



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

FRIENDS OF VICTORIA IN PARIS

Tuesday 20 May 2025

"C'est un plaisir de me joindre à vous tous ici ce soir."

[It's a pleasure to join you all here this evening.]

"Bien que je ne sois pas en mesure de prononcer l'intégralité de ce discours en français, compte tenu de la signature d'une lettre d'intention historique, j'ai pensé qu'il serait approprié de commencer dans votre langue maternelle."

[Though I am not able to deliver the entirety of this speech in French, given the signing of an historic Letter of Intent, I thought it would be fitting to begin in your native tongue.]

Though it is not my first time in Paris, this trip marks my first official visit as Governor of Victoria.

Today, France is Victoria's third largest trading partner in the EU, representing our third largest source of foreign investment.

Likewise, the newest of our 24 Victorian Government Trade and Investment Offices was established right here in Paris – this has been matched with the recent addition of a permanent French Consulate-General in Melbourne.

We in Victoria have also forged a Memorandum of Understanding with the Île-de-France region, and we are excited about the prospects for Paris and Melbourne to grow closer in a cultural and economic sense.

Our focus on this important partnership, at all levels, reflects the value we place on it.

At the heart of it are people like yourselves.

Whether through commerce, education or cultural exchange, your work is what is helping to sustain the relationship between Victoria and France into the future.

It is a privilege to represent the State of Victoria abroad – not in the least because Victorians have much to be proud of, and much to share.

Our State is home to world-class higher education and research sectors, a vibrant cultural and arts scene, and impressive major events calendar.

We may speak different languages, but we are united by a deep love for food and wine.

And when you visit us in Victoria, just as when we visit here, you can experience that love in our cafés.

Like Parisians, Victorians have embraced the simple pleasure of a coffee or wine, with or without a meal, enjoyed on a lively street.

However, this is a relatively recent discovery for us – and something for which we can thank the French.

Melbourne had and has all the right ingredients for a great café scene: nice weather, open space and of course, a burgeoning community of people from across the world.

In the 1950s, the owners of The Oriental hotel in Melbourne did something bold and daring:

They placed tables outside, on the footpath.

To Parisians, this was nothing new, but to Victorians, it was revolutionary – so much so that it made the front-page of the newspapers.

The French wife of the owner of The Oriental, Suzanne Ress, spoke to one of the journalists, saying:

'This is wonderful. It is just like the Champs-Élysées back in Paris.'

More than 50 years later, that very section of Melbourne where we first dared to enjoy a coffee outdoors is officially known as “The Paris End” (of Collins Street).

This distinct French influence now forms part of the great melting pot of cultures that defines Victoria’s identity.

However, the origins of our relationship are not limited to the cultural and the culinary.

Importantly, as part of my Official Visit, tomorrow I will travel to Villers-Bretonneux – a place where our connection was tragically moulded through conflict.

It was there that thousands of Australian soldiers, alongside their French counterparts, gave their lives in defence of the town against enemy forces during World War I.

It is a story of comradeship and sacrifice, one that has woven itself into the very fabric of our national identity.

After the war, the school of Villers-Bretonneux was rebuilt with money raised by donations from Victoria.

Etched into the classrooms is a simple, yet heartfelt message:

‘N’oublions jamais l’Australie’

("Let us never forget Australia")

And you haven’t.

Our partnership, formed on the battlefield and in those early days of cultural exchange, remains strong –

And through fora like this, it will only continue to grow.

Thank you for joining us this evening.

I look forward to speaking with you and hearing about your experiences and ideas.