

BUILDING A BETTER VCAT: STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-17 – March 2015 Update

Strategic Direction 1: Better Access	
Improved support for people who represent themselves at VCAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We made significant progress during this period on a major review of our customer service framework, which aims to streamline and improve the experience people have when they engage with VCAT. ▪ We commenced a review of the VCAT website, to improve the navigation, content and usability of the site and to ensure it complies with government accessibility guidelines. The improved site will have mobile device functionality. ▪ VCAT is hosting 16 free forums across Victoria to assist tenants, landlords, property managers and others involved in residential tenancies matters. For the first time, we will hold forums in suburban locations, in addition to regional Victoria and central Melbourne. ▪ We continued our regular consultations with key representative bodies such as the Tenants Union of Victoria, Law Institute of Victoria and the Office of the Public Advocate, to ensure we support vulnerable groups.
Plan for future accommodation needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In February 2015, we opened a VCAT hearing facility in the Darebin Intercultural Centre, the former Preston Courthouse, to meet growing demand in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. ▪ VCAT continues to make full use of its new facility in the Moe Town Hall.
Support the development and use of multi-jurisdictional facilities through CSV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We continued our involvement in the long-term accommodation strategy led by Court Services Victoria (CSV).
Modernise hearing room facilities and improve security at 55 King Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In December 2014, we completed the refurbishment of our 55 King Street facility, which had been ongoing for the past year. The refurbishment has improved the configuration of the building, our audiovisual capability, natural light in our hearing rooms, and the efficiency of our lifts using call technology. Security was also improved when we installed screening equipment in January 2015.
Strategic Direction 2: Community Involvement And Engagement	
Work in partnership with our stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We are implementing our external communication strategy and are in the process of developing a stakeholder engagement strategy. ▪ Our relationships with key stakeholders were formalised in Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with Consumer Affairs Victoria, the Legal Services Board and the Victorian Building Authority. Additional MoUs are being finalised.
Review and improve community engagement and user group forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We conducted an audit of our user group meetings and forums, and are evaluating the results. A forum is being planned this year for the newly-established Building and Property List. ▪ VCAT appointed a 'Member for social and cultural inclusion' to ensure a greater focus on this important area.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We developed a Koori Inclusion Action Plan to work with Victoria's indigenous community on improving access to VCAT. To gain a further understanding on Koori issues, we hosted an internal presentation to staff and Members by an elder from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
Seek feedback from people who have had a matter heard at VCAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A customer satisfaction survey is being developed as part of the customer service framework review. We reviewed and evaluated our complaints processes, and integrated the results into our process improvement strategies.
Improve the way we provide information and build knowledge about VCAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our external communication strategy is being implemented, including the VCAT website review project outlined above. New internal and external media policies are being finalised. VCAT is once again supporting Courts Open Day, in May 2015, to help improve understanding of how we work. We also held briefings for council mayors and local and international delegations.
Strategic Direction 3: Modernising Service Delivery	
Review and suggest updates to the VCAT Act and enabling provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are implementing two significant reforms to the VCAT Act and are responding to numerous legislative changes. To help parties make applications and prepare for hearings, we continued to develop rules of practice and procedure, and practice notes. The position of legal researcher was established to assist with reviews of the VCAT Act, regulations, rules of practice and procedures.
Support the development of Court Services Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VCAT is actively supporting Court Services Victoria (CSV) governance as a founding partner. Our President is a Member of the Courts Council, Chair of the Risk and Audit Portfolio Committee, and member of a number of CSV Portfolio Committees Our Members and senior management are actively encouraged to participate on the CSV Portfolio committees.
Engage earlier with government stakeholders in the legislative process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A costing model has been developed to estimate impacts and costs of new or amended legislation. We prepared and submitted a funding proposal to support the cost of implementing the <i>Power of Attorney Act 2014</i>.
Review and expand the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An analysis of our ADR process will commence in May/June 2015, as part of the VCAT fee regulations Regulatory Impact Statement project currently being undertaken.

Drive process improvements in Registry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As outlined above, we commenced a review of VCAT customer services, to improve our processes, systems and service quality. ▪ We upgraded our case management hardware and software, and trained Registry staff in its use. ▪ Cost savings were achieved through our annual program of destroying time-expired records, making better use of our storage capacity.
Expand our use of information technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Our plan to replace outdated versions of hardware and software, and upgrade to our TMS case management system is almost complete. ▪ The iManage pilot in the Review and Regulation List, to replace hard copy files in a select group of matters with electronic files, is almost complete. ▪ The VCAT Online Forms Project is on track to deliver nine reviewed and improved forms by May 2015.
Strategic Direction 4: Improving Efficiency	
Improve governance arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We have identified and linked our risk treatment strategies directly with VCAT's business priorities and are progressively implementing improved treatments to minimise or mitigate risks exposure. ▪ The implementation of the financial accountability framework is progressing, including training of relevant staff. ▪ VCAT has established its own trust fund to manage trust receipts from the Department of Justice and Regulation, and has formalised MoUs with key partners and funding bodies. ▪ An independent audit has commenced of VCAT's Business Continuity Plan.
Drive process improvements for Listings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We have implemented significant reforms in the Civil Claims and Planning & Environment Lists. ▪ We started developing a resource management (scheduling) tool and in October 2014 upgraded hardware and software components for Listings. ▪ Upgrades were made to Caseworks (case management system), which has improved functionality and data integrity. ▪ Enhancements to the TMS (case management system), VCAT Online Portal and other online forms are progressing. ▪ We recruited a new Manager, Listings, as part of the 2014 organisational review into building VCAT capabilities.
Review performance measures and ensure data integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We are reviewing our performance framework, including how we provide performance information to key stakeholders.
Monitor the impact of fee regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To prepare for the sunseting of the current fee regulations on 30 June 2016, we continued a comprehensive Regulatory Impact Statement project.

Strategic Direction 5: Investing In Our People	
Improve the way we manage our workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The new VCAT management structure has been implemented to enhance VCAT's capability and skill base. Two key positions were the Director, People Management, appointed in November 2014, and the Manager, Workforce Strategy, who commenced in February 2015. ▪ To improve the way we induct and support new staff, we commenced a review of the induction process. ▪ We have undertaken a review of the practical support needs for Members. ▪ Our internal communication strategy has been introduced, which includes a regular VCAT-wide e-newsletter and informal briefings with the President and CEO.
Improve training and development opportunities for Members and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We continue to identify and offer professional development opportunities to Members and staff; and supported the Member Professional Development program.
Maintain transparent appraisal processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We have maintained the current Personal Development Plan (PDP) process in 2014-15 for staff, including regular performance reviews. ▪ VCAT is providing input into the CSV review of PDP policy and processes.