

HOLDEN
LET'S GO THERE



Fairness Fund Frustrations

Six months has passed since the Victorian Labor Government announced their proposed changes to the taxi and hire car industry, yet the lack of direction and clarity from Government representatives and industry regulators continues to cause widespread distress and anguish amongst our members.

Although designed to provide targeted assistance for licence holders who are facing significant financial hardship as a result of the reforms, the Fairness Fund, at least at the time of writing, is proving to be anything but.

From the time it was announced, we have had correspondence from our Members seeking assistance with accessing the fund. There were delays in opening the applications, there was miscommunication from TSC representatives regarding the process and even when information sessions were held earlier this month, the limited number of places made available meant that some, who are being significantly impacted financially, psychologically and emotionally were unable to attend.

The feedback from those that have been through the process of applying is extremely concerning and further highlights the lack of respect being afforded our Members by the Government and its representatives.

1. Impact of a Proposal Before it Takes Effect

The main question asks claimants to *"briefly describe the circumstances of your financial hardship, explain how you consider this to be a direct result of the announced Victorian taxi and hire car industry reforms"*. In other words, how are you being impacted **NOW** by a proposal that has not even been agreed on let alone implemented? It concerns me greatly that this large sum of money is being "offered" to assist those struggling since a "decision" was made – as opposed to anything concrete. Has this "decision" effectively meant that the current climate is a true snapshot of the hardships that licensed operators will experience? By extension does that mean that unlicensed operators are currently free to operate in the same manner that they will be allowed to after (if) new legislation is written, introduced and passed? I would suggest that the offer to assist individuals now is an admission that the current laws are not being enforced – otherwise, these funds should be made available to capture the true hardship which will only be felt **AFTER** changes to the industry have materialised.

2. Fund Administration Cost

While the Government is talking up the sum of \$50 million being set aside to assist impacted license owners, the question of whether the cost of administering the fund will be paid from

the allocated \$50 million or in addition to it remains unanswered. Given that half of the previous \$4 million hardship fund of two years ago was paid to administrators, we would be hoping that this is not repeated.

3. Fund Replenishment

Given that applications are being processed as they come in and not at the end of a submission deadline, the question has justifiably been asked if this a race for cash or will each claim be assessed on its merits? How does an individual with a valid claim access this fund if the \$50 million is already exhausted?

4. Process for Appeal

Another major area of concern is the decision to deny unsuccessful applicants the right to appeal. Without access to information sessions or any set criteria to base applications on, I am concerned that most in need of assistance will be left without adequate support.

These are but a few of the queries / frustrations that have been conveyed to the VHCA in recent months. We have written to the Chairmen of the Fund as well as Government Ministers seeking answers but at the time of writing, no response had been received.

Many have begun to lose hope and have refused to submit applications rather than endure what has been described as a "cruel and humiliating process." To those Members and all others, I urge you to stay strong and take the opportunity to apply. We would like everyone to be adequately compensated for the mishandling of this serious issue and welcome any further feedback in relation to your experiences.

Adam Lust
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