



CELEBRATING
OUR CENTENARY



ENGINEERS
AUSTRALIA

Engineers Australia Submission

The Gold Standards Award for Government Relations

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About Engineers Australia

Engineers Australia is the peak representative body for the engineering profession, with about 100,000 members. Established 100 years ago and governed by a Royal Charter, its purpose is to advance the science and practice of engineering for the benefit of the community.

Fighting for ground-breaking legislation to enhance community safety.

Background

Engineers Australia targeted Victoria to be the first jurisdiction to follow the example of Queensland and legislate for engineers' registration.

In 2014, the Government of Victoria committed to this, introduced a bill to Parliament, but acted slowly. When Parliament dissolved for the November 2018 election (and the bill therefore lapsed), the governing Labor party's will to continue the legislative process was assessed to be at high risk.

Engineers Australia formed a six-person cross-functional taskforce which included the National Manager for Public Affairs, General Manager for the organisation's Victorian Division, National Media Manager, two Deputy Registrars, and a government relations consultant (MCM Strategic Communications). The taskforce met weekly and drove the government relations strategy.

Although favoured to win the general election, the governing Labor party was not expected to secure a majority in the Legislative Council (upper house of Parliament), and the Liberal/National opposition party was publicly against the bill. The Labor party was therefore likely to rely on the support of minor parties and independent members (known as "crossbenchers") to secure passage of the bill in that chamber (this was later confirmed by the election result).

The issue

Unlike most advanced nations, professional engineering services are largely unregulated in Australia (except in the state of Queensland). This means that someone can call themselves an engineer, even without relevant education or experience.

This inadequate framework creates community safety and consumer protection risks, and contrasts with professions with a significant public safety role like doctors and architects.

Without compulsory registration of engineers, there is no independent quality control mechanism: individuals who attempt to provide engineering services without suitable qualifications or experience, or who do not perform to the standards expected by society, are generally free to operate and cannot be excluded from practice.

Engineers Australia has taken a strong position to advocate for compulsory registration of engineers.

Key Message

In a contested advocacy environment, in August 2019 the Parliament of the Australian state of Victoria passed the Professional Engineers Registration Bill 2019.

This result was made possible by Engineers Australia's government relations strategy, and will enhance trust in the built environment and improve community safety.

A two-phase campaign developed:

1. Secure a high-profile Labor party election campaign commitment to reintroduce the engineers' registration bill to Parliament in 2019.
2. Post-election, secure crossbencher support for the bill, and neutralise groups opposed to it.

Phase 1: Election campaign

For the Victorian general election in November 2018, Engineers Australia ran a content-led digital campaign to influence the commitments of contesting parties. The call to action: *We want all parties to commit to re-introduce the Engineers Registration Bill within Parliament's first 100 days*. The primary objective was securing a meaningful Labor party commitment.

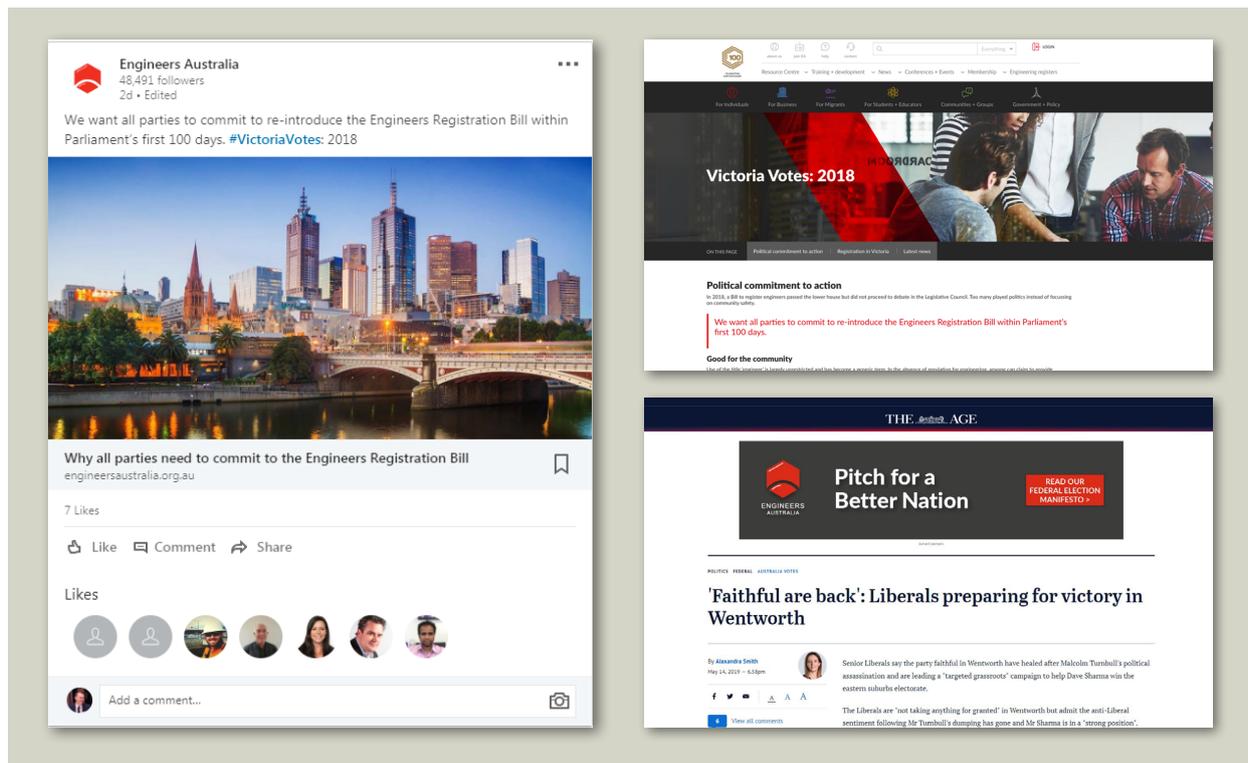
Advertisements ran on the website of Victoria's primary daily newspaper, *The Age*, and on Engineers Australia social media channels. The advertisements motivated people to click through to a campaign website: engineersaustralia.org.au/Pitch-Better-Nation-Elections/Vic-Election.

The advertisements delivered more than 708,000 impressions, and 1,089 clicks to the campaign website (above the industry average). The association's social media channels delivered more than 803,600 impressions and 1,389 clicks, plus many more found the website via Google.

The content engaged the public, with average time spent on the campaign website varying between 1min:50sec (via *The Age*) to 4min:33sec (via LinkedIn).

This campaign caused the Victorian Labor party to respond. The Labor Treasurer met the Engineers Australia Chief Executive Officer to discuss our call to action. He subsequently gave public commitment to reintroduce the Professional Engineers Registration Bill after the election.

The bill had regained political viability.



Phase 2: legislative process

The Labor party returned to Government in Victoria but without a majority in the upper house. The main opposition party opposed the bill, so Engineers Australia had to secure the support of at least three upper house crossbenchers. To do this, the taskforce developed products to demonstrate the need for registration of engineers and delivered key messages directly to crossbenchers via a schedule of meetings, and by recruiting members to act as volunteer advocates.

Engineers Australia deployed both technical and emotional tools to influence. A key example was the commissioning of a nation-wide poll of the general public to determine the level of support for legislation to register engineers. The results were overwhelming, indicating that 86% of all Victorians support registration of engineers.

Several significant industry bodies and some motivated individuals conducted concurrent lobbying in opposition. To counter these, Engineers Australia: created a [member testimonials video](#) to demonstrate wide member support; conducted multiple engagements with key crossbenchers; and, achieved positive mainstream media coverage.

The highest value media coverage was an in-depth interview by the CEO for an ABC TV [4 Corners program](#). 4 Corners is the premier investigative journalism program in Australia and the episode was seen by 653,000 people across the five largest cities on 20 August. Targeted media outreach throughout the advocacy campaign resulted in 118 stories across print, online and broadcast with a combined potential reach of 51 million.

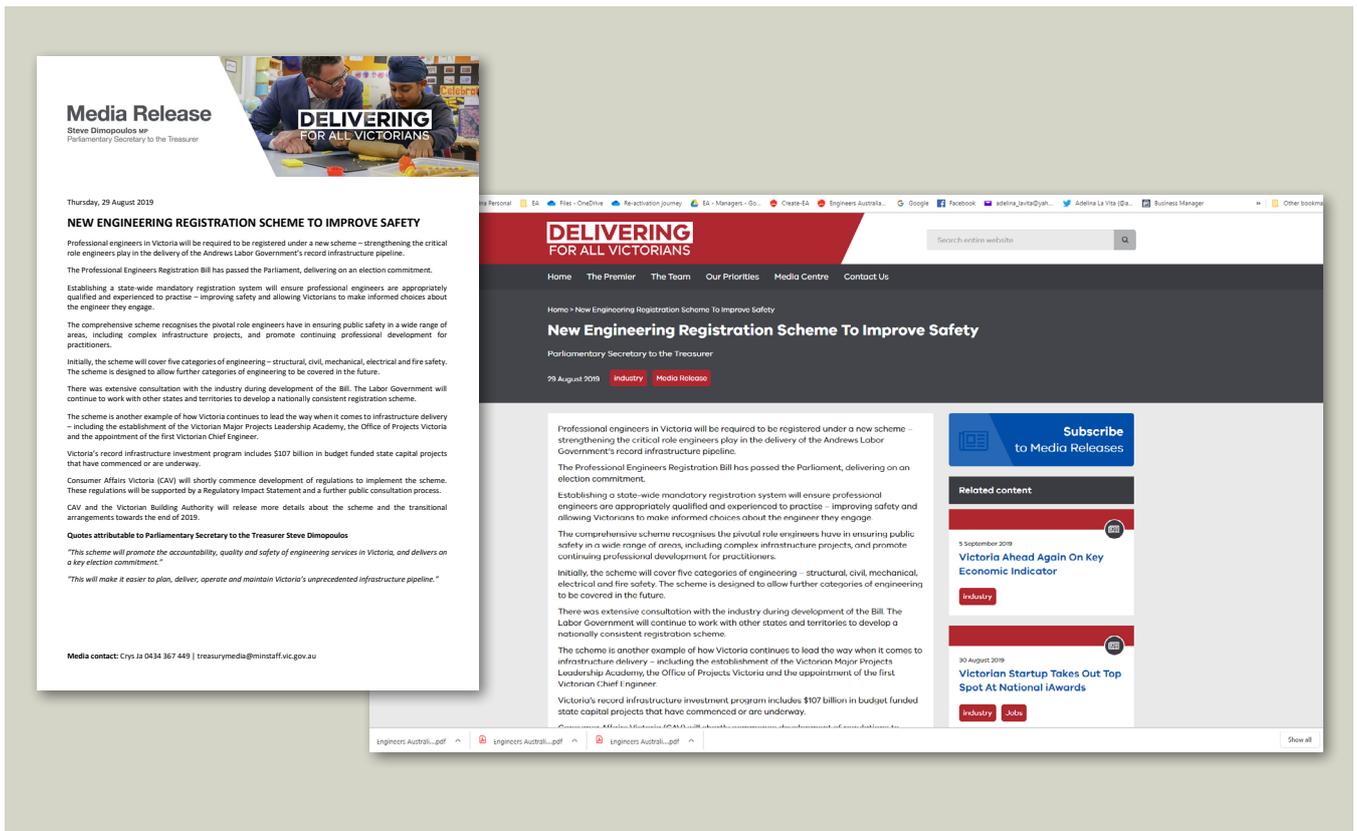
Overall success is demonstrated by the fact that although only three were needed, seven out of 11 crossbenchers supported the bill in its final upper house vote on 27 August 2019.



Overall outcome

The Professional Engineers Registration Bill 2019 has become law. It is the culmination of more than five years of sustained government relations activities and will put upwards pressure on standards for engineering practice and lead to higher levels of consumer protection and community safety.

There is now huge momentum for similar legislation across Australia.





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