

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

Strategic Direction 1: Better Access	
Improved support for people who represent themselves at VCAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed a major review of VCAT's customer service framework, to improve how we engage with users. The recommendations have now been considered and an action plan has commenced. VCAT has engaged a project director and manager to progress this work. Developed and began implementing a Koori Inclusion Action Plan. Built cultural awareness training into member and staff professional development plans. Launched a pilot self-help centre at 55 King St in partnership with Monash University Faculty of Law. Monash law students help parties understand the VCAT process and help de-brief them after the hearing, including referring to support organisations as appropriate. Progressed a major rebuild of the VCAT website, with a focus on helping people understand how VCAT works, what they have to do and how to represent themselves. Introduced a new policy for use of electronic devices at VCAT, including enabling people to take photos of their applications and documents during a file inspection. Produced a plain language version of the notice for outside hearing rooms and the file inspection room. Progressed work to open the VCAT Online system for residential tenancies matters, currently available to estate agents and Department of Housing, to tenants and private landlords.
Plan for future accommodation needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing participation in two committees led by Court Services Victoria (CSV) for this purpose – CBD Major Asset Strategic Planning Committee and the Asset and Portfolio Committee.
Support the development and use of multi-jurisdictional facilities through CSV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing participation in a CSV-led project to develop new multi-jurisdictional law courts in Shepparton, currently at design development stage. Participating in CSV-led court safety audit.
Modernise hearing room facilities and improve security at 55 King Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed options for a crest of Victoria in hearing rooms and prototyped the preferred model, for rollout to all 55 King St hearing rooms. Installed digital signage in 55 King St foyer to make it easier for people to find their hearing room. Worked with CSV on a project to provide videoconferencing at VCAT using the CSV network. Established a partnership with Arts Project Australia to hang their artworks in our waiting areas, making our spaces more welcoming whilst showcasing the work of this not-for-profit organisation.
Strategic Direction 2: Community Involvement And Engagement	
Work in partnership with our stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Held a feedback forum for users of new initiating orders and application forms in the Planning and Environment List, including regular users such as councils, town planners and lawyers, to find out what was working well and what could be improved. The feedback will be used to improve future iterations of these documents. Worked with Darebin Intercultural Centre to involve the local community in producing artworks for the hearing room and waiting area we share with them in Preston.

Review and improve community engagement and user group forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User group established for Building and Property List and first meeting held. • User groups established in regional areas for the Residential Tenancies List and inaugural meetings held. • Established a Diversity Committee to explore ways VCAT can improve its services and engagement with diverse communities.
Seek feedback from people who have had a matter heard at VCAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer satisfaction survey program is being developed as part of the customer service review implementation plan, described under Strategic Direction 1, including how VCAT can use multiple channels to gain feedback.
Improve the way we provide information and build knowledge about VCAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progressed a major rebuild of the VCAT website, which will focus on the needs of users, comply with government website accessibility standards, have mobile device functionality, more intuitive site architecture, and plain language content. • Held free information forums across the state for people involved in residential tenancies matters, including tenants, landlords and estate agents. • Provided free information sessions and a foyer display at Courts Open Day in May, to help people understand the VCAT process. • Provided free information sessions for people completing an Account by Administrator report. • VCAT President Justice Garde took talkback callers on ABC Radio to explain how VCAT works.
Strategic Direction 3: Modernising Service Delivery	
Review and suggest updates to the VCAT Act and enabling provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruited a legal researcher to assist with reviews of the VCAT Act, regulations, rules of practice and procedure. • Developed a training program and schedule as part of implementing Principal Registrar delegations to senior registry staff.
Support the development of Court Services Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued to support CSV, including our President chairing CSV Portfolio Committees and our senior management actively participating on these committees to support the effective management of CSV.
Engage earlier with government stakeholders in the legislative process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully introduced new Powers of Attorney jurisdiction, effective from 1 September. • Continued to provide information to stakeholders and VCAT users regarding legislative change. Ongoing consultations with government departments and statutory agencies continue, where new or amending jurisdiction is conferred on VCAT. • Provided a submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria).
Review and expand the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed a formal analysis of VCAT's investment in ADR, which aimed to determine where ADR is best used and what other types of matters could benefit from ADR processes.
Drive process improvements in Registry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed an Operations Continuous Improvement Plan 2015-16 to drive process improvements in Registry. Priority areas for improvement include developing and documenting all general processes, with a focus on consistency, customer-focus and governance; developing a quality assurance framework; embedding performance reporting and monitoring; building leadership capability and staff development; building productive relationships with members and embedding a positive work culture. • Convened a Residential Tenancies Working Group, chaired by the VCAT president, to oversee the progress of

	initiatives and to manage any issues arising in the Residential Tenancies List.
Expand our use of information technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online application forms for applications to the Civil Claims and Owners Corporations List are in the final stages of testing. Seven further online application forms are in development. • Completed electronic file management pilot, replacing hard copy files in a small group of matters with electronic files. • Initiated a project to develop a new online Statement of Grounds form for the Planning and Environment List.
Strategic Direction 4: Improving Efficiency	
Improve governance arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent audit of VCAT's Business Continuity Plan completed and an action plan developed and endorsed. • Completed implementing financial accountability framework, including training of relevant staff.
Drive process improvements for Listings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established a Listings Working Group to oversee the listing of Residential Tenancies cases.
Review performance measures and ensure data integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued to review the framework within which we assess timeliness targets and other process improvement measures. Commenced a pilot of the new framework to test if it improves our ability to diagnose and respond to operational issues.
Monitor the impact of fee regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of fee options is underway to inform the next Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS), which will be released to the public for consultation in early 2016.
Strategic Direction 5: Investing In Our People	
Improve the way we manage our workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VCAT workforce plan developed and launched to staff and members, with key priorities around: recruit and induct, capability development, leadership strength, safety and wellbeing, right resourcing and enabling culture. Implementation is now underway. • Completed a review of member support needs and implementation of key recommendations is underway, including staff and union consultation.
Improve training and development opportunities for members and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to training and development opportunities will be guided by the VCAT workforce plan. • Reconstituted the Staff Development Group to support the workforce plan, giving staff the opportunity to contribute training ideas and give feedback on how the plan was progressing. • VCAT hosted the Council of Australasian Tribunals conference in June, at which a number of VCAT members presented.
Maintain transparent appraisal processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VCAT is maintaining the current Personal Development Plan process in 2015-16.