Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Board of Victoria

Board's Report 2025-26



VICTORIA State Government

A message from the Chair

I am pleased to provide the Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Board (Board) report for 2025-2026 in response to the Victorian Government's Statement of Expectations (SoE) to highlight what has been achieved and what have been the priority areas of focus during the reporting period.

I was appointed as Chair for a second term and welcomed the re-appointment of Stephen Bunce for a further term as well as the appointment of Wayne Cheesman as the new Victoria Police representative following completion of Sussan Thomas' second term.

The Board's operational workload has continued to be high as can be evidenced from the significant increase against the Deparment's performance measures and targets associated with the number of permits, licences and registrations considered. The Board has contributed to the consideration of proposed legislative reforms that could effectively and sustainably address the operational requirements of regulating the sport.

Contestant safety remains a priority focus. Following the death of an amateur MMA contestant (Jake Sendler) early in March 2025, the Board completed its independent review of policies and processes relevant to Mr Sendler's registration, weigh-in and pre-fight medical examination. The review confirmed that Board policies, requirements and procedures had been applied consistently with the legislative requirements and recommended opportunities for improvements to practices more broadly. These recommendations will inform the Board's priority focus in 2026-2027.

Maintaining integrity in the industry is a very important purpose of the statutory scheme and has continued to be an important focus for the Board in ensuring that licence holders are fit and proper persons and that it is not contrary to the public interest for a person to hold a licence. A decision by VCAT in March 2026 to overturn a Board decision in relation to a licensing matter has prompted consideration of revisions that may be necessary for ensuring the robustness of the legislative scheme.

The Board's priority focus on supporting the development of officials continued, with a second Muay Thai development session delivered and a boxing training opportunity provided over the reporting period.

Stakeholder engagement has continued as a priority and the Board has been responsive to queries and feedback from the sector. Convening regular and structured engagement forums where issues can be raised directly with the Board, assists in ensuring that the Board is aware of current and emerging issues and provides a mechanism for continuing to educate the sector of the Board's regulatory responsibilities and priority focus.

The Board's participation in the second annual meeting of combat sport regulators is an effective mechanism for sharing key information about operational challenges and identifying opportunities for collaboration. There is broad consensus by combat sport regulators in the consideration and response to new and emerging high risk combat sports which provides a strong foundation for states/territory governments who regulate the sport.

(Alan Clayton PSM)

Introduction

The 2025-26 Board Report is the first report provided in response to the 2025-27 SoE issued by the Victorian Government.

Legal framework

Professional boxing and combat sports in Victoria is regulated under the *Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Act 1985* (the Act) and the *Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Regulations 2018* (the Regulations) to promote safety, reduce the risk of malpractice and uphold industry integrity.

The Board is the principal regulatory body responsible for ensuring that standards are upheld, community expectations are met and contestant safety is prioritised.

Safety

- Matchmaking remains a key focus

All matchmaking is scrutinised by the Board who take into account a range of factors, including:

- The prior performances of individual contestants.
- The ability of contestants to effectively defend themselves.
- Experience.
- Skillset.
- Stylistic compatibility.
- Physical attributes.
- Conditioning.
- Overall preparation.
- Proven record at the proposed weight class and scheduled distance.

The Board has continued its careful review of all proposed match-ups over the reporting period, assessing and approving 772 proposed match-ups and seeking additional rationale from licensed matchmakers for about 10% of match-ups.

- Conditions of registration

The Board exercised its powers, consistent with s.10A(3A) of the Act, to apply certain conditions to a contestant registration in the interest of health and safety. The conditions limit the individual to competition in a specific weight class and on the recommendation of a licensed matchmaker.

- Medical suspensions

Contestants with a diagnosed or suspected concussion must, as a minimum, refrain from competition for at least 37 days and contact sparring for at least 30 days. Medical clearances from a medical practitioner stating the contestant has recovered from their concussion (or suspected concussion) must be provided to the Board prior to their return to contact training/sparring. The period of suspension increases in cases where successive concussions are sustained.

If a contestant is subject to a non-fight period they will be ineligible to compete in professional contests during that period in the interests of their health and safety.

Of the 1544 contestants that competed in the reporting period, 13% (n=199) had medical suspensions applied. The suspension periods applied are informed by a range of factors, including the ringside doctor's diagnosis following contests, loss of consciousness, consideration of any previous concussions and contest outcomes such as knockouts and technical knockouts. About one third of contestants who had medical suspensions applied required medical clearances to return to training and competition.

- Jake Sendler case review

The Board finalised an independent review of its processes and procedures associated with Jake Sendler's contestant registration and participation in the weigh in and promotion that took place in March 2025. The review confirmed that all processes and procedures were followed and identified opportunities for improvements. The Board accepted the review findings and recommendations and has commissioned further work to raise awareness of the risks of unsafe weight cutting practices that will be a priority focus in 2026-2027.

- Safety threats

The Board has a responsibility to ensure a safe workplace for all officials, staff and medical personnel and has a detailed risk assessment and security planning protocol in place as standard practice. An elevated security protocol that is developed and executed in collaboration with Victoria Police is required at times to address threats to public safety which may include the application of additional conditions and security measures.

In collaboration with Victoria Police, the Board activated its elevated security protocol for two promotions during the period to mitigate safety risks to licensed officials, contestants, ringside medical personnel, staff, Board members and spectators.

Integrity

The purpose of the Act explicitly requires that the Board is required to uphold industry integrity by ensuring that a licence holder is a fit and proper person to hold a licence, and it is not contrary to the public interest for a person to hold a licence.

- Licence applications

During the reporting period 136 licence applications were approved and four were denied by the Board on the basis of the Chief Commissioner's advice that the applicants were not assessed as being fit and proper and it was contrary to the public interest to hold a combat sports licence. Individuals who are denied a licence may seek review of the Board's decision in VCAT and/or may re-apply in 12 months or a longer period that is determined by the Board.

Over the reporting period, there were three licence application appeals active in VCAT. One appeal application was withdrawn, one remains ongoing and one was found in favour of the applicant. The VCAT decision to overturn the Board's decision to deny a licence application has prompted consideration of revisions that may be necessary for ensuring the robustness of the legislative scheme.

Integrity of outcomes of contests

The Board's practice of convening post promotion meetings with licensed officials and ringside doctors provides an important opportunity for referees and judges to share insights and learnings as well as establish transparent accountability for decisions made and actions taken that relate to the outcome of each contest, including where injuries could have been prevented.

The Board's rules provide for written applications for decision reviews of contest outcomes and is premised on whether any of the following occurred:

- There was collusion by persons affecting the result of any contest.
- The completion of the scorecard of the judges shows an error which would mean that the decision was given to the wrong contestant.
- There was a clear violation of the Act, Regulations or rules governing the contest which affected the result.

In the reporting period the Board reviewed five decisions and upheld the decision of officials in all cases.

- Integrity education plan

The Board collaborated with Sport Integrity Australia to develop an integrity education plan for the Victorian combat sports sector that aligns with the Board's policies and conditions of licence holders, registered contestants and ringside medical personnel.

The sector was encouraged to access the online education modules to raise awareness and understanding of integrity threats such as doping, match-fixing, sports betting and illicit drugs in sport. Mandating completion of the online modules as part of a licence or registration application process is being considered for implementation in the future.

- Victoria Police – Sport Integrity and Intelligence Unit and Organised Crime Unit

The Board continued to work closely with and further develop its working relationships with the relevant local area commands of Victoria Police and the Sporting Integrity and Intelligence Unit within the Organised Crime Unit in assessing and mitigating safety and integrity risks associated with regulating combat sports.

- Victorian Sport Integrity Network

The Board is represented at the Victorian Sport Integrity Network (Network), alongside representatives from law enforcement, regulatory bodies, state sporting associations, Victorian-based national sports associations, the Victorian racing industry and leading sports academics. The Chair attended the quarterly meetings of the Network.

Officials - safety, integrity and best practice

- Officials Training

The Board's priority focus on supporting the development of officials continued, with a second Muay Thai development session delivered and a boxing training opportunity provided over the reporting period.

- 15 bout cap

Following consultation with the sector, the Board implemented a cap of 15 bouts for any promotions as another measure for managing the duration of events and preventing fatigue of officials.

- Conflicts of interest

The Board has commenced an educative approach with licence holders to raise awareness of the importance of recognising and declaring conflicts of interest. The objective is to build on the practice that is already in place for judges and referees through extending to other licence holders who train, promote and arrange match-ups for contestants.

Digitisation of registration, licence and permit system

The Board's digital registration, licence and permit system continues to provide self-service opportunities for the sector. A digital fightcard released at the beginning of 2026 has allowed licensed matchmakers to submit proposed contests for the Board's review whilst accessing real time updates in the approval process. This digital enhancement has been positively embraced by promoters and matchmakers.

Reputational issues

The Board sent correspondence to a media outlet after it published articles that contained inaccuracies about individuals licensed by the Board and misattributed quotes to the Board Chair. The Board sought the attention and assurance of the media outlet that future articles about the Board's work, inquiries and decisions were correctly informed and verified with the Board prior to publication.

Industry engagement

The Board continues to communicate with the sector via its website, written communications via email and its newsletter, *Board Rounds*, along with regular online forums with stakeholder groups to provide opportunities to discuss proposals and raise issues experienced by the sector. Over the period:

- Various online forums were held with licence holders, including promoters and matchmakers, officials and trainers.
- Board Rounds was issued to the sector on a quarterly basis.

Annual meeting of Australian combat sport regulators

The Board participated in the second meeting of combat sports regulators that was hosted by the New South Wales Combat Sports Authority in Sydney in June 2026. The meeting provided an important forum to discuss contestant health and safety, including opportunities to collaborate in the development of educational resources associated with weight management and emerging, unregulated combat sports and the inherent safety risks to participants.

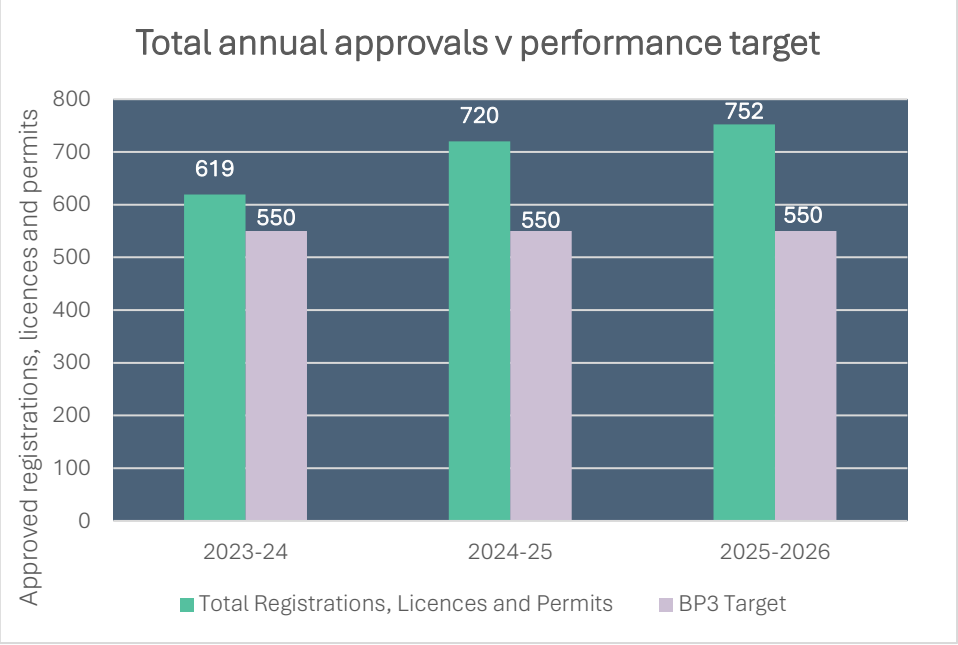
Emerging combat sports

The Board considered the health and safety risks associated with a new combat sport that features striking only with the use of MMA style gloves and is conducted in a square cage, as part of the process in responding to a request for Ministerial Determination of the sport. The Board's advice was provided to the Minister for Sport in the next reporting period.

Operations – Performance Measures

Over the reporting period, the Board approved 752 contestant registrations, licences and permits, resulting in a 37% increase over the Department's performance measures target of 550. A total of $193,506.50 was generated in revenue from the payment of associated application fees.

Figure 1 provides a 3-year comparison of the summation of all registrations, licences and permits against the performance measure target, demonstrating a consistency in above targets being sustained.

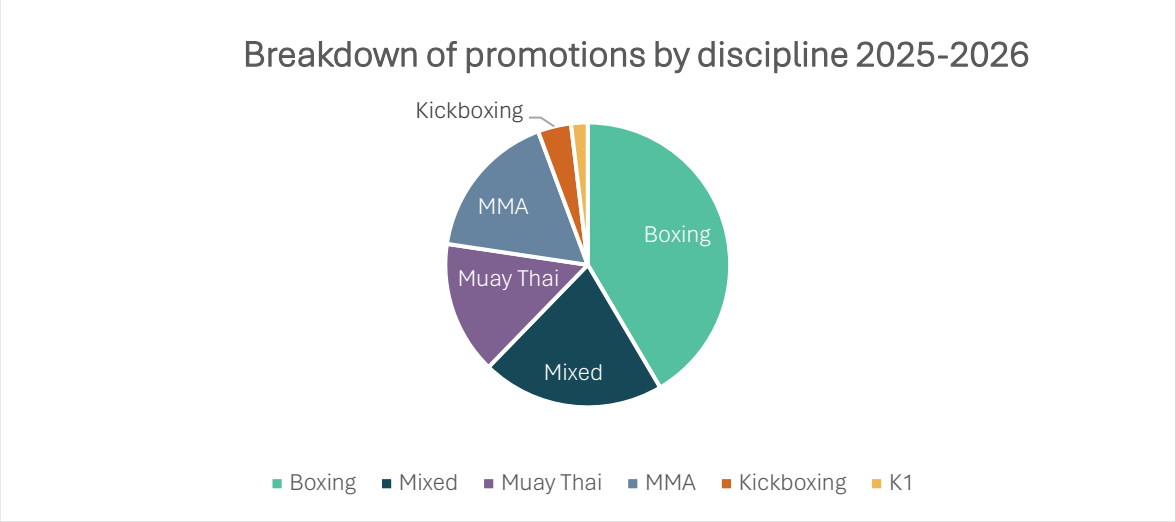


Operations – trends in combat sport disciplines

The Board supervised 53 promotions during the reporting period. Promotions consisted of several combat sports disciplines including boxing, MMA, Muay Thai, K1 and Kickboxing. A breakdown of promotion by discipline is provided below.

Boxing continues to represent the largest percentage of professional promotions, however in 2025-2026, there was a relative increase in mixed discipline promotions.

Of the 53 promotions held in 2025-2026, 87% were conducted in metropolitan Melbourne and 13% were conducted in regional locations such as Ballarat, Traralgon, Stawell, Ararat and Geelong.



Board meetings

Board meetings are scheduled monthly to consider a range of operational, governance, policy and risk management matters.

Table 2. Board members attendance at Board meetings, weigh-ins and promotions in 2025-26.

Name	Board meetings attended*	Weigh-ins supervised	Promotions supervised
Alan Clayton	11	9	9
Stephen Bunce	11	9	12
Daniel Cairnes	9	12	15
Uyen Ha	10	8	11
Christopher Shen	11	11	13
Nigel Snart	3	4	4
Sussan Thomas	2	N/A	N/A
Wayne Cheesman	5	N/A	N/A

*Monthly Board meetings

Board membership

During the reporting period, there was one resignation and three Board appointments.

- Wayne Cheesman was appointed in September 2025 to replace outgoing Victoria Police member Sussan Thomas as the Chief Commissioner's representative.
- Nigel Snart resigned in October 2025 leaving a vacancy.
- Stephen Bunce was appointed in April 2026 for a second term.
- Alan Clayton was appointed in May 2026 for a second term as Chair.

Table 3: Board membership as at 30 June 2026

Name	Position	Gender	Period of appointment	Term
Alan Clayton	Chair	Man	02/05/2026 – 01/05/2029	Second term
Stephen Bunce	Member	Man	21/04/2026-20/04/2029	Second term
Wayne Cheesman	Member (serving police officer)	Man	01/09/2025 – 31/08/2028	First term
Daniel Cairnes	Member	Man	01/08/2023-31/07/2026	Third term
Uyen Ha	Member	Woman	04/03/2024 – 04/03/2027	First term
Christopher Shen	Member	Man	22/06/2024 – 21/06/2027	First term

Board member biographies

Alan Clayton PSM (Chair)

Mr Clayton is the Principal of Clayton Contracting Services which offers a range of strategic management services to Government services. His prior roles include Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Greyhound Racing Victoria, where he implemented major reforms in Victoria's greyhound racing industry and inaugural CEO of Court Services Victoria. He has also held positions with the Victorian Government as an Executive Director (Department of Human Services) and Deputy Secretary (Police, Emergency Services and Corrections). He was appointed to the Board in May 2023 and has commenced his second term.

Stephen Bunce JD BBus GDLP FAICD FIPA

Stephen Bunce is a barrister at the Victorian Bar. Prior to this he worked for over a decade as CEO of a non-profit medical research institute and has also worked in various consulting and regulatory affairs roles. He holds a Bachelor of Business (Information Systems), a Juris Doctor and has recently completed a Master of Laws at the University of Melbourne. He is on various boards and committees including the Medicolegal Society of Victoria, the Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Board of Victoria and the Western District Health Service. Stephen is a member of the Victorian Bar and a fellow of the Institute of Public Accountants and the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Stephen has a lifelong passion for combat sports and has trained and competed in various combat sports at the amateur level. He was appointed to the Board in April 2023 and has commenced his second term.

Daniel Cairnes

Mr Cairnes currently works in the commercial construction industry and is a graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon. He holds both a trade qualification and has completed an MBA (Exec). Mr Cairnes served in the Australian Defence Force for over a decade where he fulfilled a variety of regimental, training and operational appointments as an Army Officer. His interest in combat sports is derived from military service where he instructed in defensive tactics that are based on BJJ techniques and incorporate military weapon systems and equipment. He was first appointed to the Board in August 2017 and has served three terms.

Uyen Ha

Ms Ha is a retired professional MMA athlete, former Australian National Team wrestler and fight coach. Ms Ha is a lawyer and brings a passion for progressing combat sports in Victoria. She was first appointed to the Board in March 2024.

Christopher Shen

Mr Shen is a psychologist, wrestling coach, and former combat sports referee. He has represented Australia in freestyle and greco-roman wrestling and officiated for the Ultimate Fighting Championship mixed martial arts sports league. Mr Shen holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Monash University and since 1996 he has partnered with organisations across the private, public, educational, and sport sectors to deliver psychology solutions, executive coaching, leadership development, resilience programs, and mental health treatment and support. He was first appointed to the Board in June 2024.

Wayne Cheesman

Mr Cheesman is the current Victoria Police representative on the Board. Wayne's 38-year career with Victoria Police has included roles with St Kilda Uniform, Prahran Criminal Investigations Unit, Drug Squad, Homicide Squad, Echo Taskforce and as Staff Officer to (retired) Victoria Police Executive Command members, Shane Patton and Ross Guenther. Mr Cheesman was recognised as the Victoria Police Detective of the Year in 2013. He holds a Master of Business Leadership and Graduate Certificate in Applied Management (Policing and Emergency Services). He was first appointed to the Board in September 2025.