

# Statement

**The Hon Gayle Tierney MP**  
Minister for Skills and TAFE  
Minister for Water



Monday, 13 April 2026

## STATEMENT FROM GAYLE TIERNEY

I have advised the Premier that it is my intention to step down from my ministerial responsibilities and that I will retire at the forthcoming 2026 State Election.

This has not been an easy decision – but for me it is the correct one, and it feels right.

Serving as a Minister for nearly a decade across portfolios including Skills and TAFE, Higher Education, Agriculture, Regional Development, Water and Corrections has been both humbling and incredibly fulfilling.

One of the greatest privileges of my career has been leading the Skills and TAFE portfolio over that entire period – allowing us to deliver the deep reform needed to rebuild from the ground up.

We rebuilt a system that had literally been destroyed under the previous Coalition Government. We restored confidence, strengthened public provision, and put students, industry and communities back at the centre of vocational education – including through the delivery of 45 new and upgraded TAFE campuses across Victoria.

We have transformed vocational education – making it more relevant to the modern economy and more accessible to people from all walks of life. Through Free TAFE, we haven't just opened doors – we changed the system.

In the last Parliamentary sitting week, we embedded Free TAFE into law and have ensured funding of public provision and access to training is protected for generations to come. This cannot be undone with the flick of a pen.

Importantly, we have also positioned TAFE at the centre of Victoria's future – delivering training in the areas that matter most, including the housing and construction, renewable energy and digital skills workforces our state needs.

At a time when cost-of-living pressures are real for many families, Free TAFE has made a practical difference – helping people retrain, upskill and access secure, well-paid work without the burden of upfront fees.

I am also very proud of the stronger supports we have put in place for apprentices and the apprenticeship system, and the continuing work our government is doing to strengthen this vital area.

Building a more joined up post-school system – from grassroots Learn Locals through to TAFE and university – is critical to a modern, relevant and accessible skills and education system.

I have always believed that vocational education must stand as an equal first choice alongside university, and I am proud that the reforms led here in Victoria have now largely been adopted by the Federal Government and are shaping the national skills agenda.

Across the other portfolios, I have been equally driven by a commitment to fairness, opportunity and long-term reform.

In agriculture, we strengthened biosecurity preparedness – ensuring Victoria was well-positioned to respond to major threats such as foot-and-mouth disease.

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In water, our focus has been on securing the future – supporting communities through drought, progressing long-term water security planning, advancing the Dilwyn aquifer feasibility study to support the Heytesbury food bowl, and contributing to important reform discussions including the Murray-Darling Basin.

In Regional Development, we backed our communities with practical investment – from the Geelong City Deal to regional worker accommodation and the Tiny Towns Fund – supporting local economies and helping communities grow and adapt.

In corrections, we implemented significant reforms, including the establishment of the Post Sentence Authority and the introduction of more respectful body scanning practices.

But beyond portfolios and programs, I am equally proud of what we have delivered for Western Victoria.

Having completed my primary and secondary education in regional and rural schools, that lived experience has shaped my approach, and reinforced the importance of strong regional voices in everything we do.

From new specialist schools across the region – from Portland through to Colac – to major investments in education and training at the South West TAFE and The Gordon, including the Centre of Excellence for Disability Inclusion, the culinary school, and the expansion of trade training facilities.

From landmark projects like the Nyaal Banyul Convention and Event Centre, to community infrastructure like the Warrnambool Library and Warrnambool Hospital, improved rail services, upgraded sporting facilities, and continued investment in health and community services.

We've backed regional communities with real investment – not just promises – and I am proud to be part of a government that understands the strength and potential of regional Victoria.

I am also very optimistic about the future of our region.

With assets like Avalon Airport and the ports of Geelong and Portland, Western Victoria is uniquely positioned to drive social and economic development – creating jobs, supporting local industries and strengthening our communities for years to come.

None of this work happens alone.

I want to thank my ministerial colleagues and staff, past and present, as well as the dedicated public servants who work tirelessly to deliver for Victorians every day.

To my extraordinary electorate office team in Geelong, past and present, thank you. Your ongoing commitment to the community and to this work has been nothing short of exceptional.

And to my husband Ian – I simply could not have done this without you. Your unwavering support, patience and understanding over many years has meant everything to me.

For more than 45 years, I have had the honour of serving working people – including 36 years in elected office.

Throughout that time, I have been guided by a commitment to inclusion and equity – ensuring opportunity is open to all, and that First Nations voices are recognised and included across the work I have led in every portfolio.

While I am stepping back from ministerial responsibilities, my purpose has not changed.

I will continue to serve the great people of Western Victoria with the same energy, commitment and determination that has guided me throughout my career.

And as I look ahead, I do so with confidence – in the depth of talent and energy within our team, and in the next generation of leaders who will continue the work of building a fairer, stronger Victoria.

After nearly 20 years in Parliament, for me, it is simply time to pass the baton.