous industries to make their terms fairer, developed guidelines for industry, took legal action against several traders, surveyed consumer experiences of unfair contract terms</p> <p>Conducted six major research projects and numerous smaller research projects</p>
<b>Fair Trading</b>	
<p>Educate and advise consumers about general and fair trading issues</p> <p>Educate students on consumer issues</p> <p>Enforce consumer protection laws</p> <p>Register business names</p>	<p>Received more than 545,000 calls to our Consumer Helpline including 126,890 calls on fair trading issues, distributed almost 1,400,000 publications</p> <p>Won Chairs Award for our work with VCAL students, distributed almost 12,000 teacher resources, partnered with Office of Gaming and Racing on responsible gambling education</p> <p>Secured \$701,763 in court fines and \$422,842 in compensation for consumers, concluded 45 prosecutions and 228 civil proceedings, signed 73 parties to enforceable undertakings</p> <p>Processed 63,030 new business name registrations</p>
<b>Residential Accommodation</b>	
<p>Enhance consumer protections for tenants, including residents of rooming houses, caravan parks and commercial student accommodation</p> <p>Help consumers with tenancy enquiries</p> <p>Educate vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers about their rights and responsibilities in the private rental market</p> <p>Conduct inspections in accordance with the <i>Residential Tenancies Act 1997</i></p> <p>Provide extra help for vulnerable and disadvantaged tenants</p>	<p>Developed a Residential Accommodation Strategy, including releasing for public consultation an Issues Paper. We received almost 50 submissions in response</p> <p>Answered a record 107,268 calls</p> <p>Developed a DVD and educational program for the Sudanese community, reproduced the publication <i>Renting a Home</i> in more accessible formats</p> <p>Conducted a record 7,903 inspections regarding repairs, abandoned goods and rental assessments</p> <p>Funded a program that enabled almost 3,500 vulnerable and disadvantaged tenants to get advocacy help</p>
<b>Buying and Selling Property</b>	
<p>Oversee the introduction of the <i>Owners Corporation Act 2006</i></p> <p>Review laws and policies relating to real estate</p> <p>Educate home buyers and real estate agents</p> <p>Resolve disputes between estate agents and consumers, enforce the <i>Estate Agents Act 1980</i></p>	<p>Produced a guide to owners corporations, distributed about 52,000 guides in response to requests</p> <p>New laws we developed commenced, protecting the highest bid at auction after the fall of the hammer</p> <p>Sponsored and exhibited at First Home Buyers Expo, answered a record 15,963 calls on real estate matters</p> <p>Achieved settlements for consumers totalling almost \$340,000, conducted 95 inspections of real estate agencies leading to two prosecutions and 15 enforceable undertakings</p>
<b>Building</b>	
<p>Answer enquiries about building matters</p> <p>Resolve disputes between consumers and builders</p> <p>Enforce the <i>Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995</i> and <i>Fair Trading Act 1999</i></p>	<p>Answered a record 29,737 calls</p> <p>Finalised 1,721 disputes, resolved 82 per cent of those that met our conciliation criteria, recovered \$2.6 million for consumers, doubling the amount recovered last year</p> <p>Prosecuted 22 building matters, including Joseph Frendo, also known as Joe Capri, who was fined \$160,000 plus costs</p>



## Objectives

## Achievements

### Credit and Debt

Improve access to affordable credit	Hosted the Affordable Credit Summit and convened a taskforce to progress ideas that stemmed from it, commenced the inquiry into small amount lending
Provide practical help to consumers in debt	Funded 43 financial counselling agencies, which provided financial counselling to more than 41,000 Victorians
Train financial counsellors/volunteers in Energy Hardship programs	Trained 140 financial counsellors and more than 1,400 volunteers
Uphold the rights of consumers in relation to credit	Took legal action that resulted in the Consumer Credit Code being considered for the first time in the High Court
Advise consumers on credit matters	Answered a record 11,842 calls, up about a third on last year

### Motor Cars

Educate consumers about buying cars	Distributed 31,300 copies of <i>Better Car Deals</i> and quick tips guides. Launched and distributed translated copies.
Make regulations to support amended <i>Motor Car Traders Act 1986</i>	Prepared a Regulatory Impact Statement for new Regulations
Enforce <i>Motor Car Traders Act 1986</i>	Motor car traders fined \$222,000 as a result of our compliance program, up 208 per cent compared to last year, Ballarat trader fined \$110,000 for trading without a licence, detected 19 potential offenders with our computerised detection program

### Liquor

Support Director of Liquor Licensing	Processed 17,620 new/change liquor licence applications, attended 243 liquor forum meetings
Deliver Responsible Serving of Alcohol training	Trained more than 48,000 people, accredited 103 new trainers, held 17 quality assurance seminars for existing trainers
Develop policy and review legislation	New laws strengthening the powers of the Director of Liquor Licensing came into force

### Trade Measurement

Test or inspect instruments used for trade measurement	Tested/inspected 21,819 instruments, including 8,300 petrol or LPG pumps, conducted inspections at 5,138 premises, rejected 1,538 instruments for non-compliance, inspected 49,203 pre-packed articles
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### Product Safety

Advise consumers on product safety, including specific advice to parents	Launched Toy and Nursery Safety Hotline, completed pilot of Safe Products for your Baby program
Assist national project to harmonise product bans and standards	Helped lead national review of existing product safety ban orders and safety standards
Enforce laws protecting consumers	Seized more than 9,800 banned and regulated products, destroyed more than 19,000 dangerous products, inspected over 500 premises

### Other Industrial Regulation Schemes

Enforce the law governing prostitution providers	Inspected 36 licensed brothels, resulting in three disciplinary hearings, one prosecution and one enforceable undertaking, investigated allegations of illegal brothels
Develop policy and review legislation	New laws for funeral providers and co-operatives introduced, new regulations for travel agents commenced, a review we conducted led to changes to patriotic fund reporting requirements

### Engaging with the Community

Help consumers with face-to-face enquiries, provide web information	Helped more than 39,000 consumers at the Victorian Consumer & Business Centre, number of website visitors up 33 per cent, added Frequently Asked Questions to website
Engage with regional consumers	Regional offices delivered training, exhibited at event days, answered queries and resolved disputes for almost 10,000 regional Victorians

### Striving for Higher Performance

Develop staff leadership skills	Extended leadership program to more staff, launched new Learning and Development calendar
Use new technologies to improve service	Completed trial of knowledge management tool Wiki, reviewed telephone menus

# Organisational Structure

**The Hon. Tony Robinson MP**  
Minister for Consumer Affairs

**Penny Armytage**  
Secretary,  
Department of Justice

**Dr Claire Noone**  
Executive Director and Director  
of Consumer Affairs Victoria  
*Dr David Cousins was  
Director until 23 June 2008*

**Chris Noone**  
General Manager,  
Education & Information

**Andrew Levens**  
General Manager,  
Compliance & Enforcement

**Warwick Knight**  
General Manager, Corporate Resources

**Lois Goodes**  
General Manager,  
Community Partnerships

**Elizabeth Lanyon**  
General Manager,  
Consumer Policy & Programs

Dr David Cousins



**Geoff Browne**  
Deputy Director  
Consumer Affairs Victoria

**Paula Healey**  
General Manager, Regional Operations

**Paul Myers**  
Acting General Manager,  
Dispute Resolution

*Tony McMahon was GM until 24 April 08*

**Steven Scodella**  
General Manager, Enquiries

**Anne Cousins**  
General Manager, Market Monitoring

**Melanie Saba**  
General Manager, Registration &  
Community Engagement

**Neil Taylor**  
General Manager, Licensing

Melanie Saba



Chris Noone

Claire Noone

Geoff Browne

Warwick Knight

Neil Taylor

Anne Cousins

Lois Goodes





# About Us

## **Consumer Affairs Victoria**

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- > We are the state's leading consumer protection agency. We are here to protect and promote your interests as a consumer, to make sure you get a fair deal. From baby and child safety, to youth and student issues, to buying a car, renting or buying a home, or moving into a retirement village, we are looking out for you at every stage of your life.

## **Our vision**

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- > Informed and responsible consumers and traders, who know their rights and responsibilities

## **Our goals**

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- > Empower consumers
- > Create a competitive, fair and safe trading environment
- > Protect vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers
- > Optimise our organisational capability

## **Our values**

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- > Serve the community
- > Work together
- > Act with integrity
- > Respect other people
- > Make it happen

## **Our functions**

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- > Provide information and advice to consumers, traders, tenants and landlords on consumer and tenancy issues
- > Educate consumers and traders on their rights and responsibilities and changes to the law
- > Seek to reduce disputes between consumers and traders and between tenants and landlords, including providing a dispute resolution service
- > Develop policies and laws that protect consumers
- > Ensure compliance with consumer laws
- > Promote product safety
- > Regulate the consumer environment through licensing and registration
- > Promote accurate trade measurement
- > We support the Ministerial advisory roles within the Consumer Affairs portfolio, including the Consumer Credit Fund Advisory Committee, Estate Agents Council, Patriotic Funds Council, Prostitution Control Act Ministerial Advisory Committee, Funeral Industry Ministerial Advisory Council and the Liquor Control Advisory Council
- > We also provide administrative support to several statutory offices and bodies including the Business Licensing Authority, Director of Liquor Licensing, Motor Car Trader Guarantee Fund Claims Committee and the Residential Tenancies Bond Authority
- > Consumer Affairs Victoria administers 47 Acts of Parliament. We are required to report to the Victorian Government on our activities under the *Fair Trading Act 1999*, the *Credit (Administration) Act 1984* and the *Veterans Act 2005*.

Andrew  
Levens

Elizabeth  
Lanyon

Steven  
Scodella

Paula  
Healey

Tony  
McMahon

Paul  
Myers

