



MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

March 21-23

RACV Cape Schanck Resort

Trent Jones Dr, Cape Schanck

Victorian Convention of Councillors

Program



Acknowledgment of Country

The Municipal Association of Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria, and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters, and culture.

We pay our respect to Elders past and present who carry the memories, traditions, cultures, and aspirations of First Peoples, and who forge the path ahead for emerging leaders.

We support local government's commitment to strengthen relationships with Victoria's First Peoples communities and for it to encourage greater unity, knowledge, cultural awareness and respect for the first occupants of our land — through its strong community links and local representation.

President welcome

On behalf of the Municipal Association of Victoria, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Victorian Convention of Councillors on the beautiful Mornington Peninsula. This event provides a unique opportunity for Mayors and Councillors from across Victoria to come together, learn, collaborate, and be inspired as we explore the theme, “The Future of Local Government”.

Local government is at the forefront of tackling some of the most complex challenges facing our communities today. From addressing the housing crisis and to navigating funding pressures and evolving technologies, our roles as Councillors have never been more critical.

At the Convention you’ll have the chance to engage in high-level discussions, participate in thought-provoking workshops, and connect with peers who share your passion for making a difference. Together, we will explore not only the immediate issues at hand but also the long-term strategies and opportunities that will shape the future of our communities.

This year’s Convention features a dynamic lineup of speakers and facilitators, who will share their expertise and perspectives on leadership, accountability, and innovation in public office.

As you immerse yourself in this program, I encourage you to take full advantage of the sessions and networking opportunities. Use this time to exchange ideas, reflect on your own leadership journey, and your commitment to serving your communities with purpose and passion.

Thank you for your dedication to local government and for the critical role you play in shaping a better future for all Victorians. I hope this Convention leaves you inspired, empowered, and ready to tackle the challenges ahead with energy and vision.

Warm regards,
Cr Jennifer Anderson
MAV President



CEO welcome

On behalf of the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Victorian Convention of Councillors.

At the MAV, we take immense pride in our long-standing commitment to supporting local government leaders across Victoria. We are deeply aware of the significant and growing pressures faced by Councillors as they navigate the complexities of their roles, strive to meet rising community expectations, and lead transformative change in their communities.

Your work is vital. The decisions you make, the leadership you provide, and the service you offer have profound impacts on the lives of the people you represent. We understand the weight of responsibility you carry, and it is our privilege to provide the resources, programs, and opportunities to support you in your role.

This Convention has been carefully designed to reflect the realities and challenges of local government leadership. You will hear from inspiring speakers and participate in sessions that delve into the critical issues facing councils today. From exploring innovative solutions to fostering collaboration and resilience, this is a space to learn, share, and grow together.

I encourage you to make the most of this opportunity—not only to gain insights and tools to take back to your councils but also to connect with your peers, share experiences, and build on your passion for the work you do.

Thank you for your dedication to serving your communities and for the critical role you play in shaping a stronger, more sustainable future for all Victorians. I hope this Convention leaves you inspired and empowered to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Warm regards
Kelly Grigsby
CEO MAV



**Please note this agenda is subject to change.*

2:00PM - 8:00PM - Convention registration & check-in

Conference registration desk open, RACV Cape Schanck

6:30PM - 8:00PM - Welcome and Networking Function

MC Welcome

- Libby Mears

Convention Welcome from the MAV President

- Cr Jennifer Anderson, MAV President

Convention Welcome to Mornington Peninsula

- Cr Anthony Marsh, Mayor, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

7:00AM - 8:30AM - Breakfast & Registrations Open

Breakfast from 7:00AM

- Samphire Restaurant (open for hotel guests)

Registrations from 7:30AM

- The Horizon Foyer

8:30AM - 9:10AM - Convention Welcome

MC Welcome

- Libby Mears

Welcome to Country - Bunurong Land Council

- Elder Jaeden Williams

Host Council Welcome

- Cr Anthony Marsh, Mayor, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

Address from the MAV President

- Cr Jennifer Anderson, MAV President

9:10AM - 9:30AM - The Future of Local Government

Setting the Scene: What's the Future of Local Government?

- Kelly Grigsby, CEO, MAV

9:30AM - 9:55AM - Minister Address

Minister for Local Government Address

- The Hon. Nick Staikos MP

9:55AM - 10:15AM - The Future of Local Government

Financing the Future: Adaptive Leadership for the 21st Century

- Marcus Spiller, Principal & Partner, SGS Economics

10:15AM - 10:45AM - Morning Tea Break

The Horizon Foyer

10:45AM - 12:45PM - Positioning for Change: Leadership and Innovation in Modern Governance

Positioning for the Future: The New Shape of Australian Politics

- George Megalogenis, Journalist, Political Commentator and Author

Creating your Legacy: Municipal Leadership in the 21st Century

- Jess Scully, Former Deputy Lord Mayor of Sydney and Author

Governing for Impact: Collaborating Across Difference

- Chris Kotur AM, Leadership Specialist

12:45PM - 1:30PM - Lunch Break

The Horizon Foyer

1:30PM - 3:00PM - Councillor Workshops

Confronting the Challenges of Divergent Views, Values and Expectations-Horizon Room 1

- Chris Kotur AM, Leadership Specialist

This practical and interactive workshop will equip Councillors with the skills to navigate competing values, diverse perspectives, and evolving community expectations. Through a values-based leadership approach, participants will explore strategies for managing tensions, fostering constructive dialogue, and making decisions that reflect community needs while maintaining integrity and accountability.

Financial Leadership: Strategies for Sustainability and Resilience - Flinders 2

- Domenic Isola, Local Government Finance Specialist

This practical and interactive workshop is designed to equip Councillors with the tools and knowledge to address the financial challenges facing their councils. Participants will explore strategies for sustainable financial management, develop skills for navigating budget choices, and learn how to work effectively to maximise opportunities.

Leadership in Place-Based Change - Horizon Room 2

- Michelle Howard, Place Leadership Specialist

This practical and interactive workshop addresses the critical role of local government leadership in supporting communities through place-based change. Participants will explore a model of change that can be applied at the local level, discuss key change issues facing their councils, and identify strategies for leading communities in times of transformation.

1:30PM - 3:00PM - CEO Workshop

CEO Connect Forum - Flinders 1

- Kelly Grigsby, CEO, MAV

3:00PM - 3:30PM - Afternoon Tea Break

The Horizon Foyer

3:30PM - 5:00PM - Councillor Workshops

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3:30PM - 5:00PM - CEO Workshop

Disinformation: Implications and Actions for Local Government Executives - Flinders 1

- Ika Trijsburg, Democracy and Diplomacy Specialist

Participants will gain practical insights into identifying and mitigating disinformation risks, with a focus on risk reduction and response, recovery and resilience-building.

6:00PM - 10:00PM Gala Dinner

Pre Gala Dinner Networking

MAV President Welcome

- Cr Jennifer Anderson, MAV President

Host Council Welcome

- Bulent Oz, Acting CEO, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

Gala Dinner Keynote Address

- Nick McKenzie, Award Winning Investigative Journalist

7:00AM - 9:00AM - Breakfast

Breakfast from 7:00AM

- Samphire Restaurant (open for hotel guests)

9:00AM - 10:15AM - Ethical Leadership in Public Life

Welcome Back from MC

- Libby Mears

Reflections on Leadership and Standards in Public Life

- David Wolf, Commissioner and Chair Parliamentary, Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission
- Dr Graeme Emonson PSM, Leadership Specialist

10:15AM - 10:30AM - Scholarship Awardees : Strengthening Local Government Leadership

These Scholarships are an investment in leadership, ensuring that Councillors from rural and regional communities and those early in their journey have access to professional development and networking opportunities.

Please join us in congratulating our 2025 Scholarship Recipients:

- Cr Jodie Ashworth, East Gippsland Shire Council
- Cr Tim Berenyi, Mansfield Shire Council
- Cr Michelle Cowan, Deputy Mayor, Wodonga Council
- Cr Meg Edwards, Bass Coast Shire Council
- Cr Damien Hurrell, Greater Bendigo City Council
- Cr Justine Hide, Deputy Mayor Northern Grampians Shire Council
- Cr Helen Hobbs, West Wimmera Shire Council
- Cr Kate Kendall, Deputy Mayor, Macedon Ranges Shire Council
- Cr Brandi Morris, Melton City Council
- Cr Tony Phelps, Surf Coast Shire Council
- Cr Peter Tolsher, Deputy Mayor, Towong Shire Council.

10:30AM - 11:00AM - Morning Tea Break

The Horizon Foyer

11:00AM - 12:45PM - Political Participation in Local Government

Strengthening Connections: Approaches to Meaningful Engagement with First Nations Communities

- Rueben Berg, Co-Chair, First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria

Hate Speech and Women's Political Participation

- Cr Dr Anjalee de Silva, Monash City Council and Lecturer Melbourne School of Law

Leveraging Resilience in the Face of Race Based Discrimination

- Cr Mohamed Semra, Maribyrnong City Council and Anti-Racism Campaigner

12:45PM - 1:00PM - Working Lunch

The Horizon Ballroom / Foyer

1:00PM - 1:45PM - Impact from the Council Chamber - Mayors Institute Leadership Panel

Join our panel of Mayors and Deputy Mayors as they explore their unique perspectives on the future of local government. This session will delve into practical steps that can be taken to foster innovation, drive accountability, and cultivate a shared sense of purpose.

This is an opportunity to learn from your peers and gain actionable insights on how to turn inspiration into impact for the communities you serve.

- Cr Michelle Cowan, Deputy Mayor, City of Wodonga
- Cr Andrew Davenport, Mayor, City of Whitehorse
- Cr John Dougall, Mayor, Mitchell Shire Council
- Cr Mia Shaw, Mayor, City of Wyndham

1:45PM - 2:00PM - Closing Address

- Kelly Grigsby, CEO, MAV

Speakers



The Hon. Nick Staikos MP **Minister for Local Government**

Before entering Parliament, Nick worked at ANZ Bank while studying at Monash University. He served as a Glen Eira councillor and worked for state and federal MPs. A lifelong Bentleigh resident, he ran for Parliament to improve local schools, sports facilities, transport, and healthcare. Passionate about education, Nick believes it transforms lives and wants teachers well-supported to deliver quality learning. His vision is a Victoria where education and training equip people with skills for stable employment and dignity in work. He is committed to ensuring schools are well-resourced, transport is reliable, and community services remain accessible.



Kelly Grigsby **CEO Municipal Association of Victoria**

Kelly Grigsby is the CEO of the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), supporting local councils to build thriving, resilient communities. Previously, she was the CEO of the City of Hobart and Wyndham City Council, one of Australia's fastest-growing cities. With extensive local government experience, Kelly is known for her progressive, community-focused leadership and driving transformational change. She is a Senior Honorary Fellow at the Melbourne School of Government and serves on several boards, including the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA), the Victorian Building Authority Special Advisory Panel, and the Melbourne Centre for Cities.



Cr Anthony Marsh **Mayor Mornington Peninsula Shire**

Councillor Anthony Marsh has represented the Briars Ward on the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council since 2020, re-elected in 2024. He served as Mayor in 2021-22 and 2024-25. Anthony is a representative for the Association of Bayside Municipalities, Greater South East Melbourne, Outer Melbourne Councils, and the MAV. He holds degrees in aerospace engineering and business administration, with a career as a Royal Australian Air Force officer and entrepreneurial business founder. A passionate community volunteer, he supports local businesses, job creation, health amenities, and protecting the environment from overdevelopment. He lives in Mount Martha with his family.

Speakers



Marcus Spiller **Principal & Partner SGS Economics & Planning**

Marcus Spiller, a founding partner at SGS Economics & Planning, has over 40 years of experience in public policy as an urban economist. With degrees in urban planning and economics, his expertise includes metropolitan planning, housing policy, and infrastructure funding. He has held advisory roles at all government levels, lectured at Melbourne University, and worked internationally in Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, China, and Sri Lanka. A past National President and Life Fellow of the Planning Institute of Australia, he has served on key government boards and councils. Marcus is also an honorary Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne.



George Megalogenis **Journalist, Political Commentator and Author**

George Megalogenis is one of Australia's leading political and economic thinkers, with over three decades in journalism. His book *The Australian Moment* won the 2013 Prime Minister's Literary Award and inspired the ABC series *Making Australia Great*. He has authored *Faultlines*, *The Longest Decade*, *Australia's Second Chance*, and *The Football Solution*, along with several Quarterly Essays. A regular *Insiders* guest, he has written for *The Australian*, *The New York Times*, *The Age*, and *Sydney Morning Herald*. An insightful speaker, he wrote and presented the 2015 ABC documentary on Malcolm Fraser, *Life Wasn't Meant to Be Easy*.



Jess Scully **Former Deputy Lord Mayor of Sydney, and Author**

Jess Scully is an author, city-maker, and advocate for a fair and sustainable future. As Deputy Lord Mayor of Sydney (2019-2022) and Councillor (2016-2023), she championed solutions for the housing crisis, an inclusive economy, and cultural revitalisation, including Sydney's nightlife. She founded the Vivid Ideas festival, supported emerging talent, and transformed public spaces as a consultant. Jess has served as a policy advisor and radio host. Currently, she's a World Bank consultant on sustainable urban development in Indonesia and Senior Associate at the Sydney Policy Lab. Her book, *Glimpses of Utopia*, was shortlisted for the 2021 Australian Book Industry Awards.

Speakers



Chris Kotur AM Leadership Specialist

Chris Kotur specialises in council induction, planning, strategy, and leadership development to strengthen governance. She is a trusted adviser across the public sector, working with integrity agencies, government departments, and local government leaders.

Sought after for her expertise in complex challenges, she has contributed to three Royal Commissions and major state inquiries.

With experience in senior executive roles, including as a chief executive and Pro Vice Chancellor, she has deep insight into adaptive change.

In recognition of her contributions to education and community service, Chris was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 2024.



Domenic Isola Local Government Finance Specialist

Domenic has extensive senior management experience in Local Government. He was the Chief Executive Officer at Hume City Council for over 13 years and has held senior roles in Corporate Services and Governance. He is a current Board member of Northern Health and the Lower Murray Water Board, with demonstrated experience in Financial management, governance and Council/Board operations. He is a fellow of the Certified Practicing Accountants (CPA), and a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Domenic is Director Corporate Services with MAV.



Michelle Howard Place Leadership Specialist

Michelle is an internationally accredited facilitator and strategic planner with over 30 years' experience across the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors. She specializes in complex change processes, including disability reform, health, Indigenous governance, and urban renewal. Michelle has worked on major infrastructure projects, legislative reform, stakeholder management, and held ministerial advisory roles. Known for fostering collaborative relationships, she ensures sustainable outcomes for clients and communities. A Fellow of the Planning Institute of Australia, she also mentors professionals and facilitates training programs both in Australia and internationally.

Speakers



Ika Trijsburg **Democracy and Diplomacy Specialist** **Municipal Association of Victoria**

Ika Trijsburg draws on diverse sector expertise to address complex challenges to democracy. She leads the Disinformation in the City project across five Australian universities, and was lead author of the world first Disinformation in the City Response Playbook in 2024. Ika is Director of Urban Analytics at the ANU Institute for Infrastructure in Society in the Crawford School for Public Policy and Head of Democracy and Diplomacy at Municipal Association of Victoria. She also holds positions with the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Initiative for Peacebuilding at the University of Melbourne. She has provided policy guidance to key actors globally including cities, national governments, G7 RRM, Council of Europe and UN-HABITAT.



Nick McKenzie **Award Winning Investigative** **Journalist**

Nick McKenzie is an acclaimed Australian investigative journalist, working primarily for Melbourne newspaper The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald.

He's presented major investigations for the ABC's Four Corners program, 60 Minutes and the Australian Financial Review.

With two decades experience, Nick has won every major award in Australian journalism, including the nation's highest journalism award, the Walkley, a record 20 times.

He's been named Australian Journalist of the Year on four occasions but is best known for his work exposing war criminal Ben Roberts-Smith and, most recently, the CFMEU.



David Wolf **Commissioner and Chair:** **Parliamentary Workplace Standards** **and Integrity Commission**

Mr David Wolf is the Chair of the Commission and also acts as Chief Executive Officer. He was previously Deputy Commissioner at IBAC, where he led the public sector portfolio from 2020 to 2024.

He was previously Victoria's first Chief Municipal Inspector as the head of the Local Government Inspectorate.

He has extensive leadership experience and expertise in complaints assessment and public interest disclosure protection frameworks.

Speakers



Dr Graeme Emonson PSM Leadership Specialist

Dr. Graeme Emonson PSM is a leadership specialist and was formerly Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action in Victoria. He has an extensive background as a Fellow and Board Member of the Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA), a former Executive Director of Local Government Victoria, CEO of the City of Wangaratta for five years until 2002 and CEO of Knox City Council from 2002 to 2016. He is currently Chair Administrator at Moira Shire Council.



Rueben Berg Co-chair, First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria

Rueben Berg is a proud Gunditjmara man and Co-Chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. He represents the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, a Traditional Owner group in south-western Victoria. Rueben is deeply committed to advancing the rights and interests of First Nations people, ensuring that Treaty delivers practical solutions for Aboriginal communities.

His leadership and dedication have earned him widespread respect. Rueben is known for fostering collaboration and understanding among diverse stakeholders. He played a significant role in designing and negotiating the Treaty Negotiation Framework during his first term in the Assembly (2019-2023).

Rueben has also served on the Heritage Council of Victoria, founded Indigenous Architecture and Design Victoria, and held leadership roles in various organisations, including being the first Aboriginal Chair of a water corporation in Victoria. His extensive experience and commitment to his community make him a highly respected figure in both First Nations and broader communities.



Cr Dr Anjalee de Silva Monash City Council and Lecturer Melbourne School of Law

Dr Anjalee de Silva is a two-term Councillor at the City of Monash, where she also serves on the Gender Equity Advisory Committee. Outside local government, she is a Lecturer at Melbourne Law School and a Women's Leadership Institute of Australia Fellow. She is an expert in administrative, anti-discrimination, and free speech and media law and theory, with a focus on harmful speech and its regulation, particularly in online contexts. In particular, her work examines vilification or 'hate speech' directed at women, as well as the role of law in deterring, regulating, and mitigating the harms of such speech.

Speakers



Cr Mohamed Semra Maribyrnong City Council and Anti- Racism Campaigner

Mohamed Semra is an entrepreneur, human rights advocate, keynote speaker, and Board Director. As CEO & Co-founder of Endeavour Youth Australia, he supports young people in re-engaging with education. Passionate about justice, he challenges misconceptions about African migrants and refugees while advocating for racial equality, climate action, and diverse leadership. A recipient of multiple awards, including Liberty Victoria's Young Voltaire Human Rights Award, he also serves on the Victoria African Communities Committee and chairs Melbourne Sudanese Youth. Mohamed strives to inspire CALD youth to break barriers, define their identities, and excel in all aspects of life.



Libby Mears Master of Ceremonies

Libby is a values-driven leader with a strategic mindset, business acumen, and a collaborative style. She has served as a Surf Coast Shire councillor and two-term mayor, and as CEO for a non-profit, driving growth and social impact. Currently, she focuses on leadership, governance, and high-performance cultures, working with teams and individuals during times of change. Libby holds several leadership roles, including Chair of the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, Western Leisure Services, and Non-Executive Director of Barwon Health and Mercy Community Services. She was a finalist for the 2020 Telstra Businesswoman of the Year.