



Chinatown (and AgiBot) welcomes Foreign Minister

Foreign Minister Penny Wong shares a moment with an AgiBot in Chinatown during a recent business roundtable, alongside Lord Mayor Nick Reece and Melbourne Chinatown Business Association president Christina Zhao, as leaders came together to discuss innovation, multiculturalism and Australia-Asia engagement. More on page 15.

Kilkenny Inn site set for new chapter as council backs bigger residential tower

“One of the CBD’s most prominent long-dormant corners appears finally set for a new beginning, after City of Melbourne councillors endorsed revised plans for the former Kilkenny Inn site at King and Lonsdale streets.”

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



At its May 19 Future Melbourne Committee meeting, councillors backed a ministerial planning referral for 572-574 Lonsdale St and 248-260 King St, supporting a major shift in direction for the long-troubled site.

What was once approved as a 21-storey office development will now become a much taller 48-storey

residential tower, reflecting both Melbourne’s weak office market and the city’s continuing demand for housing.

The proposal, by Hickory and designed by Fender Katsalidis, would deliver 469 apartments above a podium that retains and responds to the heritage fabric of the former Kilkenny Inn. It also includes 636 sqm of retail space, a through-site pedestrian connection linking Lonsdale St to Manton Lane, 74 car spaces, 145 bicycle spaces and an on-site affordable housing contribution equivalent to five per cent of the floor area, or about 23 apartments.

For the western end of the CBD, the decision is significant not only because of the housing it would bring, but because it finally gives clear direction to a site that has sat empty for years.

The corner, once home to the well-known Kilkenny Inn and later a strip club, has endured a particularly difficult recent history. Hickory acquired the site in 2019 and won approval in 2021 for an 80-metre office tower behind the retained pub façade. But after a fire in 2022 gutted much of the building and market conditions turned sharply against new office projects, the site stalled. It later hit the market and, while plans were reconsidered, was temporarily activated with a pop-up park.

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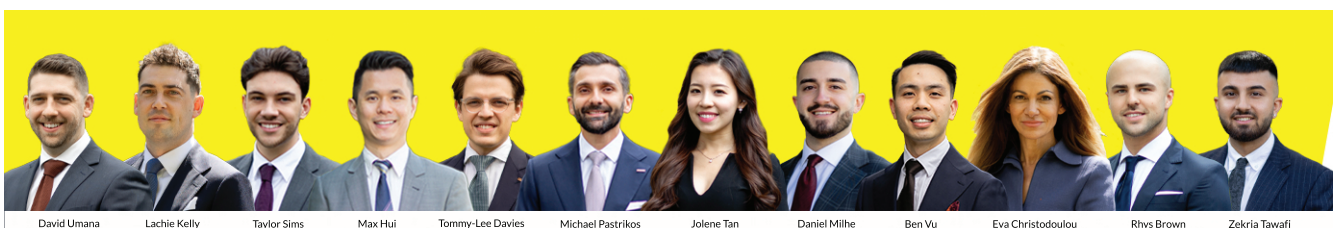
RISING returns for another Melbourne winter arts extravaganza



HIDDEN SECRETS, PAGE 7

A bar, a laneway and 25 years of city life at Hells Kitchen

When Melbourne band Amyl and the Sniffers had their show cancelled and famously donated their \$35,000 fee to the patrons of seven local music venues, Hells Kitchen was one of them.



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Australia tightens the screws on international students

One in three international students applying to an Australian university were rejected in February 2026. That 32.5 per cent refusal rate is the highest monthly figure recorded in 21 years of tracking data, and it is no accident.

WORDS BY
ZENNY ZHOU



The numbers behind that headline tell a sharper story. Refusal rates for students from Nepal reached 65 per cent in February, 51 per cent for Bangladesh and 40 per cent for India. Chinese applicants, by comparison, faced a refusal rate of around 3.5 per cent, although that cohort is shrinking quickly, with Chinese higher education applications down 39 per cent year on year.

The tightening does not stop at the front door. Student visa application fees have risen from \$1600 to \$2000, and every dollar is non-refundable if the application is refused.

For students who make it through to graduation, the next hurdle is steeper still.

From March 1, 2026, the fee for a Temporary Graduate visa, the subclass 485 and the standard post-study work pathway, doubled overnight from \$2300 to \$4600. The federal government framed the increase as a way of restoring integrity to a visa route it believes had become a default stopgap for many graduates.

For those applying with a partner, the total cost can exceed \$6900 before health checks, biometrics and other associated expenses are added.

Beyond the graduate work visa sits permanent residency, and that door is



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT VOICE

narrowing too.

The 2026-27 federal budget confirmed plans to overhaul the skilled migration points test, with the stated aim of prioritising younger and more highly educated applicants. The detailed changes have not yet been legislated, but the direction of travel is clear.

Taken together, these changes amount to a much tougher operating environment for international students. Australia has not closed its doors, but it is making entry, stay and settlement more expensive and more uncertain.

The stakes extend well beyond individual applicants. International education contributes around \$55 billion annually to the Australian economy and supports roughly

250,000 jobs across education, housing, retail and related industries.

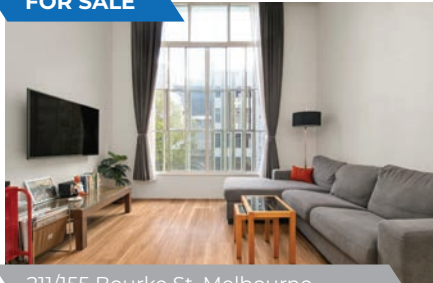
What might appear to be an immigration policy debate on paper has real implications for Melbourne's inner-city economy, where universities, student housing, hospitality venues and retailers all depend heavily on international enrolments.

For a city like Melbourne, which has long marketed itself as one of the world's great student destinations, the risks are obvious. If Australia becomes too costly, too unpredictable or too difficult to navigate, students may increasingly choose competitor markets instead.

That may be precisely the point of the policy shift. But the consequences will not be confined to migration numbers alone. ●

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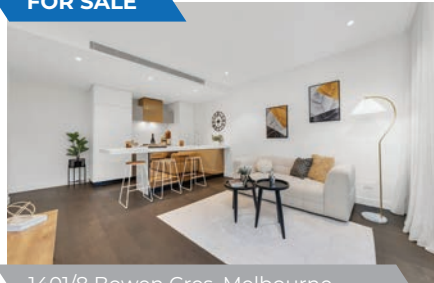


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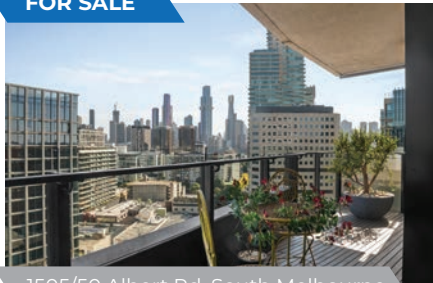


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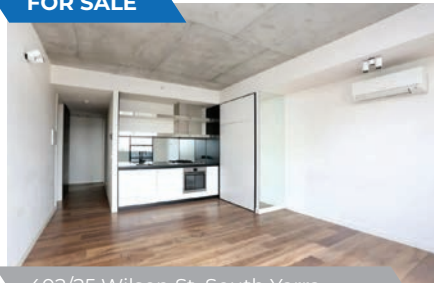


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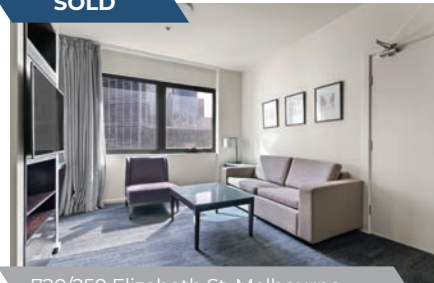


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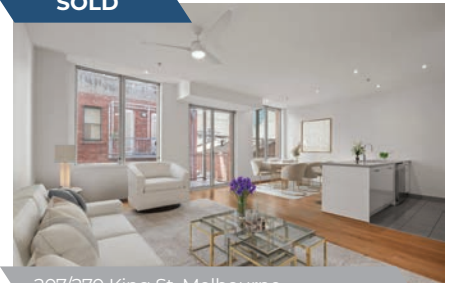


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Future Melbourne podcast wraps pilot season with Lord Mayor Nick Reece looking ahead to 2050

“
 The pilot season of *Future Melbourne* is set to close with a fitting final guest: Melbourne Lord Mayor Nick Reece, joining the podcast for a wide-ranging conversation about the city’s future and the decisions that will shape it over the next 25 years.
 ”



Titled *Melbourne 2050*, the season finale brings together many of the big themes explored across the podcast so far, from housing, city safety and Docklands to Queen Victoria Market, the Yarra River, Fishermans Bend, Lygon St and the future of the CBD.

It also returns to one of the key inspirations behind the series itself: the City of Melbourne’s 2050 Summit, held in May 2025, which sought to spark a broader public conversation about what kind of city Melbourne wants to become.

In the episode, Cr Reece reflects on why he launched the summit in his first year as Lord Mayor, what emerged from it, and how its longer-term vision sits alongside the council’s more immediate four-year plan. The discussion also grounds that vision in the numbers shaping Melbourne’s future, including strong projected growth in residents, jobs and housing, as well as the continuing challenge of homelessness and inequality in the central city.

From there, the episode moves into a rapid recap of the major topics covered across the pilot season, with the Lord Mayor offering his own take on the issues and places that have defined the series.

That includes the future of Queen Victoria Market as it balances heritage and renewal, the CBD’s recovery from COVID and the role of international students, the growing pressure on housing affordability, and the city’s layered response to safety through police, community safety officers and outreach services.

The conversation also revisits some of Melbourne’s most contested and ambitious urban renewal areas. In Docklands, Cr

Reece speaks about the precinct’s long-term potential and what a fully realised waterfront community might look like by 2050. On the Yarra and arts precinct, he reflects on the importance of Greenline, public realm investment and preserving Melbourne’s creative identity during a period of major transformation.

The episode also explores Fishermans Bend, Arden-Macaulay and Lygon St, asking how Melbourne can grow while still protecting the character, accessibility and diversity that define it.

Alongside those place-based discussions, the finale tackles the bigger questions raised by the 2050 vision: what it means for Melbourne to be green, alive and climate-resilient, how the city stays welcoming and inclusive as it grows, and how First Nations knowledge and custodianship can be meaningfully honoured in the city’s future.

As a season finale, the episode works both as a recap and a long-view conversation. It brings together the themes, tensions and ambitions that have shaped the pilot series, while giving listeners a final opportunity to hear directly from the city’s first citizen about where Melbourne is heading next.

For those who have followed the season from the start, it promises a strong and thoughtful conclusion. For newer listeners,



it also offers a concise entry point into the big ideas that have framed the series so far.

Either way, *Melbourne 2050* closes the first chapter of *Future Melbourne* by asking the biggest question of all: what kind of city does Melbourne want to become?

The episode is available now via Spotify and YouTube. ●



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Kilkenny Inn site set for new chapter as council backs bigger residential tower

Continued from page 1.

Presenting the new proposal, council planning officers said the site was surrounded by high-density built form and undergoing significant change, and that the revised design represented a better overall fit than the previously approved commercial scheme.

Acting head of statutory planning Nick McLennan told councillors that management was comfortable with the new proposal and believed the built form had been "massaged and probably more appropriately structured on the site", resulting in a well-articulated development.

Importantly, the new application does not alter the previously approved retention of the heritage Kilkenny Inn façade, a point that remained central throughout the debate.

Hickory's head of property and development Zoran Trimcevski said the company had spent the best part of three years rethinking the site in response to "persistent market conditions" and changing realities in the property sector.

"Unfortunately, due to the headwinds we're all aware of, it's meant that we've had to redesign what we thought we'd deliver on this site," he said.

He said the revised proposal was intended not only to reactivate the site, but to help "reimagine the western precinct there that's probably a little bit tired and underdone."

The pivot from office to residential also drew discussion about the type of apartments being proposed. The tower would contain 129 studios, 208 one-bedroom, 120 two-bedroom and 12 three-bedroom apartments.

Cr Rafael Camillo questioned whether that mix included enough larger homes for



families, but Trimcevski said market evidence from Hickory's recent CBD projects showed three-bedroom stock remained the hardest to sell or lease.

"The only apartment stock we're left with are three bedrooms," he said. "They're difficult to sell, difficult to occupy."

He added that the project had been deliberately conceived as a flexible residential development that could adapt to changing market conditions, whether as build-to-sell or build-to-rent.

That point became even more topical during the debate when Cr Phil Le Liu raised the federal government's newly announced tax changes around negative gearing and capital gains tax. Under the reforms, negative gearing will be restricted to new residential properties, while investors in new builds will still be able to access more favourable CGT treatment than those buying existing stock, a shift widely seen as an attempt to push more capital towards new housing supply.

Trimcevski confirmed those changes would help support investment in projects like this, particularly at a time when many approved developments remain financially difficult to commence because of high construction and labour costs.

That broader challenge has been increasingly noted by analysts arguing that the real bottleneck in housing supply is not planning approvals alone, but whether projects can actually be built once approved.

In that sense, the Kilkenny Inn approval may prove to be more than just a one-off breakthrough for a stalled site. If the new tax settings do start nudging investors and developers more firmly towards new housing, this corner could become an early example of a wider shift now beginning to flow through the city.

Deputy Lord Mayor Roshena Campbell



welcomed the outcome, noting the importance of finally moving dormant sites like this one forward.

"It is, quite frankly, unacceptable in a city like Melbourne that a site like this remains vacant, so we are incredibly excited by the opportunity to see some activity on this site," she said.

Lord Mayor Nick Reece also focused on the site's heritage value and public-facing design, asking specifically about the façade strategy and apartment mix. The development team emphasised that the project would retain the Kilkenny Inn's heritage presence while using brick and podium articulation to create a more human-scaled lower level.

Architect James Pearce from Fender Katsalidis described the scheme as a "considered evolution" of the previously approved design.

Taken together, the council's endorsement marks a long-awaited breakthrough for a site that has become symbolic of both the challenges and possibilities of the CBD's western edge.

The pop-up park may have given the corner a temporary purpose, but this new approval suggests something more lasting is finally on the horizon. ●

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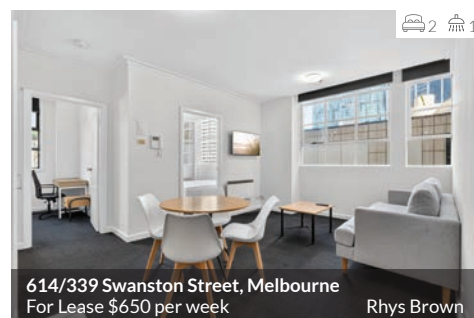
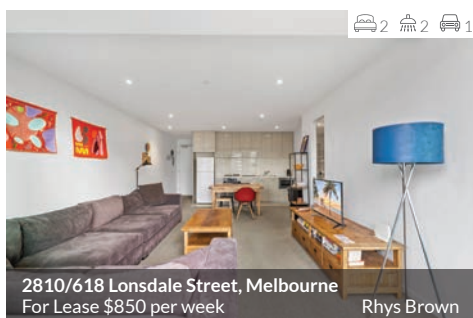
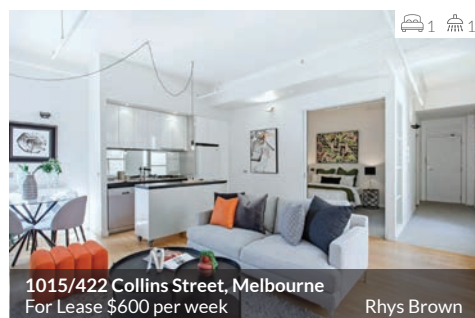
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- People experiencing homelessness with complex mental health challenges will receive more support to access housing, healthcare and social services with a \$2.3 million boost.
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CITY OF MELBOURNE

A bar, a laneway and 25 years of city life at Hells Kitchen

“When Melbourne pub rockers-turned-stadium band Amyl and the Sniffers had their show cancelled and famously donated their \$35,000 fee to the patrons of seven local music venues, Hells Kitchen was one of them.”



WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



A bunch of people who headed to the Federation Square gig had come in beforehand, the bar's owner, Russell Tarbett, told CBD News.

“They were gone for half an hour then they came back again,” he says. “Then Amy [Taylor] rang and put five grand on the bar, and it went nuts.”

The resulting frenzy was both “horrendous” and “a great night,” Russell recalls.

“We had the bagpipes in there and everything. It was one for the ages, that one. It was a beauty!”

Tucked away above eatery Jungle Juice in Centre Place – a dog-legged continuation of Degraives St – the 55-seat bar may not host a huge amount of live music these days, but it has strong links in the city's cultural scene.

In its “wild west” days – around 2003-04 – when it “hit its straps” thanks to the three floors of arts studios upstairs, Hells Kitchen was a place of experimental music and “mess” and gigs so loud they rattled the drinks and triggered complaints.

“It was just sort of exploding, and the place was packed. It was pretty amazing when you think about it now,” Russell says, recalling the sight of a man dragging a trolley laden with a speaker the size of a fridge up the steep front stairs.

Back then the police seemed to have more leeway to respond to issues, the 62-year-old says.

Russell had himself been a city cop, who

left after 13 years on the force to try his hand at hospitality.

“They were almost apologetic – ‘sorry, mate, if you wouldn't mind just turning it down from 100 to 95’ – it was that kind of vibe,” he says.

When Russell bought Hells Kitchen in 2001, it was a cafeteria-style business decked out in white “with lots of mirrors” that served lunch five days a week.

“The first thing we did was open nights,” he says.

“Back then there were people living in the city but not like they are now.

“Oh my God, some nights I would walk out of there with like 50 bucks in my pocket.”

He credits former Lord Mayor John So with opening up the CBD's hospitality landscape.

“He made it a lot easier for cafes and bars to get liquor licences and extend their hours.”

Hells Kitchen “went crazy for a few years”. “Then of course, like everything, it changed. They realised there were too many liquor licences in the city and put a moratorium on it, and all that sort of stuff.”

Around 2006 “the arts kids” from upstairs had also been kicked out but by then Russell had formed friendships with a lot of them, which have endured and helped foster relationships with a new generation of arty types.

The bar has a close association with the Victorian College of the Arts, Russell says, and tries to “encourage a lovely little community relationship with the students”.

The cosy two-room venue is a good place to build rapport.

Lit warmly by lamps and Art Nouveau-style chandeliers, the space features distinctive hand designed wallpaper and suitably mind-bending artworks.

It has a seat nicknamed “the tinderbox” which couples on dates seem to gravitate to, Russell says.

But its wall of windows overlooking the laneway offers “the prized spots”.

In summer they are opened to let the breeze in but it's in cooler weather when it rains that the view is at its best, the owner thinks.

“Everyone always says, ‘it reminds me of Blade Runner in here when it's raining,’” he says.

The venue keeps it real with its drinks, serving tap beer from local, independent breweries, wines from smaller vineyards, a changing array of spirits and “classic cocktails done well”.

“I love it,” Russell says of his 25-year-old business, “I love what I've got.”

And the thing he loves most is the clientele.

They can be aged from 18 to 80 but “tend to be people that want to have a chat and are interesting, and have something to say,” he says.

Among them recently was a young bloke whose father had recommended the bar.

“He had the biggest, goofiest smile on his face, and he told me, ‘my dad was right – he told me this was a cool place,’” Russell says.

“We're generational! That's fantastic. That's what I love, mate.” ●

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Council backs AI push, framing moment as Melbourne's “fork in the road”

The City of Melbourne has backed a new push to prepare the city for the workforce disruption and economic opportunities created by generative AI, after councillors supported a motion from Cr Andrew Rowse at the Future Melbourne Committee on May 5.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



Describing the issue as a “fork in the road moment” for Melbourne, Cr Rowse said the city was uniquely exposed to the impacts of AI, but also better placed than most to

seize the benefits if governments, industry and the education sector acted quickly and strategically.

The motion, which was seconded by Deputy Lord Mayor Roshena Campbell, starts from a stark premise: Melbourne's status as a knowledge and innovation economy leaves it especially vulnerable to the structural changes now being driven by generative AI.

The motion noted that while the City of Melbourne accounts for 22.3 per cent of Greater Melbourne's workforce, it contains a much larger share of workers in the sectors most exposed to AI, including 69.5 per cent of finance and insurance workers, 48.8 per cent of media and telecommunications workers, and 45 per cent of professional, scientific and technical services workers.

It also acknowledges that the rapid adoption of generative AI is creating both

productivity gains and significant workforce transition risks, particularly for highly skilled professionals whose roles are being reshaped or displaced.

Speaking to the motion, Cr Rowse said the warning signs were already clear.

“We've seen nearly 5000 tech jobs lost this year alone in Australia, and the quirk of this is this is not because companies are failing, this is the opposite. This is because companies are succeeding with fewer and fewer people because of things like AI,” he said.

He argued that the debate should not only be about retraining the “average worker”, but about how Melbourne could turn a growing pool of displaced skilled workers into an engine for new start-ups, venture creation and higher-productivity jobs.

“This is Melbourne's fork in the road

moment and opportunity,” he said.

The motion asks the Lord Mayor to write to the Victorian Government seeking advice on how AI-related workforce transition and skills programs can be strengthened for Melbourne's knowledge-intensive workers and adapted to encourage start-up formation.

It also calls for the City of Melbourne to jointly host a roundtable with the state government involving industry, business, start-ups and the education sector to help build a more coordinated response. In addition, it seeks engagement with the federal government on its Generative AI Capacity Study and on efforts to mitigate the employment impacts of AI.

Cr Campbell strongly supported the motion, calling AI “perhaps the most significant challenge facing industry, policy at the moment and policy more broadly”. ●

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- We also want to work with the Victorian Government to unlock public land and create more green space for our growing community. The Moonee Ponds Creek corridor is one example: 1.3 hectares of locked-up land unable to be accessed by 60,000 nearby residents.

MELBOURNE MATTERS FOR SAFE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

We know that people in our community are currently under pressure to make ends meet, and we're seeing crime and antisocial behaviour escalating in our public places.

Melbourne must remain a city that feels safe, welcoming and accessible for everyone, including the most vulnerable members of our community.

- We need continued support from the Victorian Government

to help keep Melbourne's streets safe, including a more visible and consistent safety presence in busy areas and known hotspots.

- Many people experiencing homelessness are also living with complex mental health challenges. Too often, when someone reaches crisis point, there are only 2 places for them to go: hospital or jail. We're calling for greater investment in crisis accommodation and proven programs like Street to Home that help break the cycle.

MELBOURNE MATTERS AS AUSTRALIA'S CULTURAL CAPITAL

Melbourne's arts, music and events scene is a huge part of what makes this city special – and with the creative economy contributing more than \$41 billion to Victoria each year, it's also a major economic driver.

- Major events like our New Year's Eve celebrations play a huge role in bringing the city to life and attracting visitors from around Australia and beyond. An extra \$1 million in state funding

would support the expansion of programming and offerings.

- We're calling on the Victorian Government to restore funding to organisations like Creative Victoria and Visit Victoria. Creative Victoria's funding has fallen by almost one third since 2022, with cuts starting to take a real toll on Melbourne's creative sector.

As we approach the state election, Melburnians should expect ambition from all sides of politics – and politicians should expect to hear directly from the people they represent.

Call your local MP. Visit their office. Ask them what their vision is for Melbourne and whether they are prepared to fight for it.

That matters, because Melbourne matters.



Scan the QR code for more information.



Southbank at sunset, courtesy of Visit Victoria

Bennetts Lane signage fight heads to VCAT as council defers decision

A planning dispute over signage at an iconic Bennetts Lane site in the CBD has now spilled into VCAT, with the City of Melbourne deferring formal consideration of the application while discussions continue between council officers and the applicant.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



The matter, relating to 134-144 Little Lonsdale St, came before the Future Melbourne Committee on May 5, where councillors were originally due to consider a management recommendation that the application be refused.

Instead, Deputy Lord Mayor Roshena Campbell moved a procedural motion to defer the item, citing the ongoing VCAT proceedings and the need to allow more time for negotiations.

"This is a procedural motion to defer the item, which relates to an application subject to VCAT proceedings for the purpose of giving the applicant and council officers the opportunity to have ongoing discussions," Cr Campbell told the meeting.

The motion was seconded by Lord Mayor Nick Reece and passed unanimously.

The application seeks approval for 13 business identification signs across the site's three frontages to Little Lonsdale St, Bennetts Lane and Davisons Place. The applicant is Perri Projects Pty Ltd, with fjc-studio listed as architect. The estimated cost of the signage works is \$50,000.



According to the council's planning report, the application has become contentious not simply because of the number of signs proposed, but because of their location, design and relationship to the surrounding streets.

Management had recommended refusal on the basis that, taken as a whole, the proposal did not provide an acceptable response to the Melbourne Planning Scheme. The key concerns raised in the report include road encroachment and the use of signage that could be confused with, or mistaken for, road names.

That latter point is particularly sensitive at Bennetts Lane, one of Melbourne's best-known laneways and a site with strong historic and cultural associations, especially

through its long connection to the city's jazz scene.

Council officers also noted that some of the signage references "Bennetts Lane" even where those signs are not actually located within Bennetts Lane itself.

The report says this is contrary to the City of Melbourne's Activities Local Law, which seeks to ensure clear and accurate road naming and street numbering to support emergency services, wayfinding and municipal management.

Another issue flagged by officers is the use of the address "17 Bennetts Lane", which the report says does not accurately reflect the lawful or correct addressing of the site.

The planning report also notes that the

site has already been the subject of enforcement action arising from the erection of signage without a planning permit, and that a number of those unlawfully erected signs remain in place.

Importantly, the report noted that the application was already before VCAT because the landowner lodged an appeal over the council's failure to determine the permit within the prescribed 60-day timeframe.

That means the matter has effectively moved beyond an ordinary planning application and into a more complex negotiation between the parties, with the council's deferral suggesting there may still be room to resolve some of the concerns before the tribunal process advances further. ●



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Dami Im returns to her jazz roots for intimate Birds Basement shows

“

Eurovision has helped Dami Im reconnect with a style of music and performance she loves, and next month she will share that rediscovered sound with Melbourne audiences at Birds Basement.

”

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



The pianist and singer, who has performed at the Sydney Opera House, K-pop festivals around the world, and Stockholm's Globe Arena to an audience of 200 million during Eurovision in 2016, will play two much more intimate shows at the Singers Lane club in June as part of a tour for her new EP *Stormy Weather*.

The 37-year-old says she is “stoked” about the dates.

Having played the Brisbane Jazz Club “quite a few times”, Dami says small jazz venues, with their attentive audiences and sense of connection between musicians and fans, are the “most fun” kind of shows to perform.

“So I’m really stoked to be playing the Birds for the first time,” she told CBD News.

She expects the gigs will be “jazz-ish, intimate, fun” and, hopefully, “really special and memorable”.

From behind the keyboard and backed by her “beautiful guitarist” Stephen Ward, Dami will perform a mix of largely original tracks from *Stormy Weather*, along with fan favourites from her catalogue and “some beautiful, well-known covers”.

Dami is also still riding the wave of Eurovision, having recently taken on presenting duties as Australia’s 2026 Eurovision spokesperson, announcing the local votes live on air to the event’s international hosts.

“I was there at 3am getting ready, with the big gown,” she said. “I was watching very closely.”

While Delta Goodrem’s fourth placing was disappointing, Dami believes there is no reason Australia cannot win Eurovision one day.

“But it depends on the public,” she said.

“I think Delta did incredibly well, it was a great performance and the staging looked just perfect. But unfortunately, you just never know with the results at Eurovision.”

The event also brought back memories as Dami marked 10 years since her own Eurovision appearance, where she finished runner-up with *Sound of Silence*.

She has since released a new version of the song with Indigenous duo Electric Fields, featuring a verse in Zaachariaha Fielding’s Yankunytjatjara language.

“Watching the whole thing brought back so many memories, you know, just how crazy and intense and life-changing Eurovision was for me,” she said.

“Musically, it really opened so many doors for me. And personally, it gave me a newfound strength to take charge of my career and my life.”

That independence has also allowed Dami to return more fully to jazz, the genre in which she first trained. Before her television and pop success, she studied jazz voice at the Queensland Conservatorium but says that part of her musical identity was long sidelined.

Now, recording with ABC Music and writing her own jazz-influenced songs, she says she feels closer to the music she truly connects with.

“I’m at a point now in my career where I’m able to play music that I really connect with, and I’m leaning towards this genre of pop jazz, or jazz pop, whichever way you call it,” she said.

One of her recent singles, *Bubble*, won the jazz category at the Queensland Music Awards in April, while another, *Sight of You*, leans into a bossa nova sound.

Since childhood, Dami says her favourite place has always been behind a keyboard. That is exactly where audiences will find her at Birds Basement on Friday, June 26 and Saturday, June 27.

Also coming up at the venue are New York’s Julius Rodriguez and his “electrifying trio” on June 19, Deborah Conway and Willy Zygiel on June 11, and jazz-funk house band The Harmonix Experience on June 17. ●



More than four decades of story and culture: Ray Thomas exhibition opens at Fed Square

A major new exhibition opening on May 30 at the Koorie Heritage Trust will celebrate the life, art and cultural legacy of acclaimed Gunai artist Ray Thomas, bringing together more than 40 years of paintings, sculptures, drawings and personal objects.

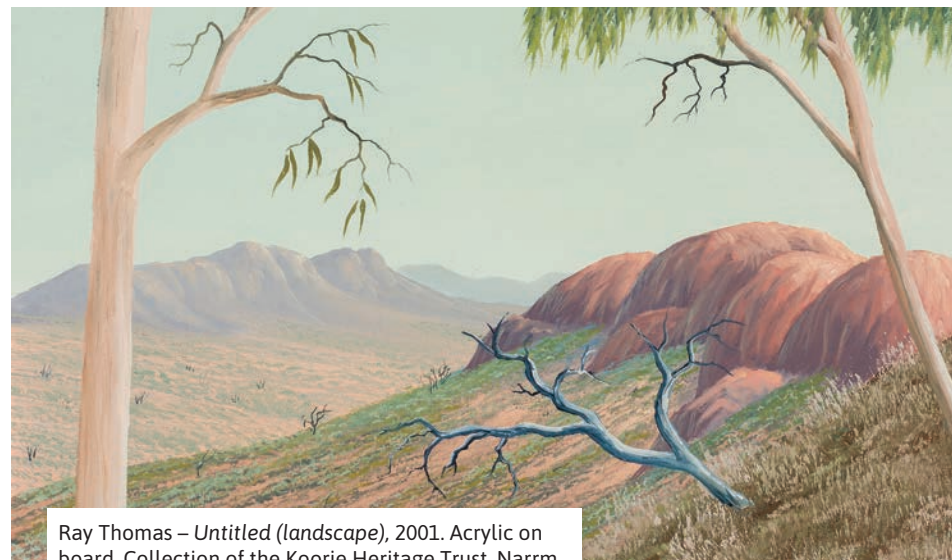
WORDS BY
GABRIELLE SHI



Running from May 30 to August 9, *Ray Thomas: Yeerung’s Journey* offers visitors a close look at the work of the Brabralung Gunai artist, whose practice has long explored memory, identity, Country and resilience through personal storytelling and community connection.

Presented at the Koorie Heritage Trust at Fed Square, the exhibition traces Thomas’s development not only as an artist, but also as a respected elder, mentor and cultural leader within Victoria’s Indigenous arts community.

Working across painting, sculpture, print-making, drawing and large-scale murals, Thomas has developed a distinctive visual language shaped by family history, lived experience and cultural knowledge. His



Ray Thomas – *Untitled (landscape)*, 2001. Acrylic on board. Collection of the Koorie Heritage Trust, Narrm.

work often reflects survival, healing and cultural continuity, while sharing stories connected to people, place and community.

The exhibition takes its title from *Yeerung*, the emu wren in Gunai lore carried as a totem by men. Within Gunai culture, *Yeerung* represents kinship, responsibility and connection to Country, themes that run strongly through Thomas’s practice.

Visitors will encounter works created across several decades, many shaped by moments of personal loss, resilience and reflection. Portraiture, storytelling and

memory remain central, with many pieces capturing important people and experiences from his life.

Thomas first became interested in art as a teenager after reading the autobiography of renowned Arrernte artist Albert Namatjira. That experience inspired him to pursue art-making and, although largely self-taught, he later developed a close friendship with celebrated artist Lin Onus, who introduced him to oil painting and encouraged him to use art as a way of sharing truth and cultural knowledge.

Over the years, Thomas has become known not only for his art, but also for his wider contributions to community and cultural development. Through organisations including Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and The Torch, he has supported cultural connection, mentoring and opportunities for emerging Indigenous artists across Victoria.

His works are now held in major collections around Australia, including the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria, Museums Victoria and the Australian Football League Hall of Fame.

Rather than focusing only on individual works, *Yeerung’s Journey* offers a broader reflection on culture, memory and inter-generational knowledge. It highlights how storytelling and artistic practice can carry history forward while remaining deeply connected to community and Country.

Set in the heart of Fed Square, the exhibition is expected to be one of Melbourne’s major Indigenous cultural showcases this winter, offering visitors the chance to experience more than four decades of art, storytelling and cultural expression through the work of one of Victoria’s most respected Indigenous artists.

Ray Thomas: Yeerung’s Journey runs from May 30 to August 9, 2026, at the Koorie Heritage Trust, Birrarung Building, Fed Square. Entry is free and the exhibition is open daily from 10am to 5pm. ●

How *Pretty Woman's* villain helps complete the fairytale

There are few movie villains as memorably slippery as Philip Stuckey.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



In *Pretty Woman*, he is the smarmy lawyer sidekick to Richard Gere's Edward Lewis, played on screen by Jason Alexander with a mix of oily charm and looming menace. He is not the romantic lead, not the comic relief, and certainly not the heart of the story. But he is the one who brings tension to the fairytale.

Now, as *Pretty Woman: The Musical* prepares for its Melbourne season at the Regent Theatre from July, Australian actor Douglas Hansell is stepping into the role and, in the process, finding that the show's so-called "baddie" might be one of its richest characters.

Hansell laughs when asked whether he has become typecast.

"I'm starting to create a niche for playing bad guys," he says.

Fresh from recent theatre work in London, including new musicals *Stiletto* and *Saving Mozart*, Hansell has returned home to join the all-Australian cast led by Samantha Jade as Vivian Ward and Ben Hall as Edward Lewis. He says Philip Stuckey is a role that, on paper, could seem fairly limited. He does not sing, he is not part of the ensemble, and his total stage time is relatively brief.

But that, Hansell says, is also what makes the part interesting.

"I'm purely there to be the drama, I suppose, or the tension," he says. "Because really, it's a story about the two of them and how they get to end up together. And you're there to sort of make it a bit spicy."



Photo: Daniel Boud.

Rather than simply replicating Jason Alexander's film performance, Hansell says the musical gives him room to reinterpret the character. That is partly because these stage adaptations are not trying to find exact physical replicas of the film cast.

"You're kind of given free rein to interpret it as you want," he says. "So, you're not stuck to the way it was done in the film or anything like that."

His version of Stuckey, he says, is more of a "lad", someone who thinks of himself as funny, charming and everyone's best friend, until the audience gradually realises just how damaged and dangerous he is.

To get there, Hansell has built a detailed internal life for the character: a man with daddy issues, a failed marriage and a desperation to prove himself through money and status. That backstory never gets explicitly explained on stage, but it gives him something much more human to play.

"Otherwise, it just kind of makes him a cardboard cut-out guy," he says.

The result, he hopes, is a villain audiences are initially drawn to before they turn on him.

There are signs it is working. Hansell recalls one audience member telling him they "really liked Stuckey" until the very end.

"That's kind of the sweet spot," he says. "He's not PC, but he's kind of that thing that you can't help but like a bit. And then you realise that you shouldn't like him at all."

It also helps that, backstage, the atmosphere is anything but dark. Hansell says he and Samantha Jade, who plays Vivian, are playful together in rehearsals and performances, something that makes their later confrontation scenes more manageable over a long run.

"If you sat in that whole heaviness and the darkness, that was one of my concerns early

on in rehearsals," he says. "How am I going to do this for 12 months?"

That concern led him to shape Stuckey as lighter and more comedic for much of the show, complete with what he describes as a "really annoying laugh" that emerged organically during rehearsals.

But Hansell is equally thoughtful about the broader appeal of *Pretty Woman* itself. He believes the show has genuine value at a time when audiences are craving relief from a heavy world.

"I think escapism is no longer a dirty word," he says. "And I think that's what this is: pure nostalgic escapism."

That may explain why the musical continues to pull such a broad crowd. There are the obvious fans, older theatre-goers who remember the film's original release and turn up dressed in Julia Roberts-inspired looks, but Hansell says younger audiences are there too, including groups of women in their 20s squealing in the front row.

The chemistry between Samantha Jade and Ben Hall, he says, is also helping drive that response. Off stage, the principal cast has become close, and that ease is translating on stage.

For Melbourne audiences, the production arrives with major pedigree. The Broadway and West End hit features music and lyrics by Bryan Adams and Jim Vallance, a book by Garry Marshall and J. F. Lawton, and direction and choreography by Jerry Mitchell. In Australia, it has already played strongly in Brisbane and now heads to the Regent as one of the city's big musical theatre drawcards for 2026.

But for all the glamour, nostalgia and romance, Hansell may be right that the most interesting thing on stage is the man trying to ruin it all.

After all, every fairytale needs a villain.

Pretty Woman: The Musical will open at the Regent Theatre this July. Tickets on sale now via ticketek.com.au.

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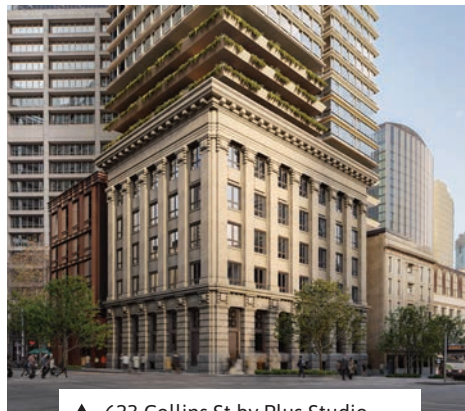


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From empty towers to a true CAD: can adaptive reuse reshape the CBD?

As the state government reviews long-criticised CBD developer incentives, a powerful new data tool from Plus Studio could help reveal which underused towers are ready to shift Melbourne from a Central Business District to a true Central Activity District (CAD).

WORDS BY SEAN CAR



▲ 623 Collins St by Plus Studio.

Few issues now define the post-COVID future of Melbourne's CBD more clearly than what to do with its underused office towers.

For years, city leaders, landlords and planners have wrestled with the same stubborn reality: while workers have returned in significant numbers, central Melbourne is still carrying more vacant and underutilised office space than anyone would have imagined before the pandemic. That has left property owners facing a more fundamental question than leasing strategy alone can answer: not just how to fill a building, but whether its best future use is still office at all.

That broader debate has now reached a more decisive policy moment.

The Victorian Government has confirmed it is updating Melbourne's Central City Public Benefits Guidelines as part of a wider review of incentives under the Capital City Zone. In plain terms, that means revisiting planning settings that have long rewarded developers for delivering office space, even as the market has changed dramatically.

A government spokesperson said the updates were about supporting more housing, "including more affordable housing".

"These changes are about getting more homes built while making sure the community continues to enjoy great parks, walking connections and public spaces," the spokesperson said.

The government stressed that it had "made it clear" that it would fast-track approvals to convert eligible commercial offices and mixed-use properties into apartments, adding that it had established a working group with industry and councils to opportunities for conversions.

It follows growing pressure from the City of Melbourne, which argued late last year that the current uplift regime was out of date after a major Queen St proposal was able to unlock additional yield by including office floorspace as a public benefit.

Lord Mayor Nick Reece, who made office-to-housing conversion a central issue of his election platform, told *CBD News* during the council's draft budget announcement on March 31 that the city had been in "very productive discussions" with the state

government, but cautioned that the issue was proving "a harder nut to crack than certainly I had initially thought."

That note of realism is important. Adaptive reuse is no longer just a catchy policy slogan. It is a highly technical, financially sensitive and often building-by-building challenge.

And that is exactly where architects like Ian Briggs and Mau Cheng from Plus Studio say the conversation needs to become more sophisticated.

Briggs, a director at the practice, says the first mistake people make is assuming adaptability is a single idea rather than a spectrum. Some buildings can be upgraded into better offices. Some can be repurposed into something entirely different. Some simply cannot be reused economically at all. But, significantly, he believes a large share of Melbourne's stock is not beyond saving.

"If you put away the refurbishing of one office building into a more modern office building, it's about 30 per cent of the CBD's built form that has the ability to be repositioned from effectively an empty or underutilised space into brand new function," he told *CBD News*.

That figure suggests the city's adaptive reuse opportunity is not marginal. It is structural.

Yet Briggs is equally clear that the old way of thinking about this issue, namely which office towers can become apartments, is already outdated. He argues that a narrow focus on build-to-sell housing misses how much the market has shifted in recent years.

Deeper floorplates once dismissed as unsuitable for apartments may still work very well for other uses, particularly build-to-rent or student accommodation. In those typologies, the building core can absorb communal areas, study rooms and shared facilities, allowing bedrooms to sit around the perimeter where light is available.

Plus Studio is already working on exactly these kinds of projects, including the

conversion of a 1970s Bourke St office building into a 900-room student accommodation scheme. Briggs says office-to-student conversion can, in some cases, be easier than traditional apartment conversion because smaller rooms can "wriggle around spaces and columns" more readily than larger residential layouts.

The practice has also built a reputation in more heritage-sensitive repositioning work. At 623 Collins St, the former State Savings Bank of Victoria site, Plus Studio designed a major mixed-use redevelopment that retains and integrates significant heritage fabric into a new residential tower. Cheng, recently promoted to associate and a design lead on the project, says adaptive reuse only works when heritage is treated not as an obstacle, but as an asset.

But both Cheng and Briggs stress that adaptive reuse comes with hidden complexity.

Old buildings conceal surprises. Even newer commercial buildings can prove less orderly than expected once walls and ceilings come off. Columns do not always line up. Structures vary floor to floor. The lesson, Cheng says, is that developers need to allow more time, more contingency and more design iteration than they would for a straightforward new-build project.

That longer timeframe is one reason the economics can be so difficult. Adaptive reuse usually takes longer to design and longer to construct than knocking a building over and starting again. That means more holding costs, more complexity and more financial risk.

In that context, the incentive system becomes critical. Briggs argues that one major blind spot in current policy is environmental performance. At present, rating tools and public benefit structures tend to focus on the performance of the finished building, but do not properly recognise the carbon already saved by retaining and upgrading the existing structure rather than demolishing it.

"You've saved all the carbon inherent in the actual basic structure of the building that you haven't knocked over," he said. "That's a really big thing that's not understood well at certain levels."

It is a point that aligns closely with the City of Melbourne's Retrofit Melbourne agenda, which has pushed for stronger incentives to upgrade existing buildings rather than waiting for replacement stock.

Cheng adds that beyond planning reform, financial relief around holding rates or taxes for slower, more complex adaptive reuse projects could make a real difference.

Former City of Melbourne finance chair Stephen Mayne argues the council should be far more willing to use its own balance sheet and taxation levers to encourage adaptive reuse, whether through targeted rate holidays, waived fees or grants for projects that actually commence within a defined timeframe.

At the same time, Mayne cautions against treating adaptive reuse as a wholesale solution that strips the city of future office capacity. Melbourne is still the central city, and it will continue to need workplaces. The goal, in his view, is not mass conversion for its own sake, but a selective approach that repurposes the right buildings for housing, education, entertainment or the arts, while allowing the market to retain the office stock the city will still need over time.

What makes this moment different, however, is that the industry may finally have a practical tool to work with.

Plus Studio has developed "AdaptAbility", a new data-driven tool designed to identify which commercial buildings across the City of Melbourne have the strongest potential for adaptive reuse. It uses census information, 3D city mapping, property data, building age, heritage controls and architectural rules to sort buildings according to their best likely future use, whether that is upgraded office, apartments, build-to-rent or student housing.

In Briggs's words, what once required months of due diligence can now be narrowed quickly into a far more targeted search. That has the potential to become a game changer, not just for developers, but for the city itself.

Because ultimately this is not only a property story. It is a city-shaping one.

Briggs strongly supports Reece's suggestion that Melbourne should stop thinking of itself as a CBD and start thinking more ambitiously as a CAD, a Central Activity District.

The distinction matters. A CBD implies monoculture: office towers, workers by day, emptiness by night. A CAD suggests something more layered: housing, study, hospitality, culture, community facilities and public life all mixed together.

For Briggs, success over the next decade will not be measured simply by how many offices become apartments. It will depend on whether Melbourne can develop a more coherent picture of the city it actually wants, including schools, libraries, childcare and cultural hubs, and then use planning, incentives and data to bring those elements together.

The pandemic may have broken the old logic of the CBD. What happens next will depend on whether Melbourne can move quickly enough, and cleverly enough, to build something richer in its place. ●



▲ Mau Cheng



▲ Ian Briggs

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RISING returns for another Melbourne winter arts extravaganza



Melbourne's monster RISING Festival kicks off on May 27, with more than 100 events featuring 376 artists, seven world premieres and 11 Australian premieres over its two-week run until June 8.



WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



The ever-changing festival this year launches a new dance biennale, which aims to act as “a city-wide invitation to unlock new joys in movement and embrace dance in all its forms”.

The program includes dance works about life in Northern Ireland (*Hard to Be Soft: A Belfast Prayer* by Oona Doherty), our connection to trees (Lucy Guerin Inc. premiere of *The Forest*), the stories of women previously lost to witchcraft (Melanie Lane's *Into the Woods*), a sheep's-eye-view of colonisation (Carly Sheppard and Alisdair Macindoe's *The Shepherds*) and humans and technology (Chunky Move's returning work *Glow*).

For the more participatory-minded festivalgoer, the *Land of 1000 Dances* in the ballroom above Flinders St station offers one-hour classes in a huge range of styles – from line dancing, ballet, Bollywood and ballroom to breakdance, bushdance, Wurundjeri dance and the Melbourne shuffle.

Among the highlights of the festival's musical program is trailblazing female rapper Lil' Kim, Chicago “spiritual jazz pioneer” Kahlil El'Zabar, UK poet and artist Kae Tempest, “visionary poet and musician” Saul Williams, New Zealand indie stalwarts The Bats, Afro Beats royalty Seun Kuti with his father's original Egypt 80 band, Welsh surrealist pop songwriter Cate Le Bon, alt-country act Wednesday, English post-punk group Dry Cleaning, “new wave Arab sound” artist Saint Levant and Jamaican roots legends The Congos.

For around \$120 a “day tripper pass” on Saturday, June 6, offers an eight-hour “multi-room marathon” of around two dozen cutting-edge music and dance acts at Max Watt's and the Melbourne Town Hall.

“Hit multisensory exhibition” *The Vinyl Factory: Reverb*, originally staged in London,

is showing at ACMI, celebrating collaborations between music and art and “div[ing] into sound through vinyl culture”.

Theatrical performance highlights include *A Year Without Summer*, “a riotous musical-comedy” about medical science and mortality by “Europe's hottest director” Florentina Holzinger; *Nowhere*, a “moving and playful ‘anti-biography’” by Arab actor Khalid Abdalla; and *Voyage Into Infinity* by US feminist performance artist Narcissister, which promises to “transform Festival Hall into a warehouse-sized contraption on the verge of collapse”.

Monsteen, a 3.5-hour participatory theatre work inspired by cosplay and set in a supernatural high school world of vampires, werewolves, sirens and witches is open exclusively to teenagers, aged 12 to 17.

Free activities at the festival include an

opening event at Fed Square featuring a massive video piece exploring Indigenous peoples' global connections with dance and new media – *Midéegaadi*, by artist Cannupa Hanska Luger – with hot drinks and “a sausage sizzle featuring First Nations flavours” part of the experience from May 28 to 30.

The Square will also be the site of a free all-ages sunset dance event on June 6. Featuring New Zealand's Royal Family Dance Crew, it promises to be “the city's biggest open-air Pasefika party”.

Also open to all, with registration, is a “voiceless mass” at St Paul's Cathedral when an ensemble work by Native American composer Raven Chacon will set the space reverberating with organ, flute, clarinet, percussion, strings and electronics in a reflection on silenced Indigenous voices.

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New CBD training hub opens for migrants and refugees

A new migrant education and training site has opened in Melbourne's CBD, with AMES Australia launching a larger city base designed to help more people from refugee and migrant backgrounds build skills, confidence and pathways into work.

WORDS BY SEAN CAR



The new centre at 525 Flinders St was officially opened in late April by Skills and TAFE Minister Colin Brooks and will replace AMES Australia's former Lonsdale St site. According to AMES, the move will improve access and amenity for students while expanding the organisation's ability to deliver both training and support services in the city.

Located in the heart of the CBD, the new site is intended to make it easier for learners to connect with courses, employment pathways and the wider community. It includes five fully-equipped classrooms, a computer lab and capacity for more than 140 students at a time. It also features an early childhood education and care simulation room, giving students practical, hands-on experience as part of their training.

The facility will be used to deliver a mix of foundation and vocational courses, including English language, digital literacy, disability support, aged care and early childhood education and care. Those areas are not only important for new arrivals building lives in Victoria, but also align with growing workforce demand in key sectors.

AMES Australia has supported more than 3200 students over the past two years through education and training delivered under the Victorian Government's Skills First program, including in foundation skills, disability support and early childhood education and care.

AMES chief executive Melinda Collinson said the new facility was part of a broader rethink of how the organisation supports migrant and refugee learners.

"Harnessing the skills and talents of migrants and refugees in Australia benefits not just the learner but the entire community," she said.

"That's why AMES is refreshing how we support migrant and refugee learners through our VET Pathways and Aspirations Strategy. It's also why we are opening our Flinders Street site which will improve student access and amenity."

Minister Brooks said the site would help thousands of people gain practical skills and settle successfully into life in Victoria.

"AMES Australia plays a vital role in giving every Victorian the opportunity to develop valuable skills, gain confidence and find meaningful employment," he said.

"This amazing location right in the heart of Melbourne's CBD will help thousands of people to connect with the community and build successful lives in Victoria."

AMES is one of more than 180 Learn Local providers across Victoria, a network of not-for-profit organisations delivering free or low-cost training in literacy, numeracy, digital and employability skills. ●

QVM TRADER PROFILE

How the Arslans turned gozleme into a QVM staple



Ekrem Arslan and his wife Asiye were the first in Melbourne to sell gozleme, he says. Nearly a quarter of a century on, his happy family market business has expanded but remains largely unchanged.



WORDS BY JENNY DENTON



When Ekrem and Asiye Arslan first came to the Queen Victoria Market (QVM) in 2003, "nobody knew what a gozleme was," he says.

"There was not a single soul that knew, and we had to introduce it."

"It was a good thing to be doing because it really is a good street food and it was sort of an audience catcher because it's all done by hand in front of everybody as they order it."

At the same time, they were serving "classic kebabs," and both types of Turkish snack food were popular.

Ekrem's first career had been as a motor mechanic.

"As a young person, that was something I loved, but then we got into a shop in Brunswick ... and it grew too big and just became something I didn't want to do anymore," he says.

After starting a catering business and working at events all over Victoria he and Asiye found their way into QVM and its night market.

"Back then, the night market was a pretty big thing, it was attracting huge crowds," he says.

With stock more affordable, prices were lower, and profits fatter.

"The crowd was there, so in terms of making money, it was a lot easier.



"It was good, it was satisfying, and we just kept going."

When the opportunity arose, the couple took up a market shop on Victoria St.

After about three years the surrounding traders began to feel like family.

"That was the environment back then and still is today," Ekrem says. "Like when we see the old traders, it's still like, 'wow! G'day!' and you go and have a drink or whatever."

"It's hard to explain but the bonds are really tight. You sort of look after one another."

Somewhere around 2010 the couple moved into F Shed and eventually got two shops side by side, allowing space for the now separate goz and kebab businesses.

Then COVID happened. "Every single neighbour that I had just left the shop and walked off," Ekrem says.

"I just chewed into my savings, and thought, 'no, I'm gonna hang in as long as I can'. 'They were tough, tough times.'"

Those days are well behind the business now and Ekrem has plenty of people to talk to.

His four kids, who have grown up there, love the market, and two of them – eldest daughter Nez, and son Talha – work with him there, while the youngest – Saliha

– comes in to make "Turkish coffee cooked in hot sand" at the night markets.

"We've never changed anything here from day one," Ekrem says, although he is now serving a range of breakfasts, including a Turkish-style meal of gozleme with condiments – jams, feta, olives, tomatoes and cucumber.

"It's all the same operation style. We've got staff on board as well, but we're still family run," he says.

His no-trouble philosophy is probably one of the trade secrets.

"I've always been friends with my kids and get along well with my wife."

"We don't argue, and we sort of stay away from stress, and it's probably helped," he says.

He describes the family as "pretty closely bonded".

"We see each other at work, and if that's not enough, we go home, and then the kids come over to see their family."

As for the food, he believes the longevity of the business is its best review.

"For us to have been here as long as we have, I believe our food must be okay!"

"We don't do a lot of social media. We just rely on good old-fashioned word of mouth!" ●

Mekong owner's scholarship fund marks 20 years and opens 2026 applications

A Swanston St restaurant owner who arrived in Australia with little more than determination has spent the past two decades quietly building one of Melbourne's most enduring scholarship programs.

WORDS BY ZENNY ZHOU



Yin Choi Lam, founder of the iconic Mekong Vietnamese restaurant, established the Tertiary Scholarship Fund (TSF) in 2005 after reflecting on the limited access to education experienced by many in his generation.

Since then, the fund has grown from a modest family initiative into a statewide program recognising Victorian tertiary students for both academic excellence and community contribution.

Applications for the 2026 TSF Awards for Excellence are now open, with a total prize pool of \$15,000 across two categories: a Main Category open to all areas of study, and a Chinese Medicine Category covering

acupuncture and herbal medicine.

The top prize in the Main Category is \$5000, with additional awards including two runner-up prizes and Community Vision Awards worth \$500 each for students showing exceptional commitment to community impact.

Mr Lam said the idea for the scholarship came from his own lived experience.

"In my generation, many of us missed out on education because of life's circumstances," he said. "Through the TSF Awards for Excellence, I wanted to encourage young people to value their education, use it well, and give back to society."

Mr Lam arrived in Australia in 1986 and built his business from the ground up, later choosing to channel that success into supporting students and encouraging community-minded leadership.

The program's 20-year milestone was celebrated at the 2025 TSF Awards for Excellence ceremony, which marked two decades of giving and recognised the contribution of supporters from Melbourne's business community and beyond.

The 2026 launch was held at Melbourne Town Hall on May 20 and attended by Melbourne Lord Mayor Nick Reece. This year's theme, Celebrating Opportunity,



reflected the migration, entrepreneurship and community spirit at the heart of the fund's origins.

The TSF has become a quiet but meaningful fixture in Melbourne's education and community landscape, supporting students not only for strong academic performance but for the broader ways they contribute to society.

Last year's major award recipients came from Deakin University, the University of Melbourne and RMIT University, with winning fields of study ranging from occupational therapy and medicine to Chinese medicine.

Applications for the 2026 awards close on August 31.

More information, including eligibility details and application forms, is available at tsf.org.au ●



Penny Wong visits Chinatown as MCBA builds links between government, business and community

Foreign Minister Penny Wong has paid a visit to Melbourne's Chinatown for a community and industry breakfast dialogue, with the event highlighting the growing role the precinct and its business leaders are playing in broader conversations about multiculturalism, trade, education and civic life.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



Hosted by the Melbourne Chinatown Business Association (MCBA), the breakfast came shortly after Senator Wong's recent visit to China and meetings with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

According to MCBA president Christina Zhao, the event brought together a mix of political, business and community leaders to discuss the role multicultural communities continue to play in shaping modern Australia.

Those attending included Lord Mayor Nick Reece, Melbourne Federal MP Sarah Witty, and representatives from the education, technology, hospitality, cultural and community sectors.

Zhao said the discussion focused on issues ranging from small business and international education to innovation, cultural exchange and Australia-Asia engagement.

The visit also provided an opportunity for MCBA to highlight the economic and cultural contribution of Melbourne's Chinatown, including the precinct's Chinese Lunar New Year Festival, which this year drew more than 200,000 attendees in a single day.

That scale underlines Chinatown's importance not just as a tourist or dining destination, but as one of the city's most visible and successful expressions of multicultural Melbourne.

MCBA also used the occasion to introduce its recently launched Chinatown Connect platform, supported by the Victorian Government through Business Victoria. The initiative is designed to showcase and support businesses across Melbourne while strengthening links between community, culture and commerce.

For Zhao, that reflects a broader ambition for the association.

"Melbourne Chinatown has always been more than a cultural destination," she said. "It represents generations of migration, entrepreneurship, resilience and community contribution to the fabric of this city."

She said MCBA was increasingly focused on strengthening connections between government, business and community, while ensuring multicultural voices were more meaningfully represented in wider discussions about Melbourne's future.

That speaks to a broader shift in the way business associations such as MCBA are positioning themselves.

Rather than acting only as networking or advocacy bodies, groups like MCBA are increasingly serving as conveners, bringing together different sectors and communities around shared issues and opportunities.

Zhao said that was central to the association's purpose.

"A lot of people see business associations as simply a place for networking, resource sharing or commercial opportunities," she said. "But for me, and for what we are building at MCBA, I've always believed the real value comes from genuinely bringing people together."

"Whether it's government, business or community leaders, what matters most is creating real relationships built on trust, understanding and long-term connection, not just transactional partnerships." ●



Council approves amended Russell St function centre, despite 36 objections

The City of Melbourne has backed an amended permit for the Space Hotel on Russell St, approving changes to a long-running proposal for a rooftop function centre after finding the revised scheme would deliver better heritage and amenity outcomes.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



Councillors considered the application for 380-388 Russell St at the Future Melbourne Committee on May 19, ultimately supporting a notice of decision to grant an amended permit. The proposal relates to the former Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) offices, now known to most Melburnians as the Space Hotel, a nine-storey building on the corner of Russell and MacKenzie streets.

The application sought to amend an existing permit rather than create an entirely new use. It updates the permit description and conditions, introduces an extra hotel room on Level 7, and revises the design and layout of a Level 8 function centre and outdoor rooftop terrace. The lower levels of the building, including the ground-floor restaurant and bar and the hotel use itself, are not being changed.

Speaking on behalf of the applicant, Planning and Property Partners consultant Luke Mooney told councillors that the proposal was largely a reactivation of a 2019 approval that was never acted on because of the disruption caused by COVID and the years that followed.

He said the revised design had been improved through a lengthy process of consultation with officers and the council's heritage adviser.

"This application is really quite confined in terms of what it does to the building," he said, adding that the revised Level 8 addition and Level 7 changes had been executed "in a better form" than the original approval.

The amended permit attracted 36 objections, with neighbours mainly raising concerns about patron behaviour, traffic and parking, taxi and rideshare activity, waste and litter, and especially noise and amenity impacts from late-night operation of the venue.

Deputy Lord Mayor Roshena Campbell acknowledged those concerns directly. She said the key questions for the council were noise, amenity and heritage, but stressed that councillors could only consider the changes now proposed, not relitigate the already-approved use of the site as a function centre.

Cr Campbell said the amended proposal represented a clear improvement, particularly because it reduced the permitted hours of the rooftop terrace from midnight to 11pm, introduced updated acoustic modelling that responds to the latest EPA noise protocol, and included more specific and enforceable permit conditions.

"There has been a reduction in permitted hours for the rooftop terrace," she said, noting that the maximum patron capacity of 200 remained unchanged.

Cr Owen Guest, who said noise was a sensitive issue in his East Melbourne neighbourhood, pressed the applicant for confidence that residents would not be unduly affected. In response, Mooney said outdoor use would end at 11pm, with activity moving inside after that, and pointed repeatedly to the importance of the venue management plan, acoustic report, noise limiters and the council's ability to require further monitoring if problems arose.

The building's heritage significance was also a major consideration. The site is covered by a heritage overlay and recognised as a significant heritage place. Councillors were told Heritage Victoria, which was a referral authority due to the nearby Royal Exhibition Building environs, had not objected to the proposal.

Cr Campbell said the revised design was "more sympathetic to the original permit when it comes to the heritage context" and backed management's position that the amended plans offered an improved planning outcome overall.

The motion passed with 10 councillors in favour and Residents 3000 president Cr Rafael Camillo abstaining. ●

ELLEN SANDELL

GREENS STATE MP FOR MELBOURNE

*Hi, I'm Ellen, your local state MP. I'm here to help.
Don't hesitate to get in touch.*

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THE
GREENS

Is your high-rise building safe and secure?

For residents living in Melbourne's CBD high-rise apartments, the building you call home is far more than four walls and a roof.

It is a complex system of safety measures, security protocols and legal obligations, all working together to protect you, your family and your neighbours.

But how confident are you that your building is truly meeting those standards? There are three key aspects to consider: safety, security and compliance.

Building safety is everyone's business

Safety in a residential tower is not just a matter for management, it affects every person who lives there. Modern buildings are expected to meet rigorous standards across several key areas, including structural integrity, fire safety, air quality and ventilation.

Think about your building. Just a few questions that come to mind:

- Are fire safety door-closing mechanisms operational?
- What is the status of handrails and safety strips on stairs?
- Do fire and ambulance services have current building access keys?
- What are the arrangements for emergency exit for disabled persons when lifts cannot be used?
- What happens during a major power outage, and are backup systems regularly tested?

When these systems are properly maintained, the result is a building that protects residents and reduces the risk of costly or dangerous incidents.

Security has changed – is your building keeping up?

Today's high-rise buildings are expected to integrate layered, intelligent security systems designed to deter threats before they occur and respond quickly when they do.

Again, think about your building:

- How are swipe cards or FOBs controlled when residents move out?
- Do you have number plate recognition for vehicles entering the car park?



- Is the CCTV system up to date, and can footage be retrieved effectively when needed?

Modern security systems now typically include access control technology, surveillance and monitoring, cyber-physical protection and emergency response coordination. With concerns around theft, vandalism and building-related cyberattacks on the rise, security is no longer an afterthought.

Compliance is not a one-off task

Meeting regulatory requirements is one of the most misunderstood aspects of building management. Many residents assume that once a building receives its occupancy permit, compliance is handled. In reality, it is an ongoing commitment.

A few questions that may apply to your building:

- Do the intercom systems align with governance standards?

- When was the last building evacuation test in case of fire?

Regular audits, documented inspections and timely updates are all essential to keeping a building legally sound.

The three pillars need to work together

Safety, security and compliance are not separate checklists, they are deeply interconnected. A building cannot be truly safe if it is not secure. It cannot be compliant if it fails to meet safety or security standards. And it cannot earn the trust of its residents if it does not demonstrate all three consistently.

Maybe it is time for a building audit?

Residents 3000 has partnered with sponsor CBD Facilities Management, which assisted with this article, to set up a raffle at our monthly event. For the next three months, the winner will receive a free comprehensive building audit. The winning building may then like to feed back to

members what they learned for our mutual benefit.

Next Forum 3000: Special Event – Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Thursday June 4, 6pm to 7.30pm

Residents 3000 has joined with the East Melbourne Group to view the new exhibition *The Hoddle Grid: the Great Land Grab* and hear from curator Dr Liz Rushen. The event will be followed by a brief history of the Society's home, a 1930s Art Deco Drill Hall, and plans for its future, presented by RHSV president Bob Pascoe.

Further details can be found at: residents3000.org.au

Dr Sue Saunders
VICE PRESIDENT



HISTORY

Reminders of wartime looms over Princes Bridge

In the early 1940s in Melbourne, as war ravages overseas, life in the city carries on as normal at the corner of Princes Bridge and Flinders St.

WORDS BY
ASHLEY SMITH



Taken from the footpath of Flinders Street Station, the first thing you see is a bug-like car with a calico roof, followed by passengers unloading from a tram. Various landmarks can be seen in the background, including St Paul's Cathedral, the Gothic Revival-styled Metropolitan Gas and Fuel building (with the "Gas is best" sign, built in 1892), the long-running drapery business Ball and Welch (which ran at Flinders St from 1899 until the 1970s), and the bulb-domed tower of the Forum Theatre.

At the far end is an advertisement for

Louis Epstein, a popular tailor that began in 1905, eventually moving to its Flinders St store (known as Epstein House) in 1926, where it remained until the 1990s.

Behind the tram, fixed to the Princes Bridge Railway Station building (where Federation Square now sits), a prominent sign invites young men 16 to 18 to enrol for the RAAF's (Royal Australian Air Force) Air Training Corps – a reminder in an otherwise ordinary-seeming scene that, out of sight

overseas, a war is raging.

The Corps (now known as the Australian Air Force Cadets) was formed in 1941, with the aim of training youths for further involvement with the RAAF. The Corps moved into Latham House at 232 Swanston Street in around 1943, with one article in the *Werribee Shire Banner* (1944), offering youths looking for a career as aircrew or technical staff, the benefits of specialised education "for the cost of a postage stamp", including science and mathematics, Morse code, navigation, aircraft recognition, and service knowledge. As typical of war propaganda of the era, it promised youths the experience would help develop their "physique, discipline, character, initiative, mental alertness and teach him to act and think for himself."

Women weren't left out in assisting the RAAF, through the voluntary auxiliary organisation, the Women's Air Training Corps (WATC). Formed in Brisbane in 1939, the Victorian branch had its first meeting in December 1939 at The Block at Collins St. *The Herald* described the organisation's aims were to "provide an emergency service of young women trained in handling aircraft,

servicing, general aircraft knowledge, motor transport, office and store clerks, and other ground organisation" (1939) involving a six-week course. One of the women who outlined the corps constitution in that first meeting, Pilot Freda Thompson, advocated in *The Herald* (1939) that training women would prepare them to take over important jobs if men went on missions overseas, a progressive idea in a then-dominantly patriarchal society. For most of its existence, the WATC would run from the 7th floor of the Capitol Building in Swanston St.

Latham House was also home of the RAAF Locker Fund, a charitable organisation that invited civilians to donate money and goods to the soldiers of the air force. They would hold charitable events, such as a Christmas Fair held at Town Hall in December 1944, which the *Standard* (Frankston) later reported raised £800 (1945).

When the war ended in 1945, the RAAF would move out of Latham house, having fulfilled their purpose. But even with their propaganda gone, their role in providing for the war effort should not be forgotten.

Photo: Royal Historical Society of Victoria.



黄英贤访问唐人街，MCBA 搭建政府、商界与社区之间的联系

澳大利亚外交部长黄英贤访问了墨尔本唐人街，参加一场社区与行业早餐对话。活动重点讨论了多元文化主义、贸易、教育及公民生活等更广泛议题中，日益重要的商业领袖角色。

Sean Car

此次活动由墨尔本唐人街商业协会 (MCBA) 主办，恰逢参议员黄英贤近期访华并会见中国外交部长王毅之后举行。根据 MCBA 主席 Cristina Zhao 的说法，此次活动为持续讨论多元文化社区如何在塑造现代澳大利亚中发挥作用提供了契机。

与会者包括地方政府官员、墨尔本联邦议员以及来自教育、科技、酒店、文化和社区等多个领域的代表。

Zhao 表示，此次讨论聚焦于从小型企业

和国际教育到创新、文化交流以及澳中关系等议题——所有这些都与 MCBA 在促进墨尔本唐人街经济与文化发展中的持续工作密切相关，包括唐人街独特的农历新年庆典，今年已进入第 200 周年。

她表示，此类聚会展示的不仅是墨尔本唐人街的旅游或餐饮目的地形象，更是这座城市最具活力、最成功的多元文化表达之一。

MCBA 还利用此次机会，近期通过 Business Victoria 启动了其与维州政府合作的项目。该计划旨在支持并展示小型企业，同时加强社区、文化和商业之间的联系。

“对 Zhao 来说，这反映了更广泛的愿景，即墨尔本唐人街一直不仅仅是一个文化目的地，”她说。“它代表着这座城市的创业精神、韧性，以及对这座城市文化结构的持续贡献。”

她表示，MCBA 越来越注重加强政府、商界和社区之间的联系，同时确保多元文化声音能在关于墨尔本未来的更广泛讨论中得到更有意义的代表。

澳大利亚进一步收紧国际学生政策

2026年2月，申请澳大利亚大学的国际学生中，每三人就有一人被拒签。32.5%的拒签率创下自2021年以来的最高月度纪录，反映出招生和签证审批标准正持续收紧。

Zenny Zhou

受影响最严重的是尼泊尔和孟加拉国的申请人。2026年2月，尼泊尔学生签证拒签率达到65%，孟加拉国为51%。中国申请人的拒签率则低得多，仅为3.5%；不过，由于中国学生群体正在迅速缩小，中国学生高等教育申请量同比下降了39%。

问题不仅在于申请人数减少。学生签证申请费用已从1600澳元上涨至2000澳元，甚至比一些非退款航空公司的申请费还高。对于成功入学并毕业的学生来说，接下来还将面临更高门槛。

从2026年3月起，485类临时毕业生签证 (Temporary Graduate visa) 的费用将从2300澳元提高至4600澳元。联邦政府将这一举措描述为恢复签证体系“完整性”的方式，同时也引发了外界对其是否会进一步削弱需求的担忧。

对于希望带家属同行的申请人而言，情况更加严峻。总费用在健康检查、生物识别和



其他相关支出之前，就已超过6900澳元。

除了研究生工作签证外，政府还在缩减其他途径。2026—27联邦预算确认，将全面改革技术移民积分测试，并收紧申请标准。其详细调整尚未公布，但方向已经明确：门槛更高、审核更严格。

综合来看，这些变化意味着国际学生面临更加艰难的环境。澳大利亚依然将自身定位为全球教育和定居目的地之一，但政策调整正使入境和留下变得更加困难。

影响不仅限于个人申请者。国际教育每年为澳大利亚经济贡献约550亿澳元，并支撑着大量就业岗位。随着大学、学生住房、餐饮场所和零售业高度依赖国际学生，任何移民政策变化都可能对墨尔本等城市产生深远影响。

《未来墨尔本》播客以展望2050年与市长尼克·里斯 (Nick Reece) 的特别节目为试播季收官

《未来墨尔本》试播季将在一位重量级嘉宾的参与下圆满结束：墨尔本市市长尼克·里斯 (Nick Reece) 加入播客，围绕城市的未来以及未来25年的发展方向展开一场广泛讨论。



题为《2050年的墨尔本》的这一季大结局汇集了播客中探讨过的诸多主题，包括住房、城市安全与维多利亚女王市场 (Queen Victoria Market) 周边的滨水区更新、菲茨罗伊花园 (Fitzroy Gardens)、伯恩利 (Burnley) 等。

节目还回顾了本系列的核心灵感之一：墨尔本市政府 (City of Melbourne) 于2025年举办的“2050城市峰会” (2050 Summit)。峰会旨在推动更广泛的公众讨论，探讨未来25年墨尔本将会是什么样子。

在本期节目中，里斯市长回顾了他为何在担任市长的第一年就发起该峰会、他希望通过峰会实现什么，以及为何他相信墨尔本正迎来城市发展的重要转折点，包括强劲的人口增长、就业与住房需求，以及“从边缘扩张”向“城市中心集约化发展”的转变。

节目还快速回顾了整个试播季中涉及的主要议题，并邀请嘉宾分享他们对于墨尔本未来的看法。

内容包括维多利亚女王市场的未来，因为疫情后的CBD (中央商务区) 复苏、国际

学生回归、住房可负担性问题，以及城市推动“15分钟生活圈”、社区安全和户外服务等因素，该市场正迎来新的发展阶段。

节目还讨论了墨尔本一些最具争议和雄心勃勃的城市更新项目。在回顾过去十年的项目时，嘉宾将讨论新的住宅社区可能如何重塑尤拉河 (Yarra River) 上的南岸 (Southbank) 区域及艺术区，同时也反思 Greening、公私空间与大型城市改造在塑造城市认同中的重要性。

节目还探讨了费舍曼斯湾 (Fishermans Bend)、阿登一麦考利 (Arden-Macaulay) 以及莱贡街 (Lygon St) 等区域，并思考墨尔本如何在持续发展的同时，保护定义这座城市特色、可达性与多样性的核心价值。

市议会支持推进人工智能发展，称这是墨尔本的“道路分叉时刻”

在5月5日举行的未来墨尔本委员会 (Future Melbourne Committee) 会议上，墨尔本市议员支持了安德鲁·罗斯 (Andrew Rowse) 议员提出的一项动议，推动城市为生成式人工智能 (AI) 带来的劳动力冲击与经济机遇做好准备。

5000个科技岗位，而讽刺的是，这并不是因为企业失败了，恰恰相反，是因为企业借助AI等技术，用越来越少的人实现了成功。”他说。

他认为，相关讨论不应只聚焦于如何重新培训“普通劳动者”，更应思考墨尔本如何将不断增加的高技能失业人群转化为新创企业、风险投资以及更高生产力岗位的动力来源。

“这是墨尔本的道路分叉时刻，也是一次机会。”他说。

该动议要求市长致函维多利亚州政府，寻求关于如何加强AI相关劳动力转型与技能培训项目的建议，以更好地支持墨尔本知识密集型劳动者，并推动初创企业的发展。

动议还呼吁墨尔本市政府与州政府共同举办圆桌会议，邀请产业界、商界、初创企业及教育部门参与，以建立更协调一致的应对机制。此外，动议还要求与联邦政府就其“生成式AI能力研究” (Generative AI Capacity Study) 以及减轻AI对就业影响的相关工作展开沟通。

坎贝尔议员强烈支持该动议，并称AI“可能是当前产业政策乃至更广泛公共政策所面临的最重大挑战”。

她表示，对于墨尔本而言，问题不仅在于如何为岗位发生变化的劳动者创造新的就业路径，更在于如何确保城市能够抓住AI带来的生产力提升与经济增长机会。

拉斐尔·卡米洛 (Rafael Camillo) 议员提出了一项修正案，希望进一步要求市政府管理层准备专项报告，研究支持小型与微型企业采用AI的战略与框架。尽管多数议员对其意图表示理解，但罗斯议员并不支持，认为墨尔本市政府真正的优势在于召集合适的专家，而不是单独应对如此快速变化且技术复杂的问题。

Sean Car

罗斯议员将这一问题形容为墨尔本的“道路分叉时刻”，并表示，墨尔本不仅特别容易受到AI影响，但如果政府、产业界和教育部门能够迅速且有策略地行动，这座城市也比大多数地区更有条件把握AI带来的好处。

该动议由副市长罗谢娜·坎贝尔 (Roshena Campbell) 附议，其出发点十分明确：作为知识与创新型经济体，墨尔本尤其容易受到生成式AI正在推动的结构性变革影响。

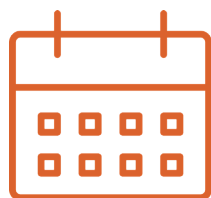
动议指出，虽然墨尔本本辖区仅占大墨尔本地区劳动力的22.3%，但在最容易受到AI影响的行业中占比远高于此，包括69.5%的金融与保险业从业者、48.8%的媒体与电信业从业者，以及45%的专业、科学与技术服务业从业者。

动议还承认，生成式AI的快速普及正在带来生产力提升，同时也伴随着重大的劳动力转型风险，特别是那些岗位正在被重塑或取代的高技能专业人士。

在发言支持该动议时，罗斯议员表示，警示信号已经十分明显。

“仅今年一年，澳大利亚就已经流失了近

WHAT'S ON June



There's something for everyone
this June in the city.



RISING: WEDNESDAY

Wednesday's sixth album *Bleeds* blends Southern gothic storytelling with shoegaze-country energy, grunge riffs and bluegrass flourishes, supported by Alien Nosejob and Season 2 performances.

Max Watts, 125 Swanston St

31 MAY – 1 JUNE, 7.30PM – 10PM



WINTER NIGHT MARKET

Queen Victoria Market's Winter Night Market runs Wednesdays June – August, offering global street food, drinks, shopping, live music, artisan stalls and interactive "Keys to Winter" performances.

Queen Victoria Market

WEDS FROM 3 JUNE, 5PM – 10PM



BIRDSONG EXHIBITION OPENING

BirdSong unites women artists through painting, ceramics, textiles, sound and photography, celebrating birds, creativity and connection with performances, artist talks and a welcome to country.

Queen Victoria Women's Centre

THURSDAY 4 JUNE, 6PM – 8PM



MY LOVE UMBRELLA

State Library Victoria's Love Umbrella workshop lets children create hanging mobiles inspired by *Under the Love Umbrella*, celebrating creativity, family, love and imagination together.

State Library Victoria

UNTIL 21 JUNE, 3PM – 5PM



GROOVY TUNES

Kofi Kunkpe leads joyful workshops where children and parents explore West African music, dance, and rhythms through interactive activities, instruments, and songs to enjoy together.

ArtPlay, Russell St Ext

UNTIL 21 JUNE, 10.30AM – 2.45PM



DRAG BINGO

Bingo just got a lipstick-stained makeover. Head to Heartbreaker for Drag Bingo hosted by one of Melbourne's finest queens and fuelled by drink specials, Connie's pizza slices, and rock n' roll.

Heartbreaker, 234A Russell St

UNTIL 24 JUNE, 7PM – 8.30PM



WAITRESS THE MUSICAL

Waitress arrives in Melbourne, blending heartfelt storytelling, empowering themes and Sara Bareilles' music as Jenna pursues happiness, friendship and a fresh start beyond marriage.

Her Majesty's Theatre

UNTIL 12 JULY, 7PM – 9.30PM

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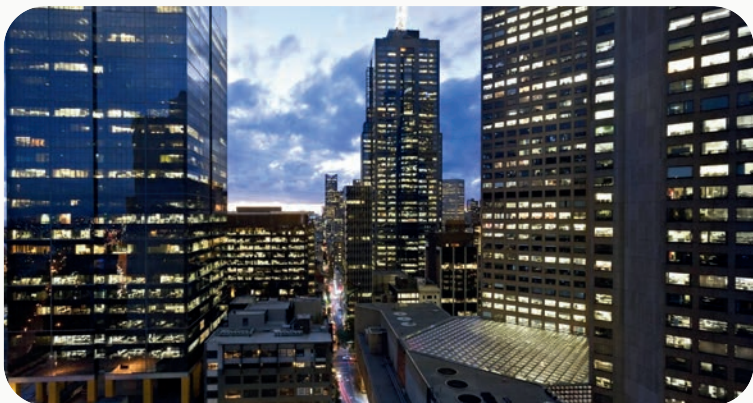


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