

Research Note

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Abstract

This research publication analyses demographic trends among the last five cohorts of elected Members of the Parliament of Victoria.

In general, the findings show the Members included within the scope of this study tended to be male, university educated, born in Australia and turning between 45-64 during the election year.

While more recent cohorts have shown increased diversity in some respects, more action needs to be taken if the state's elected Members are to more closely reflect their constituents.

Two decades of representation in the Victorian Parliament

Caleb Triscari, Data Journalist

Introduction

This paper provides a social and demographic breakdown of Members of the Victorian Parliament for the five most recent parliaments (2002-2018) with respect to age, gender, education level, region of birth and occupation before entering parliament. The findings for Members elected at the start of each parliament are compared to the Victorian population in each election year to explore which groups of the voter base are over or underrepresented across the two Houses.

Writing about the dilemmas of representation, Marion Sawer (1999) noted that while parliaments will never completely reflect the make-up of society, 'recent political philosophy has placed new emphasis on embodiment and its relationship to representation.'

The extent of representation among a governing body, especially one acting for an electorate as diverse as Victoria, can be seen as an indicator of how well it functions in the interests of its citizenry. As Anne Phillips writes in *The Politics of Presence* (1995):

Because the modern age makes identity more problematic (much less taken for granted), it also makes recognition far more important to people's well-being; and if your way of life is not recognised as of equal value with others, this will be experienced as a form of oppression. The required recognition has been widely interpreted as including a more public presence in political life: a public acknowledgment of equal value (p. 40).

Methodology

Information for Members of Parliament (MPs) was sourced primarily from the *Parliamentary Handbook*, which is published by the Victorian Parliamentary Library (2004; 2007; 2011; 2015; 2019), following the election of a new parliament. The handbook comprises information on most Members including their date of birth, place of birth, previous occupations, and education and qualifications. Information that could not be directly sourced from the handbooks was collected from other sources including the Parliament of Victoria website, inaugural speeches, election reports, the websites of Members, LinkedIn profiles, news articles, directly from the Members themselves and, in the worst-case scenario, informed estimation.

Data on the Victorian public was sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

The Members included in this study are the 128 Members (or 132 in 2002) who were elected at each Victorian state election between 2002 and 2018; Members who were elected at by-elections or appointed in the Legislative Council at a later time are not included.

In general, the findings show Members of the five most recent Victorian parliaments tended to be male, university educated, born in Australia and turning between 45-64 during the election year. These characteristics are not mutually exclusive from each other, as there are correlations between:

- Age and education (younger generations are more likely to hold a non-school qualification) (ABS, 2021a),
- Education and occupation (some jobs, such as teaching or law, require particular qualifications),
- Gender and education (certain genders tend to study certain fields) (ABS, 2021a), and
- Gender and occupation (certain genders tend to work in certain industries) (ABS, 2020a).

This research was partially inspired by similar media articles conducted on federal parliaments over the years (Evershed et al, 2016; Carter and Yim, 2021; Arora, 2022).

Data guiding this research can be found in Appendix 1.

Gender

Despite a roughly equal split of men and women in Victoria's population since at least 2002, the five most recent parliaments have comprised predominantly male MPs, ranging between 58.6% to 70.3%. Even though men continue to make up the majority, the proportion of women in parliament has increased over time.

As of November 2021, the Victorian Parliament had the fifth-highest proportion of women out of the nine federal, state and territory parliaments, behind Tasmania, the ACT, the Northern Territory and Western Australia (Hough and Richards, 2021). The Victorian Parliament's proportion of women was also slightly above the national average of 38.9%.

There has been considerable commentary about gender balance within legislative institutions locally and overseas. Late last year, the Victorian Liberal Party abandoned plans for a quota system which aimed to increase the number of female MPs (Sakkal, 2021). The Australian Labor Party initially implemented gender quotas in the 1990s and updated them in 2015 to aim for 50% by 2025 (Peatling, 2015). Other parties, such as the Greens, were established with gender equity as a founding principle (McCann, 2013).

Other initiatives such as the Labor-affiliated Emily's List and the Melbourne School of Government's [Pathways to Politics](#) program aim to address gender imbalances across parliament.

Gender balance in Parliament of Victoria 2002-2018

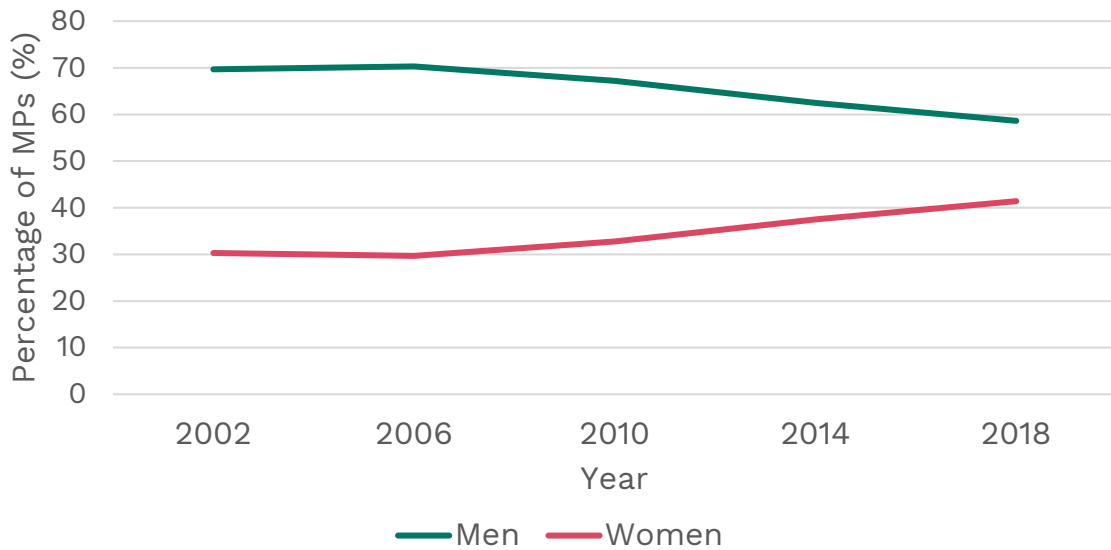


Figure 1: A line chart displays the ratio of male MPs to female MPs in the Parliament of Victoria between 2002 and 2018. The number of female MPs has generally increased over time, but remains below 50%. Click on the image to view an interactive version.

Age

The ages of MPs and Victoria's adult population were grouped into four brackets: 18-24, 25-44, 45-64, and 65 and over.

Across all five parliaments, the dominant age bracket for Members when they were elected was 45-64, making up most of the Members from each parliament. This was also the median age bracket across each parliamentary composition. Despite being the dominant age bracket for the last 20 years' worth of parliaments, Victorians aged 45-64 have only comprised a third of the total adult population.

The percentage of MPs aged between 25-44 was generally on par with that of the Victorian adult population. However, Victorians aged between 18-24, and 65 and over, were underrepresented in parliament.

For at least the past 20 years, not one Member was turning between 18-24 years of age during the year they were elected. Within the same period, the proportion of Victorians aged between 18-24 ranged from 9.6% to 10.2%.

A possible explanation for the lack of under 25s in parliament is the decision by young adults to pursue further education, trades and apprenticeships, or other employment opportunities straight out of secondary school, instead of politics. For example, in 2021, 51.3% of Victorians aged between 18-24 were enrolled in TAFE, higher education or another institution that was not secondary education (ABS, 2021a). This is supported by the large proportion of Members who have completed higher education degrees prior to being elected.

As Martin (2012, pp. 69-101) highlights, electoral politics (which includes activities like identifying with and joining a political party) is low among young people. However, non-electoral political activity such as protesting, signing petitions and boycotting appears to be on the rise among them. The decline of electoral political participation among young people could be a barrier for parties looking to recruit younger candidates.

There is also the inability to participate in some political movements as a minor, meaning their engagement with these movements generally begins from the age of 18 years onwards. However, there are groups designed for youth participation, such as the YMCA's Youth Parliament, the Foundation for Young Australians and political party youth wings.

Older age groupings, such as those over 65 years of age, have often ended their working careers and chosen retirement. Indeed, of the 969,500 Victorians who retired during the 2018-19 financial year, 76.5% were below 65 years of age. Additionally, 65.4 was the average age Victorians expected to retire when surveyed in the same financial year (ABS, 2020b).

Education

The level of education was grouped into six categories: High School or Other, Certificate III/IV, Diploma/Advanced Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, Graduate Certificate/Diploma and Postgraduate Degree.

At any given time, most Members between 2002 and 2018 had completed at least one university degree, with the portion of Members completing graduate and postgraduate study also increasing over time (see Appendix 1). Notably, many of the Members studied law at an undergraduate level, even if they did not work in the legal field prior to being elected to parliament.

ABS data releases over time show the percentage of Australians completing higher education has increased noticeably in the past 20 years. However, only 29.8% of Victorians had completed a higher education qualification by 2018.

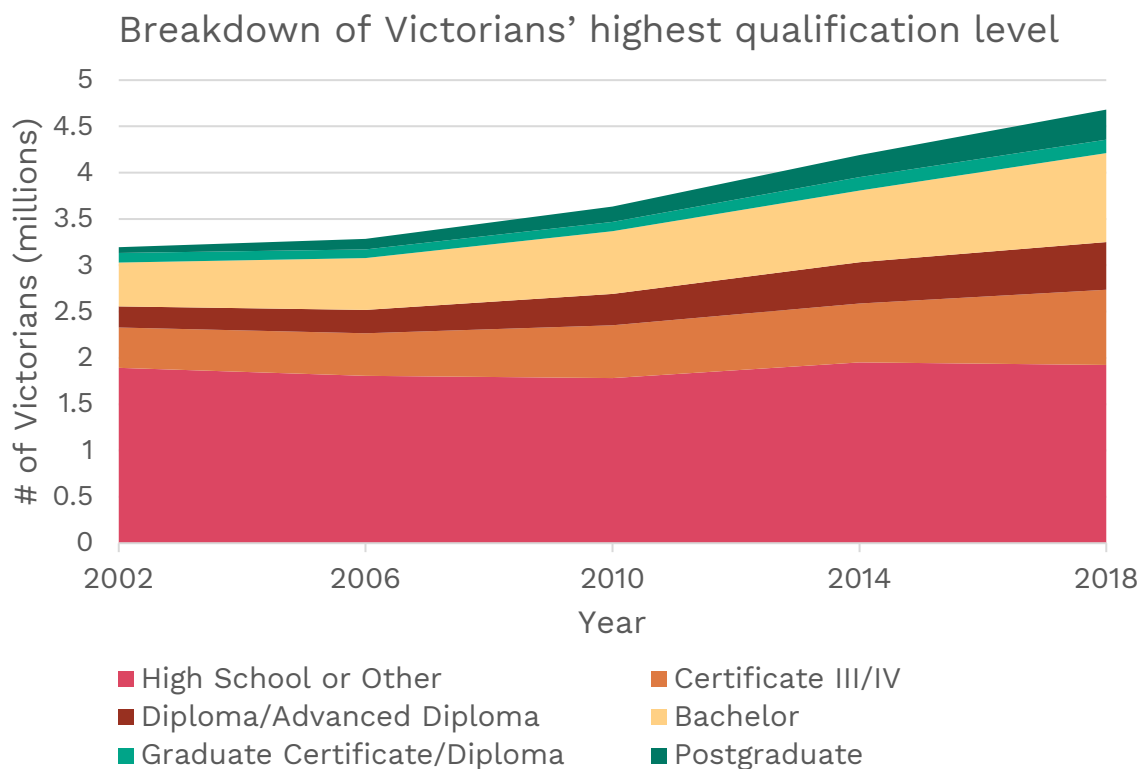


Figure 2: A stacked area chart shows Victorians' highest level of education between 2002 and 2018. Click the image to view an interactive version.

Region of birth

Countries were grouped into eight categories in accordance with the ABS' Standard Australian Classification of Countries (2008): Australia, Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe, United Kingdom, Middle East and Oceania.

The proportion of Victorians born overseas has gradually increased over the past 20 years, reaching 30.7% in 2016 (ABS, 2021b). However, this does not seem to have translated to increased migrant representation in parliament.

The number of Australian-born Members ranged between 83% and 91% over the five parliaments, which is overrepresented compared to the general Victorian population. The 56th parliament between 2006-2010 had the most Members born from countries outside of Australia at 22. Of these, more than half were born in Europe or the United Kingdom.

Occupation before entering parliament

Working within the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ABS, 2006a), job industries were grouped into 12 categories:

- Arts, culture and recreation,
- Clerical and administrative services,
- Education,
- Farming and agriculture,
- ICT and media,
- Law and finance,
- Public service,
- Retail and hospitality,
- Science and healthcare,
- Trades and blue-collar services,
- Unions and advocacy, and
- Other services.

The most recent occupation of each Member, where available, was then coded into one of these groups.

The findings show that a large percentage of the MPs in the last five parliaments had previously worked for a union, political party, trade group or the public service, including as a staff member to another parliamentarian.

While these fields appear to be overrepresented, others such as retail, hospitality and blue-collar services are underrepresented. In 2018, 23.2% of Victorians were in blue-collar work and 20.6% worked in retail or hospitality. In the current parliament, only 4.7% and 2.3%, respectively, came from these sectors. Science and healthcare are other underrepresented industries in parliament, whereas clerical and administrative fields appear to be overrepresented.

Proportion of public servants in Parliament vs. Victoria

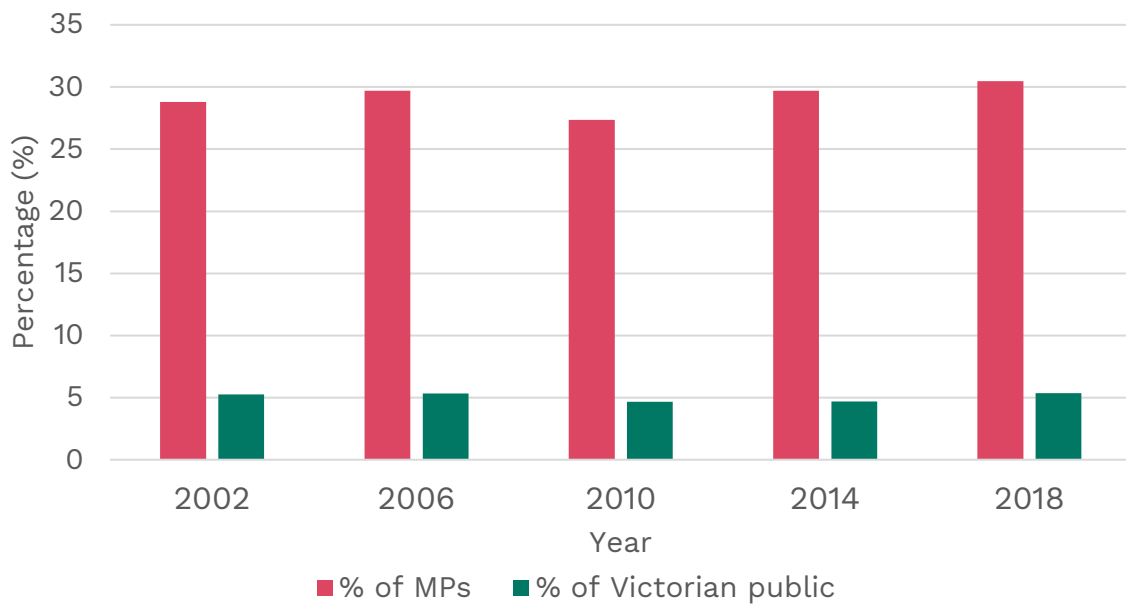


Figure 3: A histogram displays the percentage of public servants elected to parliament compared to the percentage of public servants that make up the Victorian public. [Click the image to view an interactive version.](#)

Limitations

Most of the data required to carry out this research was readily available through the aforementioned resources, such as the Parliamentary Handbook. However, eight of the 3,220 data points had to be based on estimation, due to Members not responding to information requests, information being unavailable online or the person not being able to be contacted. This was, fortunately, a negligible portion of the total number of data points needed to conduct this analysis.

For the education portion of this study, the research was limited by the inability to equate some historical qualifications with contemporary equivalents. Additionally, Members who had completed trades or apprenticeships were unable to be placed anywhere other than the 'High School or Other' category, given these qualifications do not always neatly equate to a non-school qualification such as a Certificate IV.

For the region of birth, data is sourced from the Australian Census, meaning up-to-date figures are only available every five years. The country of birth data for the Victorian public for each election year is drawn from the closest census year at the time.

Conclusion

Some steps towards more diverse representation have been made in the Parliament of Victoria, particularly when it comes to women in Parliament. However, if the state's elected Members are to more closely reflect their constituents, at least with respect to the five analysed characteristics, more action needs to be taken.

The question of representation in Victoria's legislature is even more pertinent following the gradual release of 2021 Census data from the ABS, the 2022 Federal Election results, and the forthcoming 2022 Victorian state election.

Appendix 1: Proportions of MPs and Victorians across classifications

Gender

Year	Classification	% of MPs	% of Victoria
2002	Female	30.3	48.7
2002	Male	69.7	51.3
2006	Female	29.7	48.9
2006	Male	70.3	51.1
2010	Female	32.8	49
2010	Male	67.2	51
2014	Female	37.5	48.9
2014	Male	62.5	51.1
2018	Female	41.4	49
2018	Male	58.6	51

Age

Year	Classification	% of MPs	% of Victoria
2002	18-24	0	12.6
2002	25-44	35.6	39.8
2002	45-64	62.1	30.5
2002	65+	2.3	17.2
2006	18-24	0	12.9
2006	25-44	32.8	38
2006	45-64	65.6	31.7
2006	65+	1.6	17.4
2010	18-24	0	13.2
2010	25-44	33.6	37.4
2010	45-64	64.8	31.7
2010	65+	1.6	17.8
2014	18-24	0	12.7
2014	25-44	35.9	37.3
2014	45-64	63.3	31.1
2014	65+	0.8	18.9
2018	18-24	0	12.7
2018	25-44	31.3	37.4
2018	45-64	64.1	30.4
2018	65+	4.7	19.5

Level of Education

Year	Classification	% of MPs	% of Victoria
2002	Bachelor's Degree	45.5	14.5
2002	Certificate III/IV	0	13.3
2002	Diploma/Advanced Diploma	5.3	7.1
2002	Graduate Certificate/Diploma	6.8	3.2
2002	High School or Other	30.3	59.7
2002	Postgraduate Degree	12.1	2
2006	Bachelor's Degree	48.4	16.7
2006	Certificate III/IV	1.6	13.6
2006	Diploma/Advanced Diploma	6.2	7.6
2006	Graduate Certificate/Diploma	7	2.8
2006	High School or Other	24.2	55.8
2006	Postgraduate Degree	12.5	3.4
2010	Bachelor's Degree	48.4	18.6
2010	Certificate III/IV	2.3	15.6
2010	Diploma/Advanced Diploma	8.6	9.2
2010	Graduate Certificate/Diploma	10.2	4.6
2010	High School or Other	17.2	47.9
2010	Postgraduate Degree	13.3	4.6

Level of Education

Year	Classification	% of MPs	% of Victoria
2014	Bachelor's Degree	43.8	17.8
2014	Certificate III/IV	3.1	14.6
2014	Diploma/Advanced Diploma	5.5	10.3
2014	Graduate Certificate/Diploma	8.6	3.3
2014	High School or Other	14.8	44.9
2014	Postgraduate Degree	24.2	5.5
2018	Bachelor's Degree	46.1	20
2018	Certificate III/IV	2.3	17
2018	Diploma/Advanced Diploma	5.5	10.7
2018	Graduate Certificate/Diploma	8.6	3
2018	High School or Other	13.3	40.2
2018	Postgraduate Degree	24.2	6.8

Occupation before Parliament

Year	Classification	% of MPs	% of Victoria
2002	Arts, Culture and Recreation	2.3	1.7
2002	Clerical and Administrative Services	15.2	6
2002	Education	9.8	7.7
2002	Farming and Agriculture	5.3	2.9
2002	ICT and Media	1.5	3.8
2002	Law and Finance	8.3	6.4
2002	Other Services	3.8	8.2
2002	Public Service	28.8	5.4
2002	Retail and Hospitality	3	22.2
2002	Science and Healthcare	3	8.2
2002	Trades and Blue-Collar Services	3.8	27.3
2002	Unions and Advocacy	15.2	0.3
2006	Arts, Culture and Recreation	3.9	2.1
2006	Clerical and Administrative Services	14.1	6.4
2006	Education	7	7.8
2006	Farming and Agriculture	2.3	2.9
2006	ICT and Media	0.8	3.8
2006	Law and Finance	7.8	6.4
2006	Other Services	5.5	8.4
2006	Public Service	29.7	4.7
2006	Retail and Hospitality	4.7	21.7
2006	Science and Healthcare	3.9	8.6
2006	Trades and Blue-Collar Services	3.1	26.9
2006	Unions and Advocacy	17.2	0.3

Occupation before Parliament

Year	Classification	% of MPs	% of Victoria
2010	Arts, Culture and Recreation	2.3	2.2
2010	Clerical and Administrative Services	17.2	6.9
2010	Education	3.9	7.8
2010	Farming and Agriculture	0.8	2.7
2010	ICT and Media	1.6	3.9
2010	Law and Finance	12.5	6
2010	Other Services	4.7	9.2
2010	Public Service	27.3	4.7
2010	Retail and Hospitality	5.5	21.9
2010	Science and Healthcare	3.9	8.8
2010	Trades and Blue-Collar Services	3.9	25.3
2010	Unions and Advocacy	16.4	0.5
2014	Arts, Culture and Recreation	2.3	2.6
2014	Clerical and Administrative Services	18	6.6
2014	Education	3.1	8.1
2014	ICT and Media	3.1	3.8
2014	Law and Finance	11.7	6
2014	Other Services	3.1	9.3
2014	Public Service	29.7	5.3
2014	Retail and Hospitality	4.7	22.6
2014	Science and Healthcare	4.7	9.3
2014	Trades and Blue-Collar Services	3.1	23.1
2014	Unions and Advocacy	16.4	0.3

Occupation before Parliament

Year	Classification	% of MPs	% of Victoria
2018	Arts, Culture and Recreation	0.8	2.3
2018	Clerical and Administrative Services	13.3	7.4
2018	Education	6.2	8.4
2018	Farming and Agriculture	0.8	2.6
2018	ICT and Media	4.7	4.1
2018	Law and Finance	9.4	5.8
2018	Other Services	1.6	9.8
2018	Public Service	30.5	5.3
2018	Retail and Hospitality	2.3	20.6
2018	Science and Healthcare	6.2	10.4
2018	Trades and Blue-Collar Services	4.7	23.2
2018	Unions and Advocacy	19.5	0.2

Region of Birth

Year	Classification	% of MPs	% of Victoria
2002	Africa	0	1.1*
2002	Americas	0.8	0.8*
2002	Asia	3	6.2*
2002	Australia	84.8	75.5*
2002	Europe	5.3	9*
2002	Middle East	1.5	1.1*
2002	Oceania	0	1.6*
2002	United Kingdom	4.5	4.7*
2006	Africa	1.6	1.4*
2006	Americas	0.8	0.9*
2006	Asia	2.3	8.1*
2006	Australia	82	73.7*
2006	Europe	6.2	8.4*
2006	Middle East	3.1	1.2*
2006	Oceania	0.8	1.8*
2006	United Kingdom	3.1	4.4*
2010	Africa	1.6	1.6*
2010	Americas	0.8	1*
2010	Asia	2.3	11*
2010	Australia	86.7	71.3*
2010	Europe	3.1	7.5*
2010	Middle East	3.1	1.4*
2010	Oceania	0.8	2*
2010	United Kingdom	1.6	4.1*

* Based on the closest Australian Census data release

Region of Birth

Year	Classification	% of MPs	% of Victoria
2014	Africa	0.8	1.8*
2014	Americas	0.8	1.2*
2014	Asia	1.6	13.7*
2014	Australia	88.3	69.3*
2014	Europe	2.3	6.4*
2014	Middle East	3.9	1.7*
2014	Oceania	0.8	2.1*
2014	United Kingdom	1.6	3.8*
2018	Africa	0	1.8*
2018	Americas	0	1.2*
2018	Asia	2.3	13.7*
2018	Australia	90.6	69.3*
2018	Europe	0.8	6.4*
2018	Middle East	3.1	1.7*
2018	Oceania	0.8	2.1*
2018	United Kingdom	2.3	3.8*

* Based on the closest Australian Census data release

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Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service
Parliament House, Spring Street, East Melbourne 3002
Telephone: (03) 9651 8640
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