

City's united voice that can't be ignored

EXCLUSIVE
Matt Johnston

A powerful new advocacy group will unite business, education and creative industry leaders to help shape a fairer tax system and a more liveable city.

The Committee for Melbourne and the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce, which together represent almost 280 member organisations from universities to start-ups, have merged.

The new group, which will retain the Committee for Melbourne name but now sits under the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry umbrella, is set to shake up government lobbying with a stronger voice that aims to be "impossible to ignore".

With Greater Melbourne set to house six million people early next decade and overtake Sydney as the country's largest capital city, the new organisation will seek to re-shape policy on housing, infrastructure, business attraction, and broader economic growth.

Committee for Melbourne chair Scott Tanner said the two merged bodies shared similar values and aims, and that "stronger together is better".

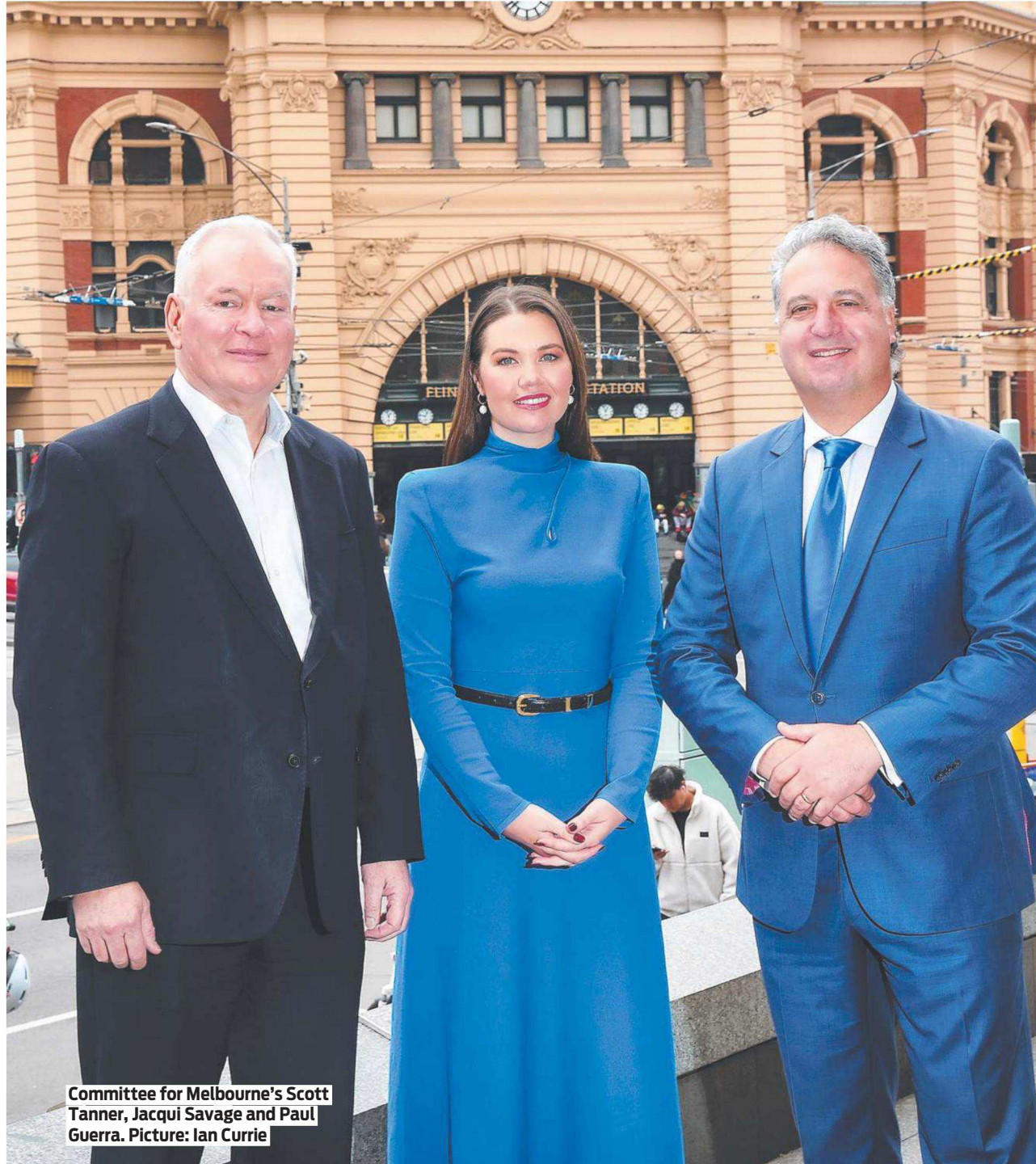
He said the city was at a "critical" juncture with clear challenges such as state debt levels, the cost of doing business and a global war for talent; but it was important to boost liveability on a broader level in order to attract industry and leadership to the city.

"Our roads are falling apart at the moment," he said.

"There's stuff that's got to be done and that can only be done if we've got economic activity and economic growth, and we're thinking holistically about that solution."

Mr Tanner said the intention was for staff across the organisations to keep their jobs and that all stakeholders would continue to get a voice.

"We will ensure that the interests of all members continue to be represented, reinforcing our commitment to making Greater Melbourne a vibrant and thriving business and community hub."



Committee for Melbourne's Scott Tanner, Jacqui Savage and Paul Guerra. Picture: Ian Currie

VCCI chief executive Paul Guerra said the state and city was facing an energy crisis and a small business crisis, and there were "challenges around the world now for where companies want to establish".

"We want Melbourne, we want Victoria, to be that place," he said.

Mr Guerra said the fact that Victoria "is the highest taxed state in the country" wasn't helping and that, by creating a

shared voice and united front, it would be "almost impossible to ignore the voice of the business community".

"We think by the two organisations coming together with that shared voice and that shared vision, it will have even greater impact on being able to influence governments ... to make Victoria the place to do business in Australia," he said.

Committee for Melbourne board member Jacqui Savage,

also founder of healthcare tech company Medcorp, said nurturing talent and attracting more to Melbourne was critical to expand emerging sectors, and enhancing liveability was a key part of this.

"It's what we're really going to be up against in the future, and it is now more than ever that we need to really advocate for that," she said.

"Success and innovation in business is honestly really

driven by, and about that, collaboration and diversity."

VCCI president Adrian Kloeden said challenges facing the state meant now was the time "for our business, education, creative arts and not-for-profit leaders to work closely together".

"As our city continues to grow, we need a singular, more unified voice and coming together represents our willingness to make this happen."

Charges laid over kids' fire deaths

Joanne Vella
Steve Zemek

A woman who survived the Lalor Park fire in Sydney attended a vigil for three children killed in the blaze after a 28-year-old man charged over their deaths faced court for the first time yesterday.

The man, who woke from an induced coma at Westmead Hospital, where he was being treated for burns and smoke inhalation, was charged with three counts of murder (DV), five counts of attempted murder (DV) and destroy/damage property with intent to endanger life (DV).

He allegedly murdered the boys, aged 6 and 3, and a five-month-old girl on Sunday, with police alleging he used an accelerant to light several fires inside the home and tried to stop them from fleeing.

The 29-year-old woman and four other children — aged between four and 11 — were able to escape the inferno.

Detective Superintendent Daniel Doherty described the alleged incident as "one of the worst cases of filicide" in NSW in recent memory.

"We will allege that the doors had been locked and as a result, prevented those inside, the occupants, from escaping the fire," he said.

The man remains under police guard at Westmead Hospital. The four surviving children are stable in hospital.

Police have also taken out an AVO on behalf of the woman and children.

The man's matter was briefly mentioned in Parramatta Local Court on Thursday and his solicitor, Ben Wilcox, made no application for bail. The matter was adjourned until September.

After visiting the scene of the fire on Wednesday, the woman, accompanied by family members, was seen walking into the gathering at Chifley Park just before 5pm, joining more than 200 local families, politicians and first responders for a "community support gathering". The Australian flag sat at half mast and some embraced as officials, including Blacktown mayor Brad Bunting and NSW deputy premier Prue Car, addressed the crowd.

Cops arrest man for brazen CBD hit run

Police have arrested a man who allegedly mowed down a victim with his own car and left him for dead while stealing his vehicle in a CBD laneway.

30-year-old Jinwoo Song was unloading his car with his girlfriend Bibi Kim on Hardware Lane when the man allegedly

struck him with it before driving off on July 4.

Police arrested a 27-year-old man on Thursday on Elizabeth St in the CBD, but have not been able to track down Mr Song's stolen red Ford.

Mr Song remains in hospital with a broken sternum and bruising.



The man is arrested yesterday.

Stir over fake Picassos

Only time will tell what will become of the three fake Pablo Picasso paintings at Mona — or if any action will be taken by those with sole authority over the Spanish master's works.

Hobart and the art communities are divided over the action taken by Mona's first lady Kirsha Kaechele: was it just a prank, or something more — a forgery?

This week, following queries from the Picasso Administration in Paris and Guardian Australia,

Kaechele admitted she painted three fake Picasso paintings to hang in the museum's female-only Ladies Lounge.

Art critic Andrew Harper said it was unclear if the museum would face consequences, or whether the fakes would damage its brand.

"Kirsha seems to like pranks," he said. "Kirsha is framing it as a prank, and it appears not everyone at Mona knew this."

"I think you can say it was set up as a prank," he concluded.