



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

PAYPAL MELBOURNE FASHION FESTIVAL LAUNCH

Friday 13 February 2026

Acknowledgments

The Honourable Steve Dimopoulos MP, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, *representing the Premier of Victoria*, and **John Cardona**

The Honourable Colin Brooks MP, Minister for Creative Industries, and **Melinda Brooks**

The Honourable Ted Baillieu AO, Former Premier of Victoria, and **Robyn Baillieu**

Rachael Westaway MP, Shadow Assistant Minister to the Leader of the Opposition, *representing the Leader of the Opposition*, and **Simon Westaway**

Deputy Lord Mayor Roshena Campbell, *representing the Lord Mayor of Melbourne*, and **James Campbell**

The Honourable Mark Dreyfus KC MP, Federal Member for Isaacs

Launa Inman, Chair of the Board, and **Howard Inman**

Caroline Ralphsmith, Chief Executive Officer, and **Dion Werbeloff**, and **Members of the Board**, PayPal Melbourne Fashion Festival

Members of the Consular Corps

Distinguished guests

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this House stands – the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the Eastern Kulin Nation – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Wurundjeri man Daniel Ross for his warm welcome.

Standing in this grand ballroom, you get a sense of what ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ was like when this place was built 150 years ago.

Just like their people, cities grow and evolve over time.

This year, the Melbourne Fashion Festival marks a shorter – but still significant – milestone of 30 years.

Yet it's fair to say Melbourne still looked, and felt, very different in the 1990s compared to today.

Shockingly, I suspect there are some in the audience tonight that were not even born before the end of the last century.

For those who did not live through it, the 90s was an era marked by acid wash jeans, scrunchies, Doc Martens, flannel shirts and parachute pants – some of which have since made returns, others we can only hope never do.

Some of the fashion choices may be questionable in hindsight.

But importantly, it was a decade in which Australians increasingly looked to our own for inspiration, supporting local talent, and building a thriving domestic fashion industry.

It was in this context that the Melbourne Fashion Festival was born.

Specifically, on a warm February night, in 1996.

Organisers had wanted to shut down Collins Street for the occasion, but when the budget didn't allow for it, Greville Street in Prahran was chosen instead.

It didn't matter.

The first iteration of the festival was a roaring success under the stewardship of its inaugural Chair, Craig Kimberley.

The street was so busy, the then-Premier Jeff Kennett couldn't find his way through the crowd to get to his reserved seat.

It was not the first show of its kind, but the festival was innovative in its approach: making fashion accessible and engaging to the broader public.

In the words of the Festival's founding creative director, Robert Buckingham:

"It was part of Melbourne building its reputation as an event and cultural capital."

Three decades on, I think we can all agree the Festival succeeded in that aim.

I have fond memories of attending events in this Festival early this century in Melbourne Town Hall and the engagement with the wealth of fashion talent at RMIT.

Melbourne's major events calendar is the envy of any global city.

Not only is this festival part of that calendar – fashion is a thread that runs through it all.

As with the city, the look and feel of this Festival have evolved since it first began in 1996.

I don't see many parachute pants in the crowd here tonight, for example.

Yet it has remained true to its founding purpose.

For three decades, it has championed local artists, supported the retail industry and inspired consumers from all walks of life – testament to everyone who has been involved in its operation across this time.

Congratulations on thirty years of creativity, and best wishes to all those who are taking part in this year's exciting program.

I now invite Minister Dimopoulos to address us.