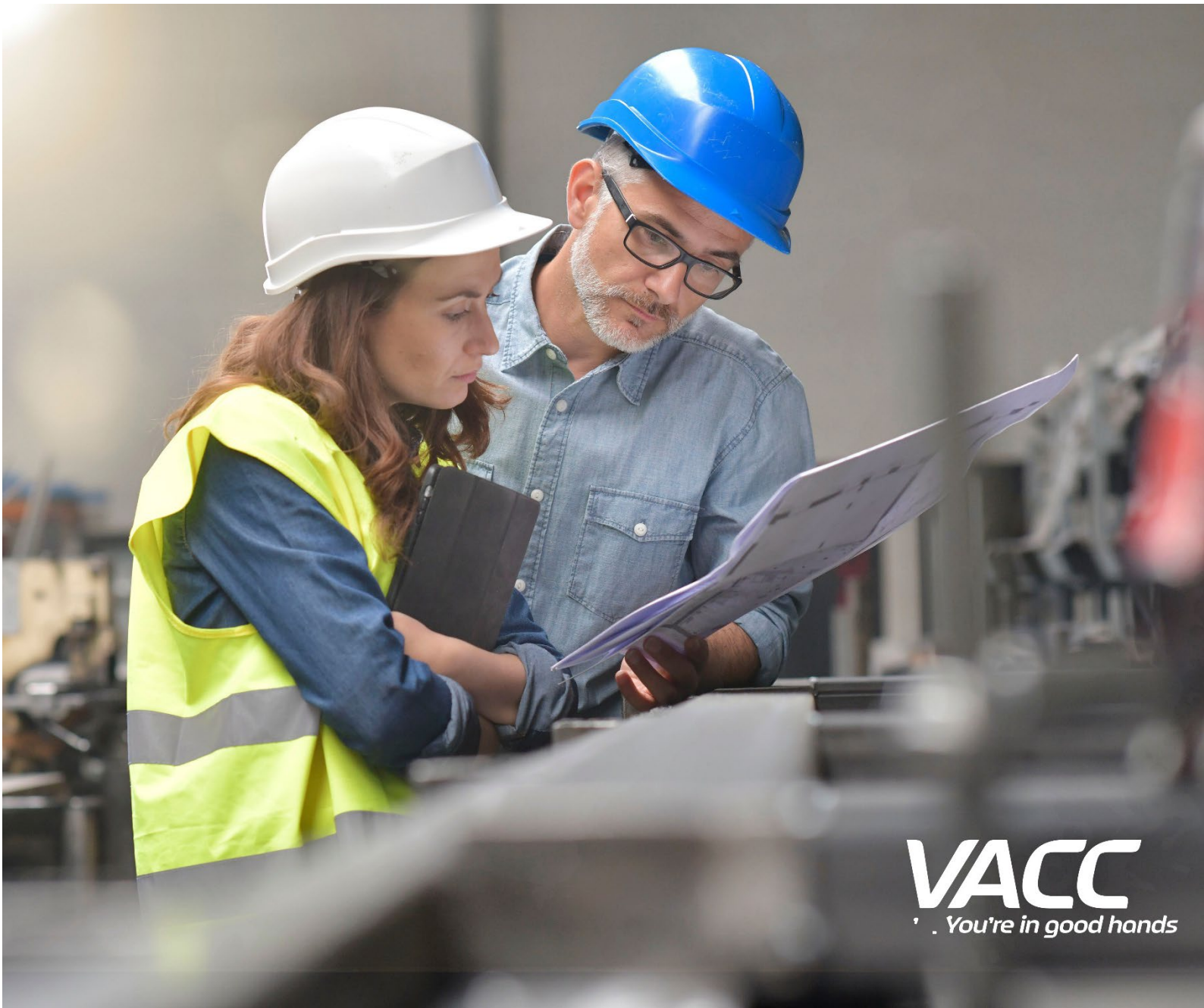
VACC Submission

VACC Response to the Review of the Professional Engineers Registration Act (2019)

AUGUST 2025



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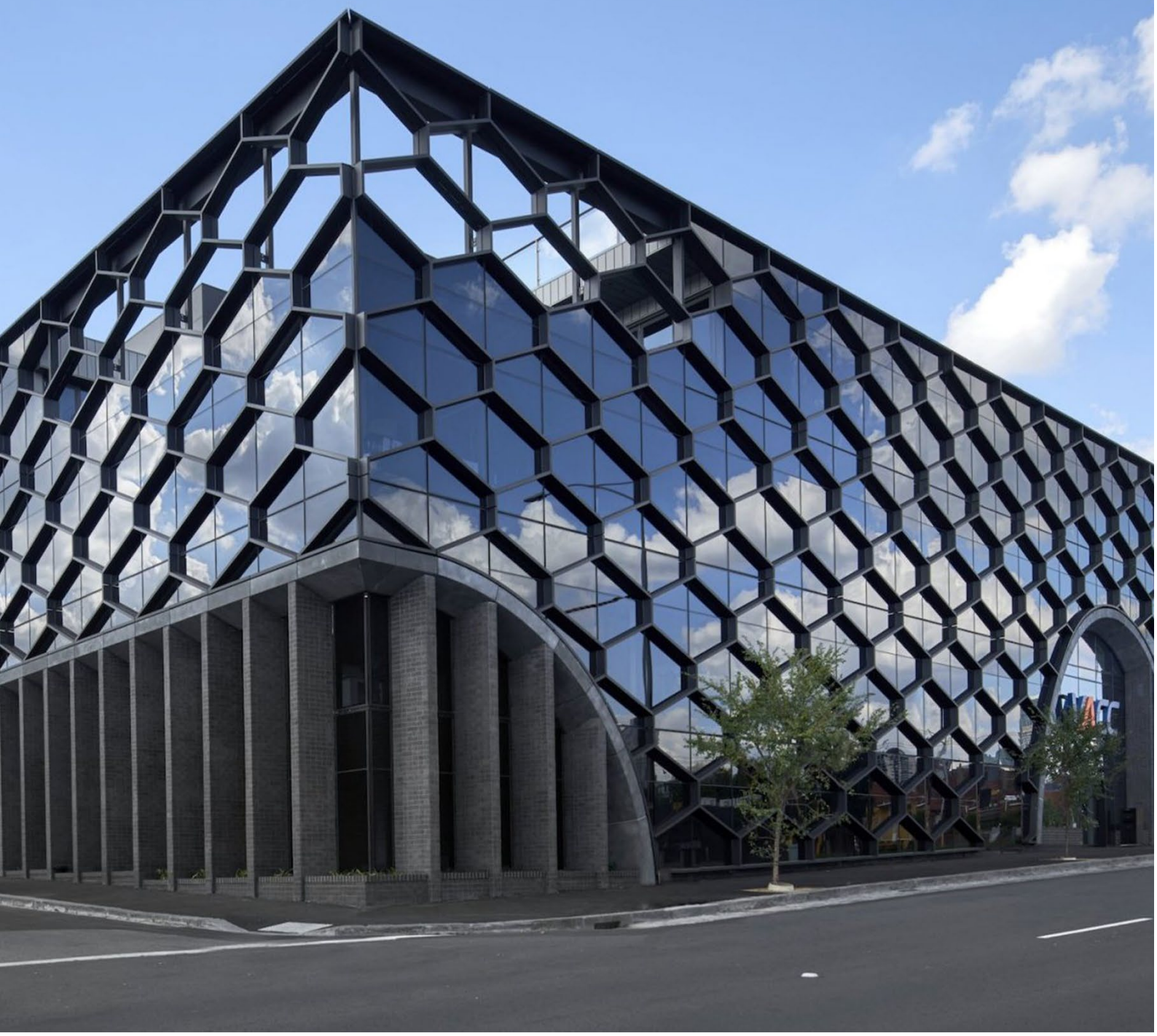
About VACC

The Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce (VACC) is Victoria's peak automotive industry association, representing the interests of more than 5,000 members in over 20 retail automotive sectors that employ over 50,000 Victorians. VACC members range from new and used vehicle dealers (passenger, truck, commercial, motorcycles, recreational and farm machinery), repairers (mechanical, electrical, body and repair specialists, i.e. radiators and engines), vehicle servicing (service stations, vehicle washing, rental, windscreens), parts and component wholesale/retail and distribution and aftermarket manufacture (i.e. specialist vehicle, parts or component modification and/or manufacture), towing operators, tyre dealers and automotive dismantlers and recyclers.

VACC is also an active member of the Motor Trades Association of Australia (MTAA) and contributes significantly to the national policy debate through Australia's peak national automotive association.



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Introduction

The Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce (VACC) welcomes the opportunity to response to the 2025 review of the Professional Engineers Registration Act 2019 (PERA). While the Act provides a framework aimed at protecting public safety and upholding professional standards, its implementation has revealed a number of practical and structural challenges—particularly within the automotive and mobility engineering sectors.

Key issues include:

- sole reliance on Washington Accord qualifications
- ambiguity in the definition of "professional engineering services"
- a lack of practical, industry-specific guidance
- inconsistent regulator communication and assessment practices
- absence of transitional recognition for experienced technical professionals

This submission draws on feedback from VACC's Approved Vehicle Examiner Group (AVEG), industry consultations, survey results, and direct engagement with engineers, VASS signatories, and technical businesses. Representing over 5,000 automotive retail-related members—many of whom are engineers or rely on engineering services—VACC calls for reforms that better align PERA with real-world technical practice and support a skilled, diverse, and future-ready workforce.

What is a VASS?

The Vehicle Assessment Signatory Scheme (VASS) is a Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) administered program that authorises qualified engineers, known as signatories, to certify modifications or constructions of vehicles to ensure they meet safety and regulatory standards.

VASS certification is often required for modified, imported, or individually constructed vehicles before they can be registered in Victoria. Signatories inspect and issue a VASS certificate confirming that a vehicle complies with relevant Australian Design Rules and Vehicle Standards. DTP provides guidelines and maintains a directory of approved signatories to assist vehicle owners and industry professionals engage accredited experts. Only signatories listed on the DTP register can issue valid VASS certificates.

VACC response to review questions

Engineering services captured under the PERA

Q1. Have you been able to determine whether the services you provide fit into a category?

Q2. Do you have any recommended changes to the current areas of engineering in the PERA?

PERA covers almost all engineers who wish to work in Victoria, requiring them to be assessed under one of five broadly-defined categories of engineering, with accreditation by one of a small number of large accreditation bodies that cover a wide range of engineering services. Most of whom have minimal understanding of the specialised activities that comprise automotive engineering services.

The current categorisation system lacks recognition for the distinct technical and regulatory work performed by automotive engineers, who are often grouped under "Mechanical Engineering" despite having highly specialised skills related to vehicle modifications, safety compliance, VSB14 & VSB6, ADRs, and NHVR requirements.

As a result, many stakeholders, particularly those operating in automotive engineering, compliance certification, and VASS-related roles, have not been able to confidently determine whether their services fall under a PERA-recognised category.

There is also ongoing confusion about whether work conducted under prescriptive standards—such as VSB14 vehicle assessments—constitutes a "professional engineering service" under PERA. The absence of sector-specific guidance or a dedicated Automotive Engineering category has made compliance determination especially difficult.

VACC is concerned that the inflexible nature of the accreditation scheme is precluding many experienced automotive engineers from practising in Victoria. This will ultimately lead to delays in obtaining automotive engineering services, particularly in rural and regional Australia, as well as increased costs due to reduced competition.

Case study 1:

"VASS signatories providing vehicle modification certifications routinely encounter Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) assessors or regulatory staff who are unfamiliar with automotive engineering practices. This has led to delays, audit misunderstandings, and compliance anxiety—not due to safety concerns, but because their work does not fit the existing PERA categories."

Case study 2:

"One automotive engineering firm underwent a costly audit by a CAV assessor who has a civil construction background. Despite the firm's high safety standards and clear documentation, the assessor misjudged the work due to a lack of familiarity with VSB14. This resulted in weeks of lost productivity and significant business disruption."

Case study 3:

"Prior to the introduction of the Professional Engineers Registration Act (PERA) in Victoria, we engaged an aerospace engineer to support our engineering consultancy activities. His appointment was based on his advanced expertise in finite element analysis (FEA), a core capability within our business, and his broader engineering background.

"The expectation was that he could work independently across projects, contributing directly to our consultancy deliverables. However, following PERA's implementation and the subsequent classification of our work as falling under the scope of "mechanical engineering activities," it became apparent that our consultancy services were now subject to mandatory registration requirements specific to that discipline.

"Despite the engineer's extensive experience and alignment with the technical demands of our projects, we were advised by CAV / BLA that he did not meet the eligibility criteria for registration as a mechanical engineer. As a result, he would require direct supervision under the Act for a minimum of five years.

"This interpretation underscores a broader challenge within the registration framework: the boundaries between engineering disciplines—particularly where technical skills and software proficiency are transferable—are not always clearly defined. For us, this meant pivoting our working model to remain compliant with the legislation, significantly reducing the engineer's autonomy and limiting overall output and commercial efficiency.

"This highlights the issue with definitions, where this employee could work in the aerospace industry and not require registration, but using those same skillsets in our business requires mechanical engineer registration. This same issue could be expanded to other engineering sub-disciplines such as mining, chemical, software, computer, environmental and product design.

Stakeholders strongly recommend the creation of a dedicated Automotive Engineering or Mobility Engineering registration category, distinct from traditional Mechanical Engineering. VACC notes that the Board of Professional Engineers of Queensland currently recognised 19 distinct areas of engineering, compared with five in Victoria.

Recommendation 1:

Amend section 4 of the *Professional Engineers Registration Act 2019* to introduce a new distinct area of engineering covering automotive or mobility engineering services.

Recommendation 2:

Clarify in the Regulations that current VASS practitioners are automatically deemed to be professional engineers (or automotive engineers).

The recommended automotive engineering category would include tailored standards, auditing procedures, codes of conduct and assessor qualifications aligned with the vehicle compliance field.

Q3. Are the qualification and experience requirements in line with industry standards?

The current qualification and experience requirements under PERA are not in line with industry standards for automotive engineers. This is due to the requirement for professional engineers to have completed a Washington Accord-accredited undergraduate or post-graduate degree, which is restrictive, and excludes capable engineers who have entered the profession through TAFE, apprenticeships, or industry-based learning.

PERA provides no mechanism for individuals already working in the industry to do so. It also provides no alternative qualification and experience requirements for engineers that have taken non-traditional pathways to develop equivalent or comparable skills and experience within the specialisation of automotive engineering. VACC notes that this directly contradicts the Victorian Government's position as stated in the 2024 Victorian Skills Plan to assist workers who have acquired skills through experiences with improved Recognition of Prior Learning.

Case study 4:

"A regional trailer designer with over 25 years experience, and no complaints levelled, was forced to close his business due to uncertainty over PERA eligibility. He had built a reputation for safe, innovative design, serving local councils and tradespeople, but walked away because there was no pathway for him to be officially recognised according to PERA."

Case study 5:

"A long-standing partner business, previously engaged to support trailer design and certification activities, has been significantly affected by the implementation of PERA.
"The owner is a TAFE-qualified engineer with extensive industry experience across caravan, trailer, and automotive sectors. Prior to PERA, he provided valuable consulting services to other manufacturers, including structural design, compliance testing, and regulatory guidance.

"Following PERA's introduction, it was determined that engineering calculations integral to his scope of work fell within the regulated practice requiring formal registration. Despite his competency, experience, and familiarity with these calculations, his qualification did not meet the new requirements. Continuing in this capacity would constitute a breach under the legislation.

"As a result, he ceased offering those services—effectively eliminating a specialised resource within the supply chain. This has disrupted operations and reduced capacity across trailer certification activities that previously relied on his expertise and responsiveness."

Case study 6:

"The Washington Accord requirement has created barriers for several of our employees seeking registration. Many completed their degrees 15–20 years ago, or studied at reputable overseas institutions outside the Accord. Despite holding advanced qualifications such as Masters or PhDs, they were not directly eligible for registration through the initial preferred organisation, that being SAE. For them to be considered they had to redo their migrant skills assessments through Engineers Australia at significant cost and time—far more than those with local degrees."

VACC supports amendments to the Act to introduce alternative pathways to meet qualification and experience requirements, in line with the Australian Capital Territory's regime as outlined Part 6 of the *Professional Engineers (Qualifications, Experience and Competencies) Determination 202* (ACT).

Recommendation 3:

Amend section 12 of the *Professional Engineers Registration Act 2019* to introduce a requirement for the Business Licensing Authority and each assessment scheme to outline alternative pathways for individual practitioners to meet qualification and experience requirements, including Recognition of Prior Learning, peer-reviewed assessments, or industry-based testing where applicable.

Mutual recognition

Q7. Do you currently use some form of mutual recognition to work as a professional engineer in Victoria? Do you have any feedback on this process?

Q8. Have you relied on your Victorian registration to register in another jurisdiction? How did you find the process and what, if any changes would you make?

VACC members have reported difficulty in obtaining interstate recognition of professional engineering accreditation and certification.

Engineers report that interstate mobility is hampered by a lack of harmonisation and duplicative application processes. VACC understands, for example, that engineers relocating from Queensland to Victoria are often required to reapply for registration as a professional engineer, with no credit or recognition of their prior assessment or experience in Queensland. VACC is also aware of similar reports from engineers relocating from Victoria to Queensland.

In addition, VACC notes that the extraterritorial application of PERA, and similar legislation in Queensland, requires professional engineers to not only meet that cost of maintaining registration in their home state, but also absorb the additional cost of obtaining mutual recognition of their qualifications in a state they do not reside in, in order to provide engineering services for a project in the second state.

Case study 7:

"Our engineering consultancy operates across most Australian states. The rollout of state-specific registration schemes has created a significant administrative burden, with clients increasingly requiring jurisdictional registration.

While our team is registered in Victoria, interstate work is becoming difficult due to inconsistent rules, added costs, and complex compliance requirements. This patchwork approach limits trade and mobility for qualified engineers.

Our attempt to register in Queensland has been slow and uncertain. Without a national framework, consultancies face duplicated effort, higher costs, and reduced efficiency—particularly impacting small-to-medium firms.

Recommendation 4:

The Victorian government should work with the Queensland and ACT governments to establish clear, reciprocal processes for (automatic) mutual recognition of registered professional engineers. This should include deemed approval while an application for mutual recognition is being assessed.

Obligations on registered professional engineers

Q9. Are CPD requirements proportionate and effective?

VACC considers that current CPD requirements to be appropriate, and does not recommend any changes.

The compliance and enforcement framework under the PERA

Q10. Is the Code of Conduct and disciplinary process fair and effective?

Q16. Is the enforcement framework proportionate and clear?

VACC has no comment regarding the Code of Conduct.

VACC appreciates that CAV's compliance and enforcement policy outlines a general approach, which broadly appears to be proportionate and clear.

However, VACC members have raised concerns over the lack of transparency regarding CAV's approach to disciplinary action under PERA, given the significant potential impacts on the employability and livelihoods of engineering practitioners captured by the registration requirements.

VACC members are particularly concerned that disciplinary or other enforcement action taken by CAV may result from an inadequate understanding of the specific standards of practice applicable to individual engineering sub-specialities.

VACC urges CAV to provide further advice on its compliance approach for professional engineering, including any steps CAV intends to take to seek peer review prior to taking enforcement or disciplinary action towards a registered engineer.

Recommendation 5:
Consumer Affairs Victoria should allow for peer-review to inform its compliance and enforcement policy, to ensure proportionality, clarity of process, and sector expertise in disciplinary action taken under the Act.

Prescriptive standards and guidance material

Q14. How does the use of prescriptive standards operate in practice in your workplace?

Q15. Do you have any feedback on how prescriptive standards could be improved? Q17. What would you change to improve the guidance material issued by CAV?

Q18. What would you change to improve the Practice Note on what is a prescriptive standard? Is it easy to understand and apply?

Whilst the intent of the legislation is understood and largely supported, the implementation of the Act requires amendment, particularly in the areas of definitions and industry obligations.

As noted in the response to Question 2 above, VACC members have raised concerns that the distinction between professional engineering services requiring registration, and work done to prescriptive standards (like VSB14 and VSB6), is unclear and at times impractical within the automotive context.

Stakeholders report poor communication, inconsistent advice, and lack of sector-specific examples from government. This lack of clarity and feedback has resulted in some qualified engineers walking away from the process.

Case study 8:

"A 4WD accessory business paused development fearing they were now illegally reviewing designs internally—even though they followed VSB14.

"The team could not get a clear answer from regulators, delaying innovation and sales."

The prescriptive standards could be improved through:

- introducing industry specific guidelines, including guidance on whether or not Vehicle Service Bulletins are considered to be prescriptive standards for the purposes of the Act; and,
- clarifying whether or not the decision to use a prescriptive standard is, in and of itself, a professional engineering service.

Recommendation 6:
Consumer Affairs Victoria should develop FAQs and guidance material tailored to highly regulated fields such as automotive engineering. This guidance should clarify the definition of professional engineering service and provide real-world examples distinguishing when registration is required under specific circumstances.

Assessment Entities and Individual Registration Experience

Stakeholders reported inconsistent outcomes based on assessment bodies and found the system favours traditional university routes over demonstrated skill.

Case study 10:

"An engineer with SAE accreditation was told to withdraw their application months after applying, due to a non-Washington Accord degree. No guidance was provided on how to amend or appeal.

"Despite extensive industry leadership roles, this engineer received no feedback and ultimately abandoned the process."

Recommendation 7:
Consumer Affairs Victoria should establish clear standards and protocols across all authorising assessment entities, including processes for engineers to request a review of decisions made by assessment entities.

The numbers of professional engineers operating in Victoria and the numbers that are registered

Q21. What is the industry impact of PERA so far?

As noted above, the implementation of PERA has negatively impacted automotive engineers operating in Victoria due to:

- their exclusion from eligibility to register as professional engineers, due to the lack of recognition of non-Washington Accord qualifications
- persistent uncertainty regarding the scope of the Act, and which activities are considered to be professional engineering services versus exempt services performed to a prescriptive standard.

In addition, PERA has led to increased cost pressures on engineering businesses in Victoria. Engineering consultancy rates must be increased to offset the cumulative costs of professional memberships and reduced billable capacity due to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) obligations. These costs escalate when multiple state registrations—such as NSW, Queensland, and Victoria—are required, resulting in triple registration fees and associated administrative overhead.

VACC members have also reported that ongoing uncertainty among individual practitioners regarding their personal liability under the registration framework has introduced hesitation and complexity into project delivery.

VACC is concerned that these issues, if left unaddressed, will lead to industry exits and business closures, with particularly acute impacts for service delivery in regional and rural Victoria.

Q22. What prevents engineers from registering, and what would help?

As noted in the Discussion Paper, the number of professional engineers captured in the Victorian public register is unlikely to represent the full cohort of individuals providing professional engineering services both in and for Victoria.

This is likely due to a number of factors, including:

- a broad lack of awareness regarding the obligations of the Act
- a lack of awareness that the services provided by individual engineers are specifically caught by PERA, due to the lack of industry-specific guidance
- excessive regulatory and financial burden, particularly for small businesses
- deliberate non-compliance, due to a lack of enforcement to date by Consumer Affairs Victoria.

Illustrative scenario: product design and engineering under PERA

Consider "Joe", an individual developing a new stapler. His process involves:

- investigating mechanical principles relevant to stapler operation
- producing technical design drawings
- performing engineering calculations for spring force, lever action, and dimensional tolerances
- manufacturing or commissioning production with the intent to sell.

Although the product may appear routine, Joe's use of engineering calculations likely qualifies this activity as regulated engineering under the Act. The lack of guidance regarding what constitutes an "advanced scientifically based calculation".

If Joe is not a registered professional engineer, and is not operating under the supervision of one, he may be in breach of the Act, even with significant practical experience or vocational qualifications.

This scenario underscores a key concern, the line between practical product development and regulated engineering activity under PERA remains unclear to many.

As a result, designers, manufacturers, and small businesses across the country may unknowingly engage in regulated work without proper registration. The Act's ambiguity creates uncertainty—especially for skilled practitioners from vocational or non-traditional engineering backgrounds—making outreach, education, and compliance guidance essential to reduce inadvertent breaches.

Recommendation 8:
Consumer Affairs Victoria should undertake a State-wide education campaign to improve awareness of PERA. This should be supported by industry specific guidance to facilitate improved understanding to the Act, and overall better compliance.

Any other feedback

Q23. Other comments on PERA's operation

In its current form, PERA is not fit for purpose for applied, cross-disciplinary, or compliance-focused fields such as automotive engineering, including the VASS.

As it stands, the registration scheme risks depleting engineering capacity, undermining safety through practitioner attrition and penalising experience-based knowledge.

VACC

You're in good hands

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