

STATEMENT – 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2025

**Re: The Health of Chambers of Commerce Continues to Suffer**

Chambers of Commerce serve as a critical touchpoint for business owners seeking advice, development opportunities, networking, and business resources. They are an important link between business and all levels of government, advocating for policy and recognition where small enterprise lacks a voice.

Chambers of Commerce are lacking fundamental support to continue their purpose. In rural and regional communities, this fact is particularly potent. Businesses in this space often have different needs, resources, and clientele.

We are writing to remind government of the needs of small chambers of commerce and trade groups, as well as the absolute value of funding local rather than national and state bodies, as previously acknowledged by government itself. Amid the pandemic in 2020/21, the Victorian Government recognised the value of chambers in supporting business across the state and reacted with a program of Chamber grants. It was recognised that investing in the boots on the ground was a far more effective use of dollars. This is equally acknowledged in **The Small Business Friendly Charter**, which emphasises supporting local business networks.

**The consensus among Victorian regional businesses is that the current economic situation is dire, and chambers are equally stretched.** Chambers are in the field, acting as a firsthand witness to business issues with tangible involvement. It is with urgency that we make the government aware that with reduced sponsorship and membership due to the economy it is increasingly difficult to support our local businesses, the engine rooms of our local economies, without government support.

We often observe funds being directed to national and state initiatives to deliver programs. Whilst we acknowledge the value of a systematic, wide-ranging approach we cannot help but emphasise the equal value in funding local organisations. This investment would not only keep regional chambers operational but would also ensure small businesses have the immediate resources required to thrive – and even grow.

All VRCA members can provide testimonials of the important work we do.

**Jodie Gillett OAM**

Chair

Victorian Regional Chamber Alliance

**For all enquiries, please call Jodie Gillett on 0447 301 966**

