Report Template: A Tale of Two Cities

An Analysis of the Impact of Designated Area Powers in Victoria, 2019-2024

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

A comprehensive analysis of every Designated Area (DA) declared via the government gazette in Victoria from 2019 to 2024 reveals a clear, two-tiered system of public space policing. The data demonstrates that the decision to deploy these extraordinary police powers is not a simple function of crime rates but is instead driven by a powerful intersection of a community's racialisation and its socio-economic status.

The key finding is that a discretionary policing tactic, a tactic this research terms "Hub-based Policing", is disproportionately and intensely focused on a specific cohort of racialised and socio-economically disadvantaged communities. A cohort of racialised LGAs (top quartile) are subjected to a level of policing that is, on average, **1.83 times more intense** than their white-majority counterparts (bottom quartile), even after accounting for the presence of major public infrastructure. This disparity intensifies at the extremes: the most highly racialised LGAs (top decile) experience **3.56 times** the policing intensity of the whitest LGAs (bottom decile).

Furthermore, a comparative analysis looking at crime reveals that the "police go where the crime is" narrative is an insufficient explanation. LGAs with comparable or even higher rates of legally relevant crime do not receive the same policing response, suggesting that the demographic context of a community is a primary driver of the policing it receives. For example Latrobe City has a higher crime rate than Greater Dandenong but receives a policing intensity 6.2 times lower. Similarly, The City of Yarra has a higher crime rate compared to Greater Dandenong's but receives zero discretionary "Hub-based Policing". The functional outcome of this system, regardless of intent, is the creation of a racially and geographically unequal system of public space policing in Victoria.

This deployment disparity occurs within a broader context where Victoria Police's own data shows: (1) reasonable grounds search already exhibit racial disproportional impacts[1], and (2) DA searches have a 1% success rate for finding illicit items[2]. Together, this evidence suggests racialised communities experience both disproportionate exposure to these powers and disproportionate burden of their harms.

What is a designated area

Designated areas allow the Chief Commissioner of police or his delegate, to declare any public area in Victoria a space where police can search a person without a warrant and without a reasonable suspicion. These powers allow police to circumvent protections like warrants or reasonable suspicion based on 5 circumstances. These circumstances can initiate two conditions in which specific powers can be used: Planned Designated Areas and Unplanned Designated Areas

---

[1] https://racialprofilingresearch.org

[2] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6126d454650f333db2d27357/t/67a3da5e3b7dd16e21220786/1738791532013/Unreasonable+Grounds+Reforming+Victoria+Police%27s+Stop+and+Search+Powers.pdf

Planned designated areas[3]:

The Chief Commissioner of Police (or delegate) may declare an area to be a designated area if the Chief Commissioner (or delegate) is satisfied of one of four circumstances.

Circumstance one (a)	• More than one incident of violence or disorder has occurred in that area in the previous 12 months that involved the use of weapons, and • There is a likelihood that the violence or disorder will recur (period of declaration must not exceed 24 hours).
Circumstance two (b)	• More than one incident of violence or disorder has occurred in that area in the previous 12 months that involved the use of weapons, and • It is necessary to designate the area for the purpose of enabling police officers or protective services officers to exercise search powers to prevent or deter the occurrence of any violence or disorder that the Chief Commissioner (or delegate) is satisfied is likely to occur (period of declaration must not exceed 6 months).
Circumstance three (c)	• An event is to be held in that area and incidents of violence or disorder involving the use of weapons have occurred at previous occasions of that event (wherever occurring), and • There is a likelihood that the violence or disorder will recur (period of declaration must be linked to the operation of the event).
Circumstance four (d)	• An event is to be held in that area, and • By information known to the Chief Commissioner (or delegate), there is a likelihood that violence or disorder involving the use of weapons will occur in that area during the period of intended operation of the declaration (period of declaration must be linked to the operation of the event).

Notice of this declaration must be advertised:
  • on the Victoria Police website, and
  • in the Government Gazette.

Unplanned designated areas

The Chief Commissioner of Police (or delegate) may declare an area to be a designated area if the Chief Commissioner (or delegate) is satisfied that:

---

[3] This section describes the legislative framework under the *Control of Weapons Act 1990* as amended in 2025 (effective late 2025). It is important to note that during the study period (2019–2024), the legislation was more restrictive: declarations were limited to a maximum of 12 hours (rather than 6 months), and the specific subsections (a, b, c, d) were structured differently. However, the operational distinction between 'Event-based' and 'Hub-based' declarations remains conceptually consistent across both legislative periods, allowing for the retrospective classification used in this analysis. https://www.police.vic.gov.au/weapons-search-areas

- there is a likelihood that violence or disorder involving weapons will occur in that area during the period of intended operation of the declaration; and
- it is necessary to designate the area for the purpose of enabling police officers or protective services officers to exercise search powers to prevent or deter the occurrence of any violence or disorder that the Chief Commissioner (or delegate) is satisfied is likely to occur (the period of declaration for an unplanned designation must not exceed 24 hours).

Notice of this declaration must be advertised on the Victoria Police website.

Methodology

This study looked at all designated areas declared between 2019 - 2024 to analyse the impact of Designated Area powers. The key driving question was whether designated areas impacted racialised communities more than other communities.

To do this a master dataset was constructed by integrating several data sources:
- **Primary DA Data:** A comprehensive database of all Designated Area declarations from 2019-2024, compiled from the Victoria Government Gazette. These were collected via the government gazette website doing a search of the database. Given that only Planned Designated Areas are published in the Government Gazette, this study could only look at Planned Designated Areas.
- **Geographic Data:** A file detailing the geographic location for each declaration, derived from official maps. These were created by copying the official map of the designated area onto a Geojson file. To enable comparisons with other data, the DA location is described by its Local Government Area. (LGA)
- **Demographic Data (ABS):** 2021 Census data for every relevant Victorian Local Government Area (LGA), including population, socio-economic status (SEIFA IRSAD Score), and ancestry data (% Racialised).
- **Crime Data (CSA Victoria):** Official LGA-level crime statistics for 2019-2024 year ending December, focusing on a custom "DA-Relevant Crime Rate."

The DA data were all taken from the Government Gazette. The Government Gazette publish the DAs and have information on:
- Date and time
- Location, with specific streets, intersections and at times landmarks
- A picture of a map showing the designated area
- The specific legislation types the declaration is being justified by: s10D(1)
- Police powers that can be used in designated areas

Classification of Policing Strategy (Legal Justification)

To move beyond a simple count of declarations, each DA was classified according to its most likely legal justification under the Control of Weapons Act 1990. The government gazette does not publish which condition of s.10D(1) each declaration is made under. This makes it difficult to understand the legal justification for each DA. The study had to infer under which broad reason a DA may have been declared. This systematic inference, based on the public

gazette notice, allowed for the separation of policing strategies. The three classifications are:

- **_Event Based (s.10D(1)(c) or (d)):_** Applied to declarations where the Operation Name field explicitly names a well-known public event, festival, holiday celebration, or political protest. A web search[4] was also undertaken for each declaration, and any mention of a major event meant the inclusion of that designated area into this justification.
- **_Hub-Based (s.10D(1)(a) or (b)):_** Applied to all other planned (s.10D) declarations that target a specific geographic location (suburb, shopping centre, train station) without a major event name. This category represents the discretionary, place-based policing that is the primary focus of this analysis.
- **_Imminent Threat (s.10E):_** Applied to any declaration listed as Unplanned (s.10E). Zero unplanned designated areas were published in the government gazette during this time. This can be explained as unplanned designated areas are exempt from being published in the government gazette

Victoria Government Gazette

No. S 173 Wednesday 6 April 2022
By Authority of Victorian Government Printer

VICTORIA POLICE

Control of Weapons Act 1990
DECLARATION OF DESIGNATED AREA UNDER SECTION 10D(1)
Planned Operation in Bayswater

The Assistant Commissioner, Transit and Public Safety Command, acting as a delegate of the Chief Commissioner of Police under section 10D(1) of the **Control of Weapons Act 1990**, declares as a designated area all public places bound by North: Dandenong Creek Trail, East: Bayswater/ Scoresby Roads, South: High Street, West: Mountain Highway/Church Street. Inclusive of Bayswater Railway Station, Mountain Highway Shopping Centre, Bayswater Park.

SPECIAL

Example:

In instances where a Gazette notice did not explicitly name an event (e.g., 'Planned Operation in St Kilda'), but the dates and location coincided with a major public gathering (e.g., St Kilda Festival or New Year's Eve), the declaration was classified as Event-Based.
This classification protocol was adopted to ensure that the Hub-Based category strictly isolates the discretionary policing of everyday community spaces, preventing the data from being skewed by large-scale public order operations

Rationale for Focusing on "Hub-Based" Policing
For the purpose of measuring disproportionate impact, this study isolates Hub-Based declarations as the primary unit of analysis. This exclusion of Event-Based DAs is central to the study's integrity for two reasons:
- **Discretion vs. Contingency:** Event-Based DAs are "contingency-based"; they are triggered by an external occasion (e.g., a festival) and target a transient, mixed crowd. In contrast, Hub-Based DAs are "discretionary"; they are triggered solely by police intelligence regarding a specific community's history or risk profile.
- **The "Hub" Dynamic:** Hub-Based DAs invariably target essential community infrastructure—specifically transport hubs and local shopping precincts (e.g., Dandenong Station or Sunshine Plaza). Because these spaces are mandatory for daily life, applying extraordinary powers here subjects the local *resident* population to

---

[4] Google web search, news items, Victoria police public statements

surveillance, rather than a visiting *event* crowd.

Imagine two scenarios. In Scenario A, police deploy search powers across a 2km² festival precinct for 12 hours, affecting 50,000 attendees. In Scenario B, they deploy the same powers at a single train station—200m²—for 20 hours over a 12-month period, affecting the same 5,000 residents daily. The second scenario is what we term 'Hub Policing.

Crucially, the impact exists regardless of how many searches occur. A resident of Dandenong who passes through the station daily must do so knowing they can be searched without cause—a psychological and legal burden not borne by a Toorak resident. Even if search rates were identical per person passing through, the decision about which communities must live under suspended rights is itself the disparity.

By focusing exclusively on these discretionary declarations, this analysis isolates the policing logic applied to the community itself, providing a clearer insight into *who* the police regard as a risk.

Unit of Analysis: Local Government Area (LGA)

The Local Government Area (LGA) was chosen as the primary geographic unit of analysis for this study. While a more granular unit such as suburb would provide greater detail, the LGA is the standard administrative boundary for which comprehensive and reliable demographic and crime data is published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Crime Statistics Agency (CSA) Victoria. Given the transient nature of the 'hubs' the designated areas target, like train stations, major shopping centres and 'high' streets, and night life precincts, The LGA was a more appropriate approximation of the population who frequent, and thus are ultimately impacted by designated areas. Using the LGA as the unit of analysis allows for the direct, "like-for-like" integration of policing data with these official datasets, which is essential for conducting a robust analysis. It is acknowledged that LGAs are not monolithic; however, the recurring pattern of declarations within the same core suburbs of certain LGAs strengthens the validity of using the LGA as a representative unit for measuring cumulative policing impact at a systemic level.

To ensure a robust "apples-to-apples" comparison and control for infrastructure, the analysis was limited to a specific sample of LGAs. A "Major Hub" LGA was defined as any municipality containing at least one of the following: a major train station, a significant commercial shopping centre, a traditional 'High Street' CBD, or a major designated nightlife precinct. The 33 'Major Hub' LGAs were defined as municipalities containing public infrastructure comparable to typical DA deployment sites. This inclusive approach ensures the study compares communities that *could* plausibly receive DA policing. This process yielded a definitive list of 33 metropolitan and major regional LGAs that are structurally comparable.

Ballarat	City of Casey
Bayside	City of Frankston
Boroondara	City of Greater Dandenong
Brimbank	City of Kingston
Cardinia Shire	City of Manningham

City of Maribyrnong	Knox City
City of Melbourne	Latrobe City
City of Port Phillip	Maroondah
City of Whittlesea	Melton City
City of Wyndham	Monash
City of Yarra	Moonee Valley
Darebin	Merri-bek
Glen Eira	Mornington Peninsula
Greater Bendigo	Stonnington
Greater Geelong	Whitehorse
Greater Shepparton	Yarra Ranges
Hume	

Measuring Racial Composition: The "Racialised" Metric

To create a proxy for the racial composition of each LGA, this study uses a 'racialised' metric, labelled as % Racialised. This was derived from the 2021 ABS Census table on Ancestry.
It is critical to note that the Census allows for multiple ancestry responses per person, meaning the sum of all responses exceeds the total population. Therefore, a simple "percentage of population" cannot be accurately calculated from this data. Instead, this metric was calculated by:
- Defining a list of ancestries as "European" (including "Australian" and other white majority countries) and all others as "non-European" (termed "Racialised" for this study).[5]
- Summing the total number of responses for each of these two groups.
- Calculating the percentage of "Racialised" responses out of the total number of all ancestry responses for that LGA.

Conceptual Framework:
It is imperative to acknowledge that "race" and "crime" are not biological or objective facts, but social constructs subject to interpretation, enforcement, and misuse. Despite this, racism is a structural reality of many people's lives. Consequently, the % Racialised metric should not be viewed as a precise classification of an individual identity.
Instead, this metric serves as an empirical tool to operationalise the state's gaze. It attempts to "reverse engineer" the logic of racialisation by police by quantifying the level of cultural and visible difference present in a community. By measuring the density of non-European ancestries, this study approximates the demographic conditions that appear to trigger the discretionary application of police power. For the purposes of comparative analysis, this proxy effectively distinguishes highly multicultural communities from white-majority communities, allowing for a test of disproportionate impact.

---

[5] See racialised test: https://www.racialprofilingresearch.org/census-benchmarking-2024

Measuring Policing Impact: The Intensity Score and Disproportionality Test

Intensity score

To compare and measure policing impact per LGA, a "Policing Intensity Score" was calculated for each LGA (Hub-Based policing Hours / Population * 100,000). To quantify the impact based on race, two complementary disproportionality tests were conducted.

To conduct the disproportionality analysis, LGAs were segmented into two groups based on their racial composition:

- A *Racialised* cohort was defined as all LGAs where the proportion of non-European ancestry responses was equal to or greater than 37%. This threshold was chosen as it represents the 25% most racialised LGAs of the 33 total LGAs.
- A *White-Majority* cohort was defined as all LGAs where the proportion of non-European ancestry responses was equal to or less than 15%. This threshold creates a clear baseline of the bottom 25% of LGAs, where European ancestries are dominant.

By using these thresholds, the comparison provides a meaningful test of the impact of policing on communities with significantly different demographic profiles.

Test A: Quartile Comparison Test (The 1.83x Ratio)

Purpose: This test was designed to measure the full, systemic difference in DA policing, including the communities that are completely exempt from this type of policing.

Method: The average Policing Intensity Score was compared between two cohorts:
- **The *Racialised* Cohort:** All "Major Hub" LGAs where the % Racialised is equal or greater than 37%.
- **The *White-Majority* Cohort:** All "Major Hub" LGAs where the % Racialised is equal or less than 15%.

Calculation: The average score of the "Highly Racialised" cohort (33.99) was divided by the average score of the "White-Majority" cohort (18.61). This test yielded a disproportionality ratio of 1.83.

Test B: Decile Comparison test (The 3.56 Ratio)

Purpose: This second test was designed to provide a more concentrated and direct comparison by analysing only those communities that were at either extreme of the racialisation. The top and bottom 10% were compared to see if the disparity would be more intense the more racialised and whiter the LGAs were.

Method: The average Policing Intensity Score was compared between two cohorts:
- **The *Highly Racialised* Cohort:** LGAs where the % racialised was greater than 45%.
- **The *Highly White-Majority* Cohort:** All "Major Hub" LGAs where the % Racialised is less than 9%.

Calculation: The average score of the *Highly Racialised* cohort (32.74) was divided by the average score of the *Policed White-Majority* cohort (9.19). This test yielded a disproportionality ratio of 3.56.

Conclusion

Both tests show a profound disparity. The first test sets out that racialised LGAs are policed almost two times more intensely than white-majority LGAs.
Focusing in on the *highly* racialised and white LGAs the test showed that the disproportionality ratio increases. This suggests that the more racialised a community, the more intense policing they will be subject to.

An important observation this test shows is that the reverse of this is true as well. The more affluent and whiter a community is, the more these social forces provide safety. This test essentially makes visible the protective factor that whiteness and affluence bring communities in Victoria.

"Looking" for Crime: The "DA-Relevant Crime Rate"

To test the "police go where the crime is" thesis, a custom crime metric was created. Using detailed data from the Crime Statistics Agency (CSA) Victoria, the "DA-Relevant Crime Rate" was calculated by summing the rates per 100,000 population for the five specific offence subgroups that are most legally relevant to the justification of a Designated Area:
- Non-FV Serious Assault,
- Non-FV Common Assault,
- Non-Aggravated Robbery,
- Prohibited and Controlled Weapons Offences,
- Riot and Affray.

This allows for a precise, "like-for-like" comparison of the specific crime risks between LGAs. The data was compiled from 2019-2024 year ending December. The totals per 100,000 were taken and then divided by the number of years this data was taken from, to land on the relevant crime rate number for comparison. Note that this method allows for averaging over the 6-year period. This flattens out any spikes or dips of crime in any particular year. For this study, these fluctuations are not critical, and allows for a simple comparison.

It is worth noting that like race, crime is a social construct. The data used in this study is of offences recorded, but does not tell us if these resulted in conviction or if charges were dismissed in court. It should also be noted that while these data presume to be neutral, only offences that police record are captured here. Many 'crimes' are not recorded, and recorded crime rates are influenced by where police use more resources. Crime rate provides more information on where police use their resources than where 'crime' is happening. Given these caveats, this study uses this custom crime rate as a tool to follow police's own logic, rather than to accept the data uncritically. This approach reveals whether even by police's own standards—using their own crime data—the deployment patterns can be justified.

While the legislation requires the consideration of incidents within the 'previous 12 months', this study aggregates crime and policing data over the full 6-year period. This aggregated

approach accounts for the fact that DAs can be declared at any point based on incidents in the prior 12 months, creating overlapping temporal windows throughout the study period.

Considerations & Assumptions

This study was designed with the following considerations and limitations in mind:

- **Focus on Impact, Not Intent:** This analysis measures the demonstrable, statistical *outcome* of policing decisions. It makes no claims about the motivations or intent of any individual officer or commander.
- **LGA as Unit of Analysis:** The LGA is used as the primary geographic unit to allow for the integration of official demographic and crime data. It is acknowledged that LGAs are not monolithic, and this represents an aggregation of a more granular reality.
- **"Racialised" as a Proxy:** The **% Racialised** metric (derived from ancestry data) is used as the best available public proxy for the racial composition of a community. It is an indicator of multiculturalism, not a precise count of individuals' racial identities.
- **Inferring Legal Justification:** The classification of DAs into legal categories is a process of systematic inference based on the available evidence in the gazette notice (e.g., Operation Name, Declaration Type). This is a necessary step due to the lack of specific legal clauses in the public notices. The classification protocol is detailed in this report to ensure transparency.

Findings

Before examining the core findings, it is important to note a broad trend. The number of DA hours have gone up over the years, with each year bringing in more DAs than the last. This suggests a growing reliance on these police powers to circumvent reasonable suspicion searches. This trend provides context for the disproportionate impact documented below.

Total hours of designated areas declared

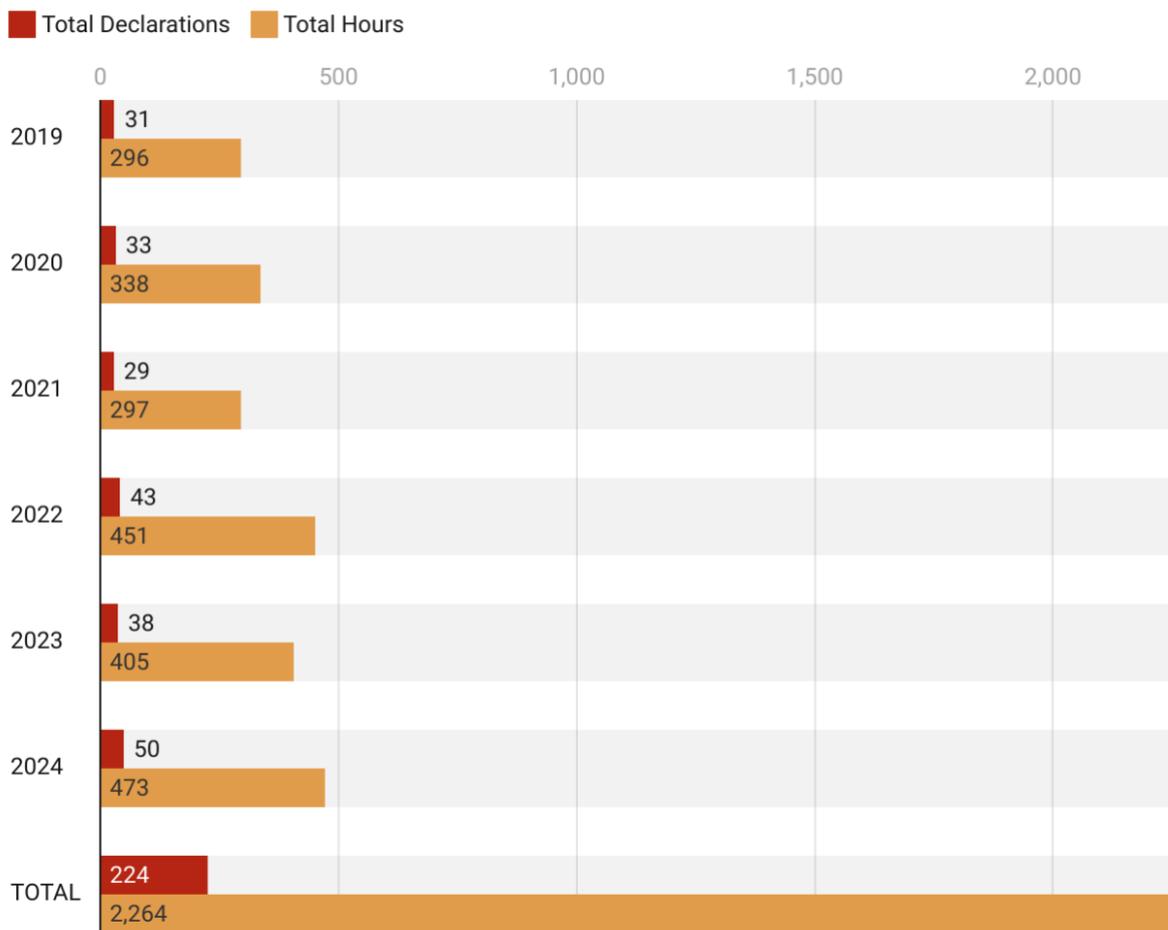Planned designated areas from 2019 - 2024

■ Total Declarations   ■ Total Hours

Year		
2019	31	296
2020	33	338
2021	29	297
2022	43	451
2023	38	405
2024	50	473
TOTAL	224	2,264

Chart: ilo Diaz • Source: CARP • Created with Datawrapper

The analysis produced four core, intersecting findings.

Finding 1: A Two-Tiered System of Policing Strategy is Evident.

The data reveals two distinct tactics. "Event Policing" is a diffuse, contingency-based strategy used for large crowds. In stark contrast, "Hub Policing" is a high-intensity, concentration-based strategy that is geographically focused on small community spaces. This analysis focuses on the application of this discretionary "Hub Policing" tactic. Hub Policing is characterised by the application of warrantless search powers in confined, essential public infrastructure (transit hubs, shopping strips). This creates a policing bottleneck, creating a concentration effect that differs distinctively from the diffuse policing of large-scale events.
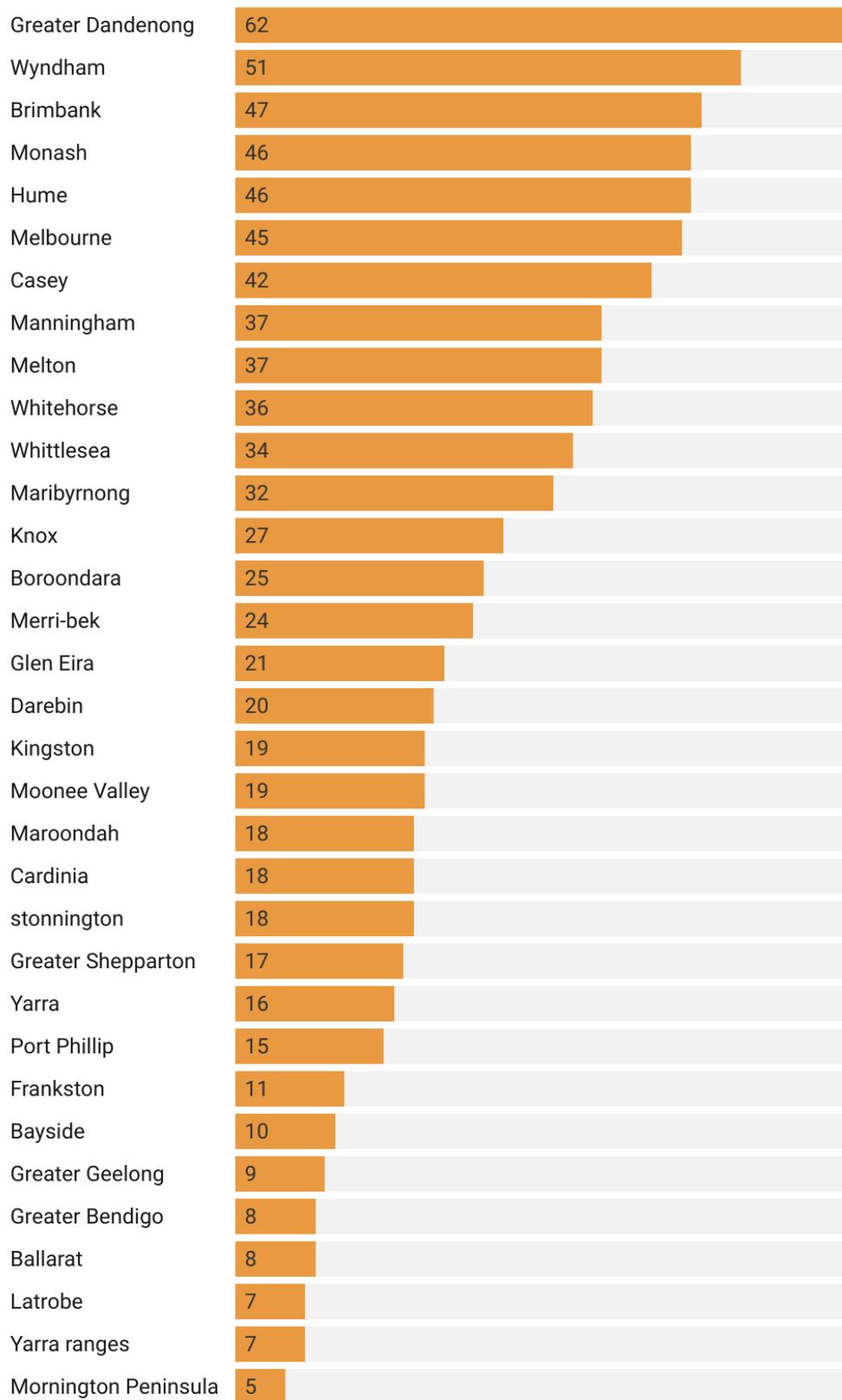
Feature	Event policing	Hub policing
Trigger	Contingency based: Triggered by an external occasion/crowd	Discretionary: Triggered by internal police choice/demographics
Density	Diffuse: Usually a large area, diluted presence	Concentrated: Small area, inescapable presence

Target	The crowd: Transient, mixed demographic	The community: Local residents, specific racial/class profile
Nature	Public order management	<mark>Targeted Surveillance</mark>

For example, Mornington Peninsula had the overwhelming amount of DA hours in the early years of this study, but were all classified as event based, as they were targeted towards schoolies events in Rye. Similarly, Melbourne CBD had 598 total DA hours, but the majority were under event-based DAs. 117 hours were deemed to be Hub-based DAs.

Racialised by LGA

Ranking of most racialised LGAs to least

LGA	Value
Greater Dandenong	62
Wyndham	51
Brimbank	47
Monash	46
Hume	46
Melbourne	45
Casey	42
Manningham	37
Melton	37
Whitehorse	36
Whittlesea	34
Maribyrnong	32
Knox	27
Boroondara	25
Merri-bek	24
Glen Eira	21
Darebin	20
Kingston	19
Moonee Valley	19
Maroondah	18
Cardinia	18
stonnington	18
Greater Shepparton	17
Yarra	16
Port Phillip	15
Frankston	11
Bayside	10
Greater Geelong	9
Greater Bendigo	8
Ballarat	8
Latrobe	7
Yarra ranges	7
Mornington Peninsula	5

Intensity score by LGA

Ranking of highest intensity score by LGA

LGA	Score
Greater Geelong	88.21
Greater Dandenong	64.67
Melbourne	62.26
Brimbank	57.55
Casey	49.83
Maroondah	30.13
Maribyrnong	28.17
Cardinia	27.07
Manningham	25.66
Frankston	21.53
Knox	20.09
Wyndham	19.18
Kingston	15.16
Greater Bendigo	14.82
Monash	12.59
Port Phillip	11.77
stonnington	11.45
Ballarat	10.55
Latrobe	10.35
Yarra ranges	10.25
Hume	9.73
Darebin	6.73
Whitehorse	4.72
Merri-bek	4.67
Melton	4.47
Whittlesea	2.62
Boroondara	0.00
Glen Eira	0.00
Moonee Valley	0.00
Greater Shepparton	0.00
Yarra	0.00
Bayside	0.00
Mornington Peninsula	0.00

Finding 2: Discretionary "Hub Policing" is Disproportionately Targeted at a Specific Cohort of Multicultural and Disadvantaged Communities.

The Policing Intensity Ranking shows a clear hierarchy. The top of the ranking is dominated by a cohort of LGAs—Greater Dandenong, Brimbank, and Casey—which are simultaneously among the most multicultural and most socio-economically disadvantaged in the state. In a cohort comparison, racialised communities experience police intensity 1.83 times more than white majority communities. If we focus in more, we find that "Highly Racialised" LGAs are subjected to a policing intensity 3.56 times higher than their "White-Majority" counterparts.

However, Greater Geelong (52.9 hours, 88.21 intensity score) complicates any single-factor explanation. As one of the whitest LGAs in the sample (11.8% racialised), yet one of the most disadvantaged (SEIFA score: 968), it demonstrates that socio-economic status can trigger intensive DA deployment in the absence of racial diversity. The evidence suggests class can drive policing in white communities, but in racialised communities, the effect is amplified.

*Finding 3: The "Police Go Where the Crime Is" Narrative is Directly Contradicted by Official Data.*

The study employed a comparative case study analysis which was termed "Crime Twins". This analysis proves that the crime rate is not the primary predictor of policing intensity.

- **Latrobe City** has a higher "DA-Relevant Crime Rate" than **Greater Dandenong** but receives a policing intensity **6.2 times lower**.
- **The City of Yarra** has a higher crime rate compared to **Greater Dandenong'**s but receives **zero** discretionary "Hub Policing."
- **Brimbank** experiences similar crime rates to **Darebin,** but receives **8.6 times** the policing intensity
- **Casey** has similar crime rates to **Moonee Valley,** yet Moonee Valley receives zero "Hub Policing".
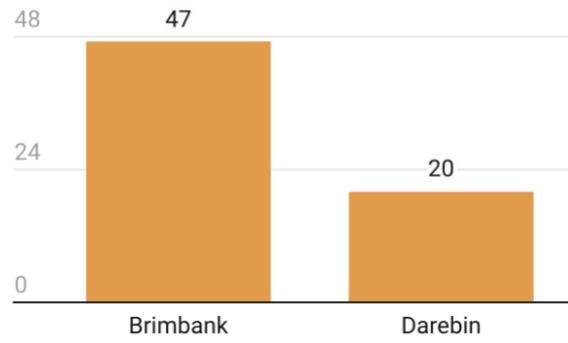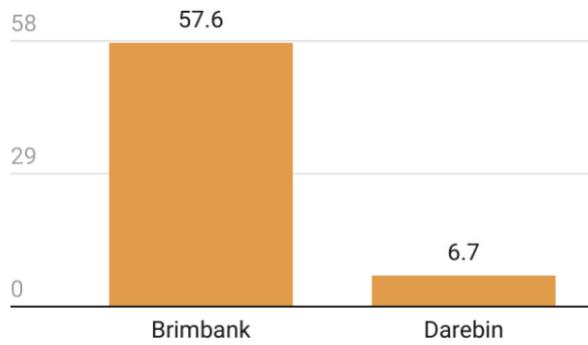
Crime Twins

Brimbank vs Darebin
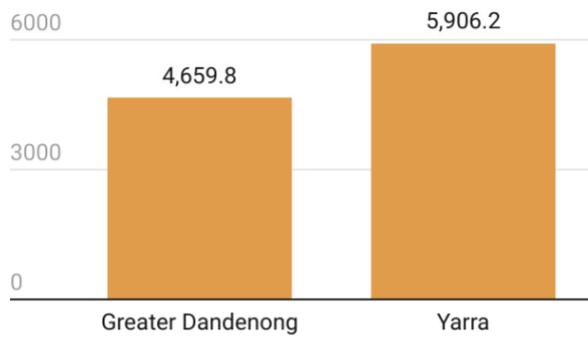
Crime Rate
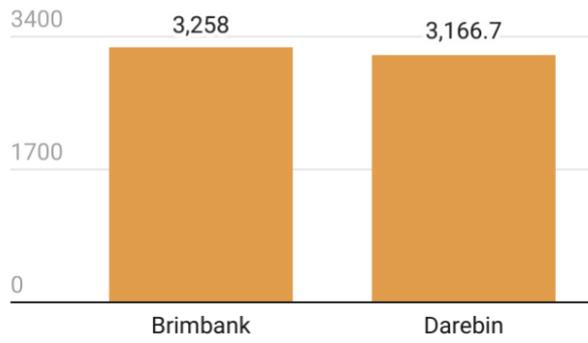
Racialised %

Intensity

Aggregated data from 2019 - 2024

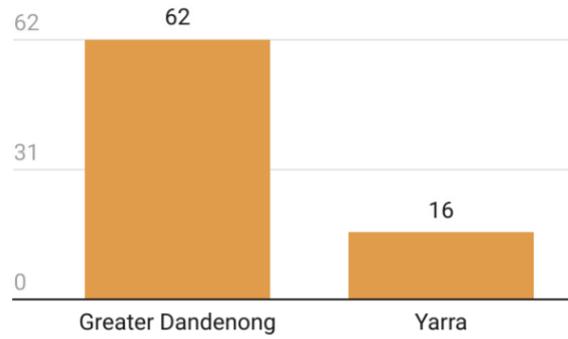Chart: ilo Diaz • Source: CARP • Created with Datawrapper

Crime Twins

Greater Dandenong vs Yarra
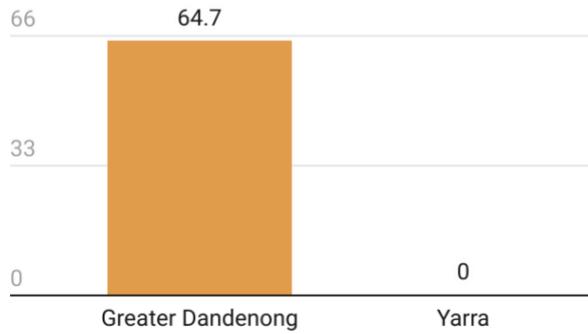
Crime Rate

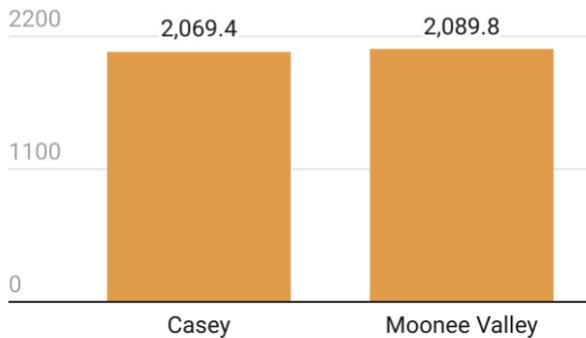**Racialised %**

Intensity

Aggregated data from 2019 - 2024

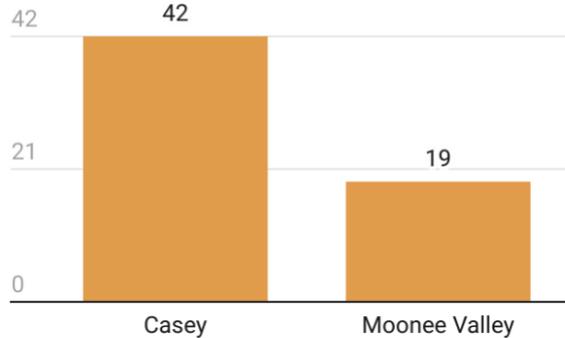Chart: ilo Diaz • Source: CARP • Created with Datawrapper
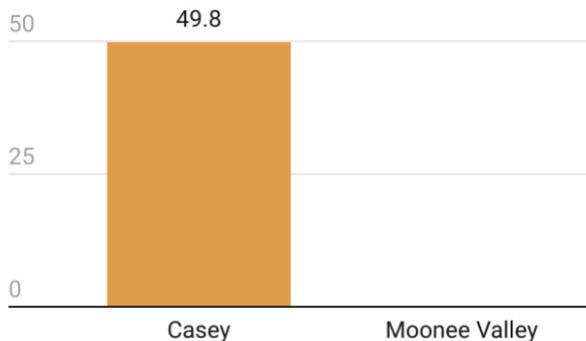
Crime Twins

Casey vs Moonee Valley

Crime Rate

Racialised %

Intensity

Aggregated data from 2019 - 2024

Chart: ilo Diaz • Source: CARP • Created with Datawrapper

Finding 4: The Broader Context Suggests Compounding Disparities and Systematic Ineffectiveness

While this study cannot measure individual search rates within DAs due to data unavailability, two additional evidence sources provide critical context:

- **Proven Disparities in searches**: Data from the Racial Profiling Data Monitoring Project demonstrates that even reasonable grounds searches—which require reasonable suspicion—show disproportionate search rates in Victoria, with certain communities experiencing up to 15 times more searches than white people. DA searches, which require *no* reasonable grounds, operate with even greater discretion, making disparities of these searches a reasonable expectation.
- **Admitted Ineffectiveness**: Victoria Police data shows DA searches yield contraband items in only 1% of cases, meaning 99% of searches subject individuals to rights violations without public safety justification. When 99% of searches in Dandenong Station find nothing, yet the station remains under DA powers for 80+ hours while Toorak Station receives zero hours, the disparity cannot be justified by crime prevention outcomes.
- **The Compounding Effect**: Racialised communities therefore face:
  - 3x greater exposure to DA activation and powers
  - Heightened likelihood of being searched within DAs

- 99% probability any search violates their rights without cause

Conclusion:

The decision to deploy the most intrusive and discretionary police powers is not a neutral response to crime, and the powers themselves are demonstrably ineffective. With a 1% hit rate, DA searches subject 99% of searched individuals to rights violations without cause. When this ineffective tool is deployed 3x more intensely in racialised communities, and when those communities already experience disproportionate reasonable suspicion searches, the cumulative impact is a system of racialised social control as public safety. The evidence demonstrates a systemic impact, intentional or not, where the outcome is the selective and sustained policing of communities at the intersection of racial diversity and economic disadvantage. The data reveals the "protective factors" of whiteness and affluence, which effectively shield communities from a form of state harm that is a routine feature of life in others.

Limitation

Limitations on Search Data:

This study analyses the deployment of legal powers (declarations), not the operational execution (searches conducted). Data on specific search numbers is not publicly available. Therefore, 'Intensity' refers to the intensity of the state's presence and legal overreach, rather than a count of physical interactions.

A note on the government Gazette data:

The data on the government gazette is not consistent. It often has different time and date format. Sometimes it specifies which delegate of the chief commissioner has declared the DA, other times it omits it completely. In some instances DAs have been said to be declared under 's10(D) or s10(E)', making it unclear if it was a planned or unplanned DA. Moving forward, we recommend that Victoria Police provide a clear, consistent formatting for DAs, with clear indications of both the power s10(D) or s10(E) and under which condition is being invoked (a), (b), (c) or (d).

Limitation on s10D

This study covers various years and therefore various variations of the legislation of the control of weapons act. S10(D) has mutated and changed over that time, with different conditions on which the Chief Commissioner could declare a DA. Having said that, there have been two broadly consistent conditions to declare a DA, event or history of violence with a weapon.

The exclusion of Unplanned DAs.

Unplanned DAs are much harder to track. Victoria Police are not required to publish unplanned DAs in the government gazette. They are only required to publish them in a 'website maintained by Victoria Police'. Over the course of the 6-year study, it has not been

made clear where to find the website with unplanned declarations. A FOI request could discover the numbers and geographic places of unplanned DA, but this was out of the scope of this research.

Implications

Racialised communities experience three compounding disparities:
- **Deployment disparity**: DA powers are activated in racialised LGAs 3x more intensely.
- **Enforcement disparity**: Even with reasonable grounds searches—which require *more* justification than DA searches—Victoria Police disproportionately target people of colour.
- **Ineffectiveness**: Victoria Police's own data shows 99% of DA searches find nothing, meaning this racially disparate system subjects thousands to rights violations for virtually no public safety benefit.

The protective factor of whiteness:
Perhaps the most revealing finding is not just who is targeted, but who is spared. The data indicates that whiteness functions as a "protective factor" against discretionary policing. Affluent, white-majority LGAs with comparable or even higher crime rates (such as Latrobe or City of Yarra) are systematically exempted from the discretionary policing applied to their racialised counterparts. For example, the City of Moonee Valley (19% racialised) has a higher DA-specific crime rate than the City of Wyndham (51% racialised). Yet, Wyndham is subject to an Intensity Score of 19.18, while Moonee Valley receives zero.

This suggests that in Victoria, the right to move through public spaces without warrantless surveillance is not a universal right, but a privilege conditional on the demographic profile of one's community. This reverses the idea of 'who is targeted' to 'who is protected'. This conceptual reversal allows us to see discriminatory policing not merely as an active choice, but as the default outcome of a system designed to protect affluence and whiteness. This could tie into the policy implications that allow such 'passive' discriminatory policing, as policy makers and governments are more concerned about who to protect (white and affluent), than who to target. Creating a 'protective cohort' allows police to police the 'other' with greater impunity.

Data transparency:
This research was dependent on trawling through government gazettes over long periods of time. The declarations in the gazette were not consistent, nor where they straight forward to classify. Given this, the transparency of data is limited to the whims of the clerk who writes the gazette. In some instances, DAs were declared over geographic areas and time periods more than once. In others, a designated area was declared, but then a subsequent erratum was published. One DA declaration, outside of this research period, was published on the Victoria Police website to only disappear completely from the website days later. This inconsistent publishing format of the DAs does not allow for data transparency. The opacity and inconsistency of these records act as a barrier to public scrutiny. Without clear uniform data, the systemic nature of these disparities remains hidden from public view. Victoria Police must specify which legislative subclass (a, b, c or d) they are invoking, and to use a uniform method of publication.

Erosion of protections

Over the research period, Victoria Police have declared more DAs almost every year. This suggests a growing reliance on DA powers for conducting searches for weapons. As this research has laid out, this impacts racialised communities the most. Taking into consideration the findings in the racial profiling data monitoring project, reasonable grounds searches are decreasing year on year.

A compound effect could be taking place where by Victoria Police are growing ever more reliant on circumventing guardrails designed to protect human rights, by relying on these powers more and more. Not only does this allow for police to search without warrants and suspicion, this reinforces the narrative among the protected cohort that extraordinary powers are necessary to police the 'other'.

Circular logic

The legislation of designated areas powers is broad and have been used to police certain communities more than others. The logic of the power, that a violent offence in that area in the last 12 months can trigger a DA, does allow for police to fall into a circular logic. Crime is a social construct, found in any community. However, triggering a DA allows for police to 'find crime' without the usual restrictions. This creates a self-fulfilling feedback loop: police can 'find more crime', that then allow them to declare another designated area in the future, allowing them to 'find more crime'. This effectively entrenches the criminalisation of specific communities.

The Policy Implication:

A crime prevention tool with a 1% success rate would be considered a failure in affluent, white-majority areas. The fact that it is routinely deployed in racialised communities suggests these powers serve a different function: not public safety, but social control and the normalization of surveillance in specific geographic and demographic spaces.

Given proven disparities in comparable searches, proven 99% ineffectiveness, and proven 3x deployment disparity, how does Victoria Police justify this system?

The systemic nature of how police operationalise systemic racism.

This study offers a systemic measure of racialised policing by analysing the discretionary deployment of powers that suspend rights in public space. Rather than focusing on individual encounters, it reveals how entire communities are structurally exposed to extraordinary police powers, independent of crime rates.

Most existing research on racial disparities in policing focuses on individual-level outcomes — such as stop-and-search rates, arrest statistics, or sentencing disparities. While these studies are vital, they often measure the bias that emerges at the point of officer discretion. This research offers a different approach. By analysing the deployment of discretionary police powers — specifically, Designated Area declarations — it shifts the lens from individual encounters to the systemic suspension of rights in public space. The unit of analysis is not the number of searches conducted, but the structural exposure of communities to extraordinary powers that remove warrant and suspicion protections.

The study offers a way to measure systemic racism in policing operations. It shows how discretionary powers are deployed in ways that structurally expose certain communities to suspended rights, while shielding others.

LGA	Total_hours	Hub based hour	Population	Intensity Score	Racialised	Non-Racialised	SEIFA	Crime Rate
Greater Dandenong	128.00	116.00	167,000	64.67	62%	38%	918	4659.75
Wyndham	64.00	56.00	292,011	19.18	51%	49%	1004	1995.22
Brimbank	112.00	112.00	194,618	57.55	47%	53%	928	3258.00
Monash	23.97	23.97	190,397	12.59	46%	54%	1067	1879.58
Hume	18.00	18.00	184,935	9.73	46%	54%	964	2614.58
Melbourne	598.77	117.92	189,381	62.26	45%	55%	1086	10981.92
Casey	182.00	182.00	365,239	49.83	42%	58%	986	2069.42
Manningham	32.00	32.00	124,700	25.66	37%	63%	1075	984.92
Melton	8.00	8.00	178,960	4.47	37%	63%	974	2154.24
Whitehorse	8.00	8.00	169,346	4.72	36%	64%	1067	1391.29
Whittlesea	6.00	6.00	229,396	2.62	34%	66%	981	2002.64
Maribyrnong	24.00	24.00	85,209	28.17	32%	68%	1045	3975.45
Knox	31.97	31.97	159,103	20.09	27%	73%	1029	2225.16
Boroondara	0	0.00	167,900	0.00	25%	75%	1131	1040.06
Merri-bek	8.00	8.00	171,357	4.67	24%	76%	1049	2330.32
Glen Eira	0	0.00	148,908	0.00	21%	79%	1103	1278.20
Darebin	10.00	10.00	148,570	6.73	20%	80%	1044	3166.70
Kingston	23.97	23.97	158,129	15.16	19%	81%	1048	2267.64
Moonee Valley	0	0.00	121,851	0.00	19%	81%	1060	2089.82
Maroondah	35.97	35.97	119,354	30.13	18%	82%	1035	2517.95
Cardinia	48.00	32.00	118,194	27.07	18%	82%	993	1769.89
Stonnington	11.98	11.98	104,703	11.45	18%	82%	1130	3836.55
Greater Shepparton	0	0.00	68,409	0.00	17%	83%	931	4201.83
Yarra	0	0.00	90,114	0.00	16%	84%	1108	5906.23
Port Phillip	193.92	12.00	101,942	11.77	15%	85%	1106	4549.57
Frankston	29.98	29.98	139,281	21.53	11%	89%	982	4019.96
Bayside	0	0.00	101,306	0.00	10%	90%	1127	1157.42
Greater Geelong	275.00	239.00	270,932	88.21	9%	91%	990	2893.05
Greater Bendigo	18.00	18.00	121,470	14.82	8%	92%	959	3160.66
Ballarat	12.00	12.00	113,763	10.55	8%	92%	965	3001.96
Latrobe	8.00	8.00	77,318	10.35	7%	93%	907	6384.52
Yarra ranges	16.00	16.00	156,068	10.25	7%	93%	1014	1620.23
Mornington Peninsula	279.00	0.00	168,948	0.00	5%	95%	1016	1955.75