

Media Release

Thursday, 2 October 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Extortion and Violent Crime in Retail Leaves Victoria in a Lawless State

MGA Independent Businesses Australia has condemned the violent ram raid on the Friendly Grocer store in Longwarry in regional Victoria, warning that independent retailers are facing an unprecedented escalation in organised crime activity. Emboldened criminal enterprises, funded through a flourishing illicit tobacco market, are now attempting to extort safety payments from small family run businesses.

“What had started as theft and then progressed to armed robbery, has now dramatically escalated into violent extortion,” said MGA CEO Martin Stirling. “Retailers are now being forced by criminal gangs to pay a ‘safety tax’ or sell illicit tobacco products under threat of violence. Victoria is rapidly slipping into a lawless state. Families, workers, and communities are being put at risk every day.”

“Independent retailers are the backbone of regional towns and communities,” Stirling said. “These are mums, dads, and family-run businesses, working tirelessly for their communities. When their shops are targeted, it threatens their livelihood, their employees, and the essential services they provide. Closure of stores or withdrawal from legal sales only fuels the illicit market.”

“This is no longer just a retail crime issue — it is a community safety emergency,” he added. “Criminal networks are operating with impunity, replicating the business models which we see in failed states, not developed societies. The government must act immediately to disempower and dismantle these criminal networks. Independent retailers cannot and should not face this alone.”

MGA is calling for:

- Practical safety measures, resources and dedicated taskforces to support small and medium sized business in vulnerable sectors
- Rapid, comprehensive resources and support to address and shut down all extortion attempts and threats of violence
- Acknowledgement that the illicit tobacco trade is funding organised crime and practical measures to shut it down, such as empowering authorities with illicit tobacco premise closure powers and other measures which are being implemented in other states

“The status quo isn’t working — we need urgent, coordinated action now to protect family businesses, safeguard communities, and restore law and order,” Stirling said. (ENDS)

For media enquiries, please contact:

Kath Markov, Marketing & Communications Manager
kath.markov@mgaiba.org.au | 0452 660 506



**MGA
Independent
Businesses
Australia**

**Support where
you need it most**

About MGAIBA

MGA Independent Businesses Australia (MGA) is a national industry association representing thousands of independent grocery and liquor retail businesses across all States and Territories of Australia. MGA has been representing family-owned independent retail businesses since 1898. Our members range from small to medium and large in size and account for tens of billions of dollars in retail sales and collectively employ more than a hundred thousand people. MGA's members are typically smaller in scale than the established large chains. In addition to trading under independent local brands, many MGA members in Victoria trade under various well known and respected banners including IGA, FoodWorks, SPAR, Foodland, Friendly Grocer, IGA Xpress, Cellarbrations, The Bottle O, Duncans, and Local Liquor. For more information, please visit www.mgaiba.org.au