



October 2024

Petrol Prices - The Disadvantage to Melton

Victorian Parliamentary Internship
Program Report



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COMMISSIONED BY STEPHEN MCGHIE, MP FOR MELTON

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Steve McGhie and his electorate staff, Emily Foley and the staff at the Parliamentary Library for their assistance with this paper.

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October 2024

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List of Abbreviations

ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
AIP	Australian Institute of Petroleum
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
CCA.....	<i>Competition and Consumer Act 2010 (Cth)</i>
NSW.....	New South Wales
PTV.....	Public Transport Victoria
RBA	Reserve Bank of Australia
SWB	Subjective Wellbeing
WA	Western Australia
WSFW	Western Suburbs Fuel Watch

Acknowledgement of Country

The research for this report was completed on the land of the Wadawarrung, Bunurong and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation. I acknowledge their ongoing cultures and connections to lands and waters. I pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Executive Summary

In the year to 18 September 2024, Melton had an average unleaded petrol price of 208.2c per litre.¹ This was the highest average petrol price in any area within the western suburbs, other than the petrol stations at Melbourne Airport.² Melton's neighbouring suburbs - Bacchus Marsh and Caroline Springs - had significantly lower prices – an average of 187.7c and 192.6c per litre respectively.³ Further, although there are 12 petrol stations in Melton, they often have identical prices and rarely have significant price differences.⁴ This is not consistent with the pricing behaviour exhibited in other western suburbs.⁵ This provides prima facie evidence of petrol prices in Melton not conforming to what would be expected in an open competitive market.

However, high petrol prices alone are not illegal. The ACCC can only take legal action under the cartel conduct provisions of the *Competition and Consumer Act*, “if a corporation makes a contract, arrangement, or arrives at an understanding, which contains a cartel provision” or if a corporation engages in a ‘concerted practice’.⁶

This study aims to provide a statistical analysis of petrol prices in Melton; identify the legal principles relating to competition; identify the factors that can influence petrol prices; and analyse the effects of those prices.

There appears to be no immediate explanation for the higher petrol prices in Melton, other than higher margins due to less vigorous competition between retailers. This is because other key factors which often explain higher prices are largely consistent across areas comparable to Melton.

It is probable that the higher petrol prices in Melton are negatively effecting residents. Generally, people with incomes below the median, and those that have a higher dependency on cars, experience greater declines in their subjective wellbeing in response to rising petrol prices.⁷ Both these factors apply to the Melton population.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Victorian Parliament should legislate the implementation of a state-run petrol price tracking application similar to FuelCheck in NSW. This could be administered by Consumer Affairs Victoria in the way NSW Fair Trading administers FuelCheck.

Recommendation 2: The ACCC should include Melton in the published petrol price data they currently collect. If anomalies or anti-competitive conduct is found, then follow up action should be undertaken. If Melton is not included, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, with Consumer Affairs Victoria, should be part of a delegation to the ACCC advocating for Melton's

¹ Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, ‘Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set’ (Looker Studio).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth) ss 45AF, 45AG, 45AJ, 45AK, 45.

⁷ Kushneel Prakash, Sefa Awaworyi Churchill and Russell Smyth, ‘Petrol Prices and Subjective Wellbeing’ (2020) 90 *Energy Economics* Article 104867; Carol Graham and Soumya Chattopadhyay, ‘(Un?)Happiness and Gasoline Prices in the United States’ (Research Report, Brookings Institution, 19 October 2010).

inclusion. Further, if a state-run petrol price tracking application is created, it should join the ACCC's Fuel Consultative Committee like WA FuelWatch.

Recommendation 3: The City of Melton Local Council and the Victorian Department of Transport and Planning, in consultation with the Victorian Planning Authority, should review land use and planning restrictions in Melton to ensure there are no impediments to entry to the market by an independent petrol retailer.

Recommendation 4: In collaboration with the Department of Transport and Planning and VicRoads, Public Transport Victoria should review the public transportation in Melton to determine how best to increase public transportation options to decrease the reliance on cars in Melton.

1. Introduction

The Melton area typically has higher unleaded petrol prices than neighbouring suburbs.⁸ This report was commissioned by Steve McGhie MP to investigate these high prices and their effects. Particularly within what has been deemed the ‘cost of living crisis’ – where purchasing power has decreased – these high prices will be exacerbating financial stress in an area that already receives lower incomes than the state average.⁹ The community concern is evidenced by the local community Facebook page ‘MELTON FUEL GROUP’, which has over 4,400 members.¹⁰

1.1 Aims

The report has four main aims:

1. Provide a statistical analysis of retail petrol prices in Melton in comparison to other western suburbs.
2. Identify the legal principles relating to competition – particularly as it relates to petrol pricing.
3. Identify the drivers of retail petrol prices and discuss them in relation to Melton.
4. Analyse the effects of high petrol prices in the Melton context.

1.2 Method

To fulfill the above aims, primary sources and secondary sources were consulted. The secondary sources included ACCC and AIP reports, a Parliament of Victoria Inquiry, newspaper articles, and scholarly works. City of Melton and ATO publications, Hansard, Google Maps Data and PTV timetables were also reviewed. The sources of law reviewed were legislation, case law and an explanatory memorandum. The quantitative data relied on was collected from the ABS, RBA, Informed Decisions, Petrol Spy and Western Suburbs Fuel Watch (WSFW).

1.3 Structure

The report is structured in the following way:

Chapter 2 presents petrol price data for Melton and other western suburbs.

Chapter 3 summarises the law surrounding cartel conduct.

Chapter 4 examines factors that influence retail petrol prices and discusses their relevance to Melton.

Chapter 5 explores the effects of high petrol prices in relation to Melton.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions.

⁸ Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, ‘Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set’ (Looker Studio).

⁹ Beckers, Benjamin et al, ‘Developments in Income and Consumption Across Household Groups’ (Bulletin, Reserve Bank of Australia, 25 January 2024); Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘Melton’, 2021 Census All persons QuickStats (Web Page) <<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA24650>>.

¹⁰ ‘Melton Fuel Group’, Facebook (Facebook Group) <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/224126305909592/>>.

1.4 Scope and Limitations

This report begins by presenting a comparative statistical analysis of petrol prices in Melton. As Victoria is the only state or territory without a fuel price transparency scheme, official statistics could not be collected.¹¹ This means the report only assesses patterns dating back to 29 April 2023, which is when WSWF started collecting unofficial data.

The law surrounding cartel conduct and previous cases is discussed as background for what is legal and not legal regarding pricing behaviour. It is not within this report's scope to determine whether any elements of an offence apply or are made out. Therefore, this report makes no conclusions as to whether any illegal or remediable conduct has possibly occurred.

In relation to literature available on factors that influence petrol prices and their effects, material from Australia and other jurisdictions was applied, where appropriate, to the Melton context as no specific literature was available for Melton.

¹¹ 'Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 'There are tools available to save money on fuel' (Media Release, 20 August 2024) <<https://www.accc.gov.au/media-release/there-are-tools-available-to-save-money-on-fuel#:~:text=Note%3A%20There%20is%20no%20fuel,to%20display%20for%20consumer%20use>>.

2. Petrol Prices in Melton

2.1 Petrol Stations in Melton

In Melton, there are 12 petrol stations.¹² The petrol station brands include Ampol, Shell, BP, 7-Eleven, and EG – all major retailers.¹³ There are no independent petrol stations in the area.

2.2 Data Verification

The raw data on petrol prices and the corresponding Looker Studio graphs were provided by WSWF.¹⁴ As this is unofficial data, to verify its accuracy, user reported data was collected and recorded each day, for each petrol station in Melton, between 5 August 2024 and 12 September 2024 from the public website PetrolSpy (report collected data set (RC)). This data was also collected for Bacchus Marsh and the area around Caroline Springs. The complete RC separated by area can be found in appendices 1 to 4.

To compare the data, the median was calculated for each day in Melton for the RC and WSWF data set. The median values of the Melton RC and the WSWF data set only differed on one occasion – 9 August 2024 (Fig. 1). This is likely explained by the RC data being collected earlier in the day, before some petrol stations changed their price. This is because the following day's median values (10 August 2024) align at the same lower price that the WSWF data recorded for 9 August 2024.

Therefore, based on the information available, it appears the WSWF data is largely reliable.

Figure 1: Melton median price comparison - Report Collected Data Set and Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set

Melton Median Price Comparison 5-Aug to 24-Aug																							
	5-Aug	6-Aug	7-Aug	8-Aug	9-Aug	10-Aug	11-Aug	12-Aug	13-Aug	14-Aug	15-Aug	16-Aug	17-Aug	18-Aug	19-Aug	20-Aug	21-Aug	22-Aug	23-Aug	24-Aug			
Report Collected Data Set Median	209.9	207.9	205.9	199.9	197.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	181.9	181.9	181.9	179.9	179.9			
Western Suburb Fuel Watch Median	209.9	207.9	205.9	199.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	181.9	181.9	181.9	179.9	179.9			

Melton Median Price Comparison 25-Aug to 12-Sep																			
	25-Aug	26-Aug	27-Aug	28-Aug	29-Aug	30-Aug	31-Aug	1-Sep	2-Sep	3-Sep	4-Sep	5-Sep	6-Sep	7-Sep	8-Sep	9-Sep	10-Sep	11-Sep	12-Sep
Report Collected Data Set Median	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Western Suburb Fuel Watch Median	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9

Source for figure 1: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio); The Report Collected Data Set collated data from 'PetrolSpy Aus/NZ', PetrolSpy (Web Page) <<https://petrolspy.com.au/map/station/538ec34003643dbe108ca39d>>.

2.3 High Petrol Prices in Melton

Suburb Comparison

The highest average petrol price in any area within the western suburbs (the suburbs included are in appendix 5), were the stations at Melbourne Airport, which had an average of 208.9c per litre in the year to 18 September 2024.¹⁵ The higher prices at Melbourne airport are likely explained by a captive market. This is because consumers rent cars and need to re-fill them almost immediately before returning them at the airport. This likely makes their demand

¹² Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid; Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Raw Data' (Google Sheets).

¹⁵ Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

relatively inelastic, so retailers there can charge higher prices without losing customers. The conditions at Melbourne Airport make it an outlier.

Therefore, of the typical areas within the western suburbs, Melton had the highest average unleaded petrol price of 208.2c per litre in the year to 18 September 2024.¹⁶ Bacchus Marsh and Caroline Springs generally had significantly lower prices in the same period. On average, the price in Bacchus Marsh was 187.7c per litre – 20.5c less per litre than in Melton.¹⁷ In Caroline Springs, the average petrol price was 192.6c per litre – 15.6c less per litre than in Melton.¹⁸ As these areas are the neighbouring suburbs of Melton, this difference in price is significant.

A factor that separates them is Melton’s lack of an independent petrol station. Bacchus Marsh has an independent petrol station within the suburb, and although Caroline Springs does not have an independent petrol station within the suburb, Deer Park has an independent petrol station which is only 3.5km away from the centre of Caroline Springs.¹⁹

Sunbury is also comparable to Melton because it has several major retailers (eight) and does not have an independent petrol station.²⁰ Further, they both contain a distinct township rather than being part of contiguous suburbs. The average price of unleaded petrol in Sunbury in the same period was 193.5c per litre, still 14.7c cheaper per litre than Melton.²¹

Price Cycle Comparison

Melton appears to be a price leader during price increases and a price follower for price decreases (see Figs. 2 and 3).²² This means prices tend to be higher for longer in Melton. So, depending on where in the price cycle petrol stations are, there can be exceptionally large differences between the average and median prices in Melton compared to other western suburbs. For example, when prices started to rise on 2 September 2024, the median price in Melton was 209.9c per litre compared to a median price of 167.9c per litre in other western suburbs.²³ That is 42c per litre more in Melton than other western suburbs. Therefore, to fill an average 60 litre car in Melton that day would have cost \$125.94 compared to \$100.74 on average in other western suburbs.

Both the median and average price graphs are included (Figs. 2 and 3) as the median price does not reflect the lower prices that consumers in some areas can access due to outlier retailers (usually independents) pricing petrol significantly below the rest of the local market.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid; ‘Google Maps’, Google (Map) <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/OOM+Energy+-+Melbourne%E2%80%99s+24+Hours+Fuel+Station,+Western+Highway,+Burnside+VIC/caroline+springs/@-37.7546851,144.7372947,14.43z/data=!4m13!4m12!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad68bb5440d8b07:0x4a8b4153b2d9df1!2m2!1d144.7570811!2d-37.7627235!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f4e167faac63:0x5045675218cf6b0!2m2!1d144.7356782!2d-37.7431281?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI0MDkyNC4wIjKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D>.

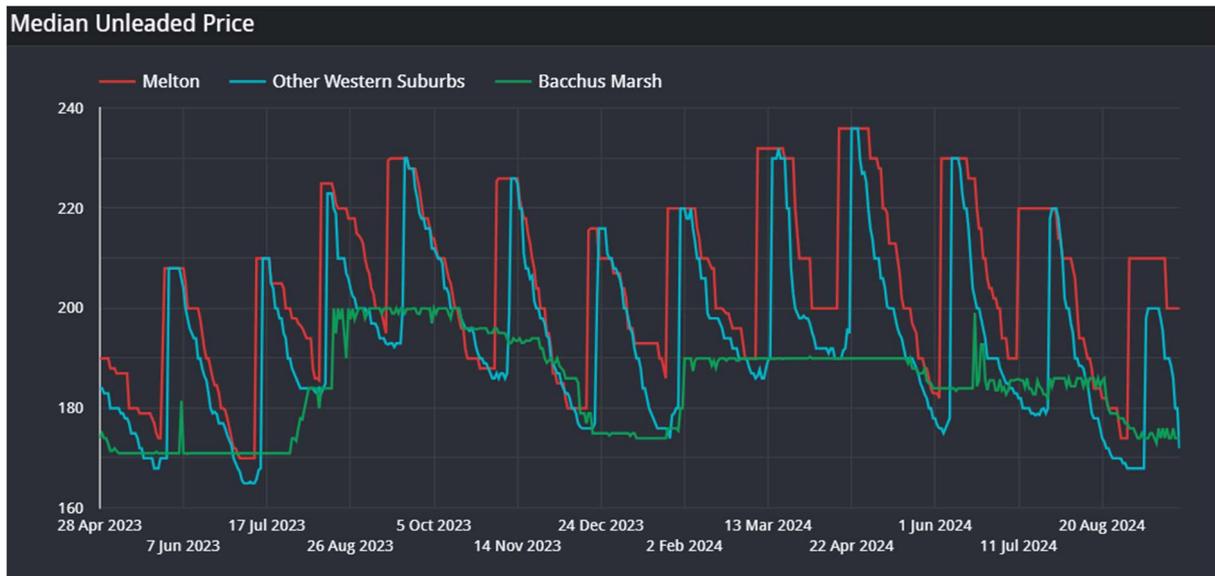
²⁰ Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, ‘Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set’ (Looker Studio).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

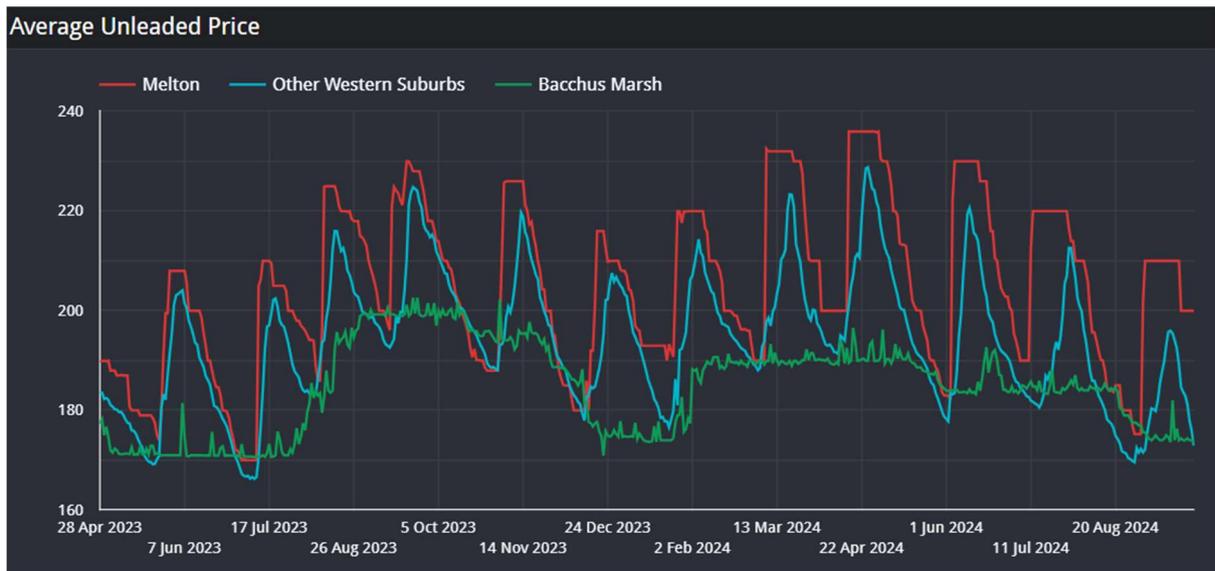
²³ Ibid.

Figure 2: Median unleaded petrol price in Melton compared to other western suburbs



Source for figure 2: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Figure 3: Average unleaded petrol price in Melton compared to other western suburbs



Source for figure 3: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

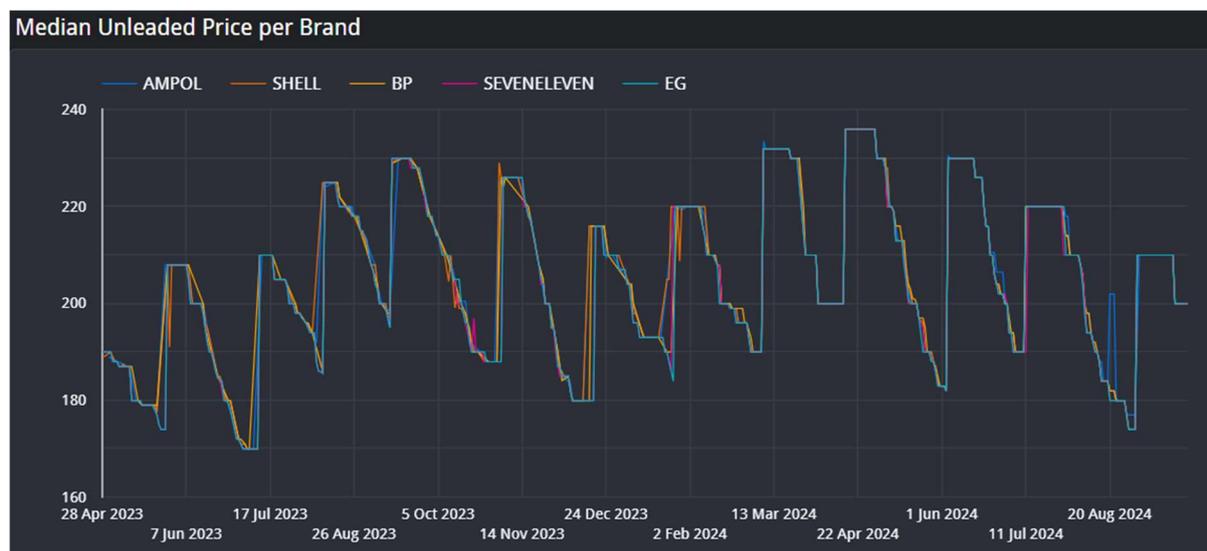
It is also of note that Bacchus Marsh does not appear to follow the regular price cycle.²⁴

²⁴ Ibid.

2.4 Lack of Price Variation in Melton

Even though there are 12 petrol stations in Melton, they often have identical prices and rarely have significant price differences (see Figs. 4 and 5, and appendix 1).²⁵ In comparison, other western suburbs show far greater variation.²⁶

Figure 4: Median unleaded petrol price per brand in Melton



Source for figure 4: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Figure 5: The maximum, minimum and average unleaded petrol price in Melton



Source for figure 5: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Between 28 April 2023 and 27 September 2024, prices increased in Melton on 12 occasions.²⁷ For 8 of these, the median unleaded petrol price per brand was identical across all brands

²⁵ Ibid.

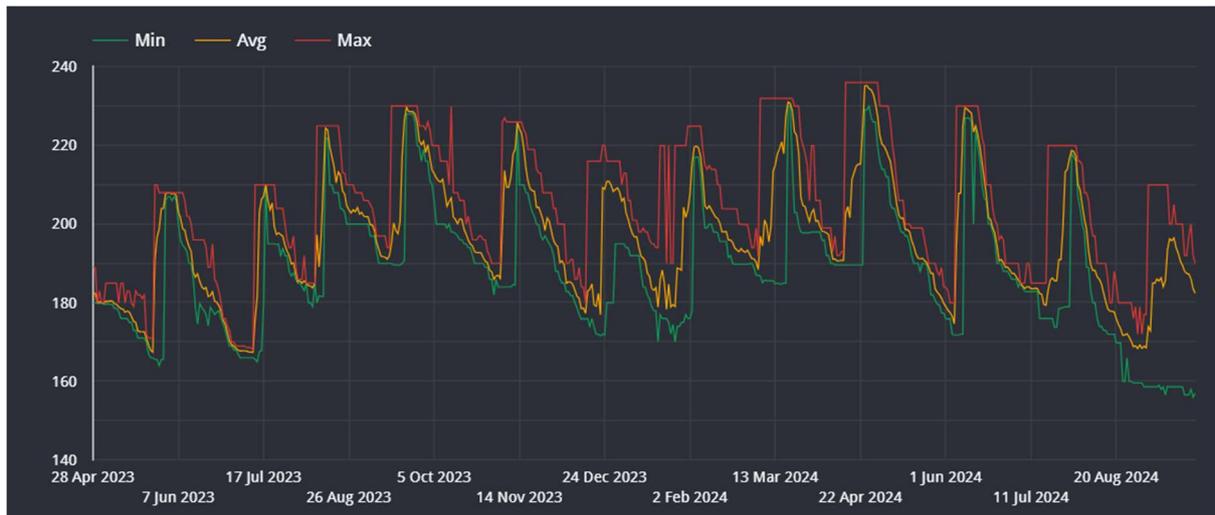
²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

within two days of the first increase.²⁸ On all but one occasion, the median price per brand aligned at the highest price in the cycle though sometimes after a slightly longer delay.²⁹

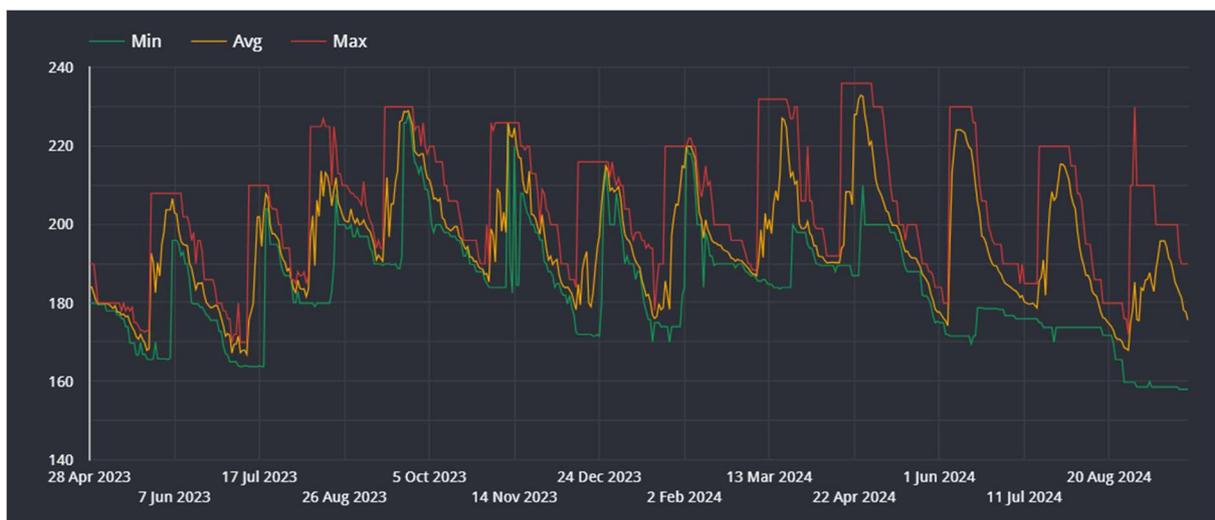
Prices perfectly aligning at the maximum price in a cycle for extended periods is not common in other areas with a similar number of stations - such as Altona (13 stations), Laverton and Truganina (12 stations) or Werribee and Tarneit (11 stations) - or Sunbury, which has similar conditions (see Figs. 6 to 11).³⁰ For a visualisation of the median unleaded price per brand see appendices 6 to 11.

Figure 6: The maximum, minimum and average unleaded petrol price in Altona



Source for figure 6: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Figure 7: The maximum, minimum and average unleaded petrol price in Laverton



Source for figure 7: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Figure 8: The maximum, minimum and average unleaded petrol price in Truganina



Source for figure 8: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Figure 9: The maximum, minimum and average unleaded petrol price in Werribee



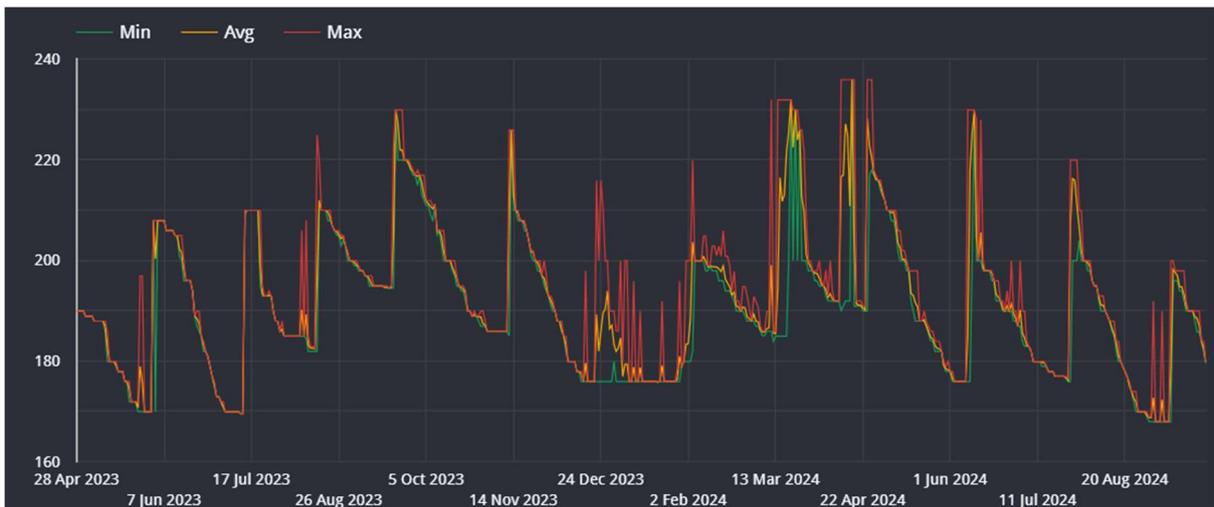
Source for figure 9: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Figure 10: The maximum, minimum and average unleaded petrol price in Tarneit



Source for figure 10: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Figure 11: The maximum, minimum and average unleaded petrol price in Sunbury



Source for figure 11: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

3. The Law Surrounding Cartel Conduct

3.1 Overview

There have been two occasions where the ACCC has brought civil proceedings against petrol retailers for cartel conduct - one against several retailers in Ballarat, and another against several retailers in Geelong.³¹ The ACCC argued in both cases that the respondents (the retailers and their agents named in the proceedings) contravened ss 45(2)(a) and 45(2)(b) of the *Trade Practices Act 1974*.³² This Act has now been repealed but provisions that are substantively similar are now in force under the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010 (CCA)*.³³ The case law interpretations are still useful in providing insight into what may be interpreted under the new Act due to their similarity.

In the Ballarat case, at first instance, the ACCC was successful in bringing a claim against some of the respondents - including Triton, Apco, Brumar and Balgee.³⁴ Apco appealed this decision on the basis that they did not commit to price increases despite being party to telephone calls the ACCC argued were used to discuss price increases.³⁵ The appeal was upheld.³⁶

In the Geelong case, the ACCC was unsuccessful, and the case was dismissed.³⁷ The judge found there were several weaknesses in the evidence supplied by the ACCC. However, the finding that was “fatal”, was that although oral evidence and admissions were given that suggested prices were discussed over the phone, there was an “absence of any commitment, moral obligation, or obligation binding in honour on the part of any party”.³⁸

3.2 Statutory Provisions

The relevant provisions on cartel conduct are now contained within Part IV of the CCA.³⁹ This section is lengthy and addresses several ways to contravene both the criminal and civil laws prohibiting cartel conduct.⁴⁰ This report provides a summary of the sections most relevant to petrol pricing.

Criminal Offences

Section 45AF of the CCA states:

“(1) A corporation commits an offence if:

³¹ *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) v Leahy Petroleum Pty Ltd* (2004) 141 FCR 183; *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) v Leahy Petroleum Pty Ltd* (2007) 160 FCR 32.

³² *Trade Practices Act 1974* (Cth) ss 45(2)(a)(ii), 45(2)(b)(ii).

³³ *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth).

³⁴ *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) v Leahy Petroleum Pty Ltd* (2004) 141 FCR 183, [384].

³⁵ *Apco Service Stations Pty Ltd v Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)* (2005) 159 FCR 452, [51].

³⁶ *Ibid* [57].

³⁷ *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) v Leahy Petroleum Pty Ltd* (2007) 160 FCR 32, [966].

³⁸ *Ibid* [949-950].

³⁹ *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth) pt IV.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

- (a) the corporation makes a contract or arrangement, or arrives at an understanding; and*
- (b) the contract, arrangement or understanding contains a cartel provision”.*⁴¹

*“(2) The fault element for paragraph (1)(b) is knowledge or belief”.*⁴²

Section 45AG states:

“(1) A corporation commits an offence if:

- (a) a contract, arrangement or understanding contains a cartel provision; and*
- (b) the corporation gives effect to the cartel provision”.*⁴³

*“(2) The fault element for paragraph (1)(a) is knowledge or belief”.*⁴⁴

Civil Penalties

Section 45AJ states:

“A corporation contravenes this section if:

- (a) the corporation makes a contract or arrangement, or arrives at an understanding; and*
- (b) the contract, arrangement or understanding contains a cartel provision”.*⁴⁵

Section 45AK states:

“(1) A corporation contravenes this section if:

- (a) a contract, arrangement or understanding contains a cartel provision; and*
- (b) the corporation gives effect to the cartel provision”.*⁴⁶

The ACCC can bring civil proceedings for the recovery of pecuniary penalties on behalf of the Commonwealth within six years of a contravention.⁴⁷

Cartel Provisions

The above sections all require a cartel provision. The legislation provides a variety of provisions that can constitute a cartel provision.⁴⁸ The type most relevant to petrol pricing is discussed below.

Section 45AD states:

“(1) For the purposes of this Act, a provision of a contract, arrangement or understanding is a cartel provision if:

- (a) either of the following conditions is satisfied in relation to the provision:*

⁴¹ Ibid s 45F.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid s 45AG.

⁴⁴ Ibid s 45AG.

⁴⁵ Ibid s 45AJ.

⁴⁶ Ibid s 45AK.

⁴⁷ Ibid s 77.

⁴⁸ Ibid s 45AD.

(i) the purpose/effect condition set out in subsection (2);

(ii)... and

(b) the competition condition set out in subsection (4) is satisfied in relation to the provision.”⁴⁹

“(2) The purpose/effect condition is satisfied if the provision has the purpose, or has or is likely to have the effect, of directly or indirectly:

(a) fixing, controlling or maintaining; or

(b) providing for the fixing, controlling or maintaining of; the price for...

(c) goods or services supplied,... by any or all of the parties to the contract, arrangement or understanding;”⁵⁰

“(4) The competition condition is satisfied if at least 2 of the parties to the contract, arrangement or understanding:

(a) are or are likely to be...

in competition with each other in relation to:

(c) ...the supply of those goods or services in trade or commerce”.⁵¹

A notable section further explaining what constitutes a cartel provision is s 45AD(6).⁵² It states that recommending prices is not considered price fixing for the purpose of this law.⁵³

3.3 Case Interpretation of Legislation

A contract, agreement or understanding

The criminal offences and civil penalties refer to “a contract, arrangement or understanding” – representing “a spectrum of consensual dealings”.⁵⁴ Of these, an understanding provides the most flexibility and lowest bar in establishing a valid consensual dealing. As this is the baseline for bringing successful proceedings, ‘an understanding’ will be discussed in detail.

In the Geelong case, Gray J found an understanding can be arrived at rather than explicitly made.⁵⁵ It can be tacit, and therefore can be arrived at “by words or acts, signifying an intention to act in a particular way”, but there must be a “meeting of the minds”.⁵⁶ There also must be enough substance within the understanding for it to contain a cartel provision that can have a purpose or an effect.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Ibid s 45AD(1).

⁵⁰ Ibid s 45AD(2).

⁵¹ Ibid s 45AD(4).

⁵² Ibid s 45AD(6).

⁵³ Ibid s 45AD(6).

⁵⁴ *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) v Leahy Petroleum Pty Ltd* (2007) 160 FCR 32, [24].

⁵⁵ Ibid [27].

⁵⁶ Ibid [28].

⁵⁷ Ibid [32].

The commitment element

In previous cases brought by the ACCC, commitment has been a major barrier to establishing a ‘contract, arrangement or understanding’.⁵⁸ For an understanding to be arrived at, there must be an “assumption of an obligation”, and a party must not be free “to do whatever it wishes”.⁵⁹ “A mere hope or expectation that a party will act in a particular way is insufficient”.⁶⁰

3.4 The 2017 Amendment

In 2017, the CCA was amended to prohibit, for the first time, engaging in a ‘concerted practice’.⁶¹

Section 45 of the Act now includes:

“(1) A corporation must not:

(c) engage with one or more persons in a concerted practice that has the purpose, or has or is likely to have the effect, of substantially lessening competition.”⁶²

However, a ‘concerted practice’ was not inserted into the penalty sections in the act. Further, this novel category has not been tested, so the legal effect of this section is unclear - though it likely broadens the scope of anti-competitive behaviour captured by the CCA.⁶³ The Explanatory Memorandum states that a “concerted practice may exist even if none of the parties is obliged, either legally or morally, to act in any particular way” – seemingly intending to remove the commitment requirement necessary for establishing an undertaking in the case of a ‘concerted practice’.⁶⁴ Further, an example used in the Explanatory Memorandum seems to directly relate to petrol prices and hypothetical communication between retailers who, despite never arriving at an understanding under the meaning in the Act, still communicate about price increases with the effect of substantially reducing competition – see appendix 12 for the extract.⁶⁵ However, the Explanatory Memorandum is only one element that can be considered by a court in the interpretation of a statute, and it is not determinative.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) v Leahy Petroleum Pty Ltd* (2007) 160 FCR 32; *Apco Service Stations Pty Ltd v Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)* (2005) 159 FCR 452.

⁵⁹ *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) v Leahy Petroleum Pty Ltd* (2007) 160 FCR 32, [37].

⁶⁰ *Ibid* [36].

⁶¹ *Competition and Consumer Amendment (Competition Policy Review) Act 2017* (Cth).

⁶² *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth) s 45.

⁶³ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Petrol price cycles in Australia* (Petrol Industry Report, 6 December 2018), 9.

⁶⁴ Explanatory Memorandum, *Competition and Consumer Amendment (Competition Policy Review) Bill 2017* (Cth), 29.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶⁶ *Scott-Mackenzie v Bail* [2017] VSCA 108, [50].

4. Determinants of Petrol Prices

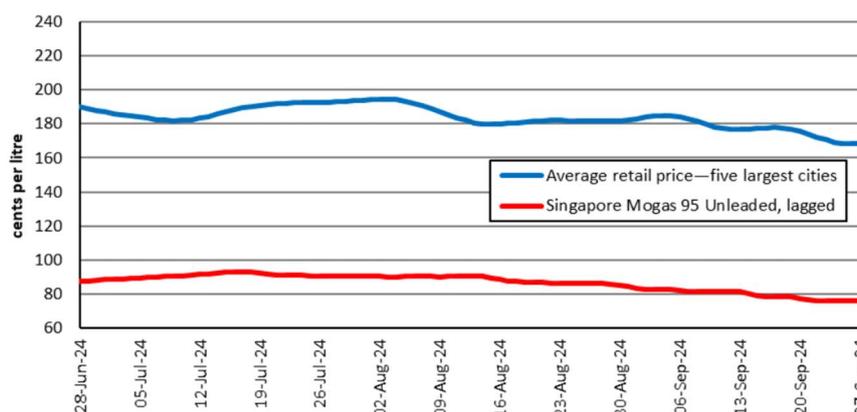
4.1 Underlying Pricing Factors

There are several factors that influence petrol prices across Australia including international benchmark prices, the value of the Australian dollar against the US dollar, and taxes. These factors provide background for the pricing of petrol, but because they effect all petrol stations in Australia, they do not explain the price discrepancy between Melton and other suburbs.

International Benchmark Prices

Around the world, fuel prices are most dependent on a country's corresponding regional market's benchmark price.⁶⁷ Australia belongs to the Asia-Pacific regional market and the trading centre is located in Singapore.⁶⁸ The benchmark price for unleaded petrol in Australia is Singapore Mogas 95 unleaded, which is highly correlated with wholesale gasoline prices.⁶⁹ Benchmark prices are linked to the price of the major input - crude oil - and its price also fluctuates as an internationally traded commodity.⁷⁰ Changes in the Mogas 95 generally have a two week delay in effecting Australian city prices due to the time taken to pass through the supply chain.⁷¹

Figure 12: The 7-day rolling average unleaded petrol price in the five largest Australian cities and 7-day rolling average of the Singapore Mogas 95 unleaded price lagged by 10 days



Source for figure 12: 'What affects fuel prices', Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (Web Page)

⁶⁷ 'What affects fuel prices', Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (Web Page) <<https://www.accc.gov.au/consumers/petrol-and-fuel/what-affects-fuel-prices>>; Australian Institute of Petroleum, *How are Petrol Prices Determined in Australia? (At a Glance, 1 May 2023)* <<https://www.aip.com.au/resources/glance-how-are-petrol-prices-determined-australia>>.

⁶⁸ Australian Institute of Petroleum, *How are Petrol Prices Determined in Australia? (At a Glance, 1 May 2023)*.

⁶⁹ 'What affects fuel prices', Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (Web Page); Australian Institute of Petroleum, *How are Petrol Prices Determined in Australia? (At a Glance, 1 May 2023)*; Zhongmin Wang, 'Station level gasoline demand in an Australian market with regular price cycles' (2009) 43(4) *Australian journal of agricultural and resource economics* 467; Abbas Valadkhani, 'Seasonal patterns in daily prices of unleaded petrol across Australia' (2013) 46 *Energy Policy* 720.

⁷⁰ 'What affects fuel prices', Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (Web Page); Abbas Valadkhani and Alperhan Babacan, 'Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia' (2014) 69 *Energy Policy* 179.

⁷¹ Australian Institute of Petroleum, *How are Petrol Prices Determined in Australia? (At a Glance, 1 May 2023)*; 'What affects fuel prices', Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (Web Page).

Strength of the Australian Dollar

The Mogas 95 is set in US dollars.⁷² Therefore, when the exchange rate between the Australian dollar and the US dollar changes, this can affect the price of petrol in Australia.⁷³

Taxes and Duties

Taxes and duties effect the retail price paid by consumers.⁷⁴ As of 1 May 2023, on average around Australia, Government taxes accounted for approximately 54 cents of the cost per litre, which was approximately 31% of the total retail cost.⁷⁵ This was made up of GST at the rate of 10% and the excise duty applied to fuel and petroleum products which from 5 August 2024 to 2 February 2025 is set at \$0.506 per litre of gasoline.⁷⁶

4.2 Price Cycles

Large cities generally follow a similar petrol price cycle – where prices slowly decrease and then sharply increase, so that when graphed there is a sawtooth pattern.⁷⁷ Petrol price cycles are not a result of changes in the wholesale price as these are more rigid – rather, it is caused by the pricing policies of retailers.⁷⁸ The literature refers to this behaviour as conforming to the Edgeworth price cycle equilibrium model.⁷⁹ It argues that because petrol is a relatively homogenous product, and prices are highly visible on price boards or via price comparison websites, consumers are sensitive to price changes and this contributes to price volatility.⁸⁰

⁷² 'What affects fuel prices', *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission* (Web Page).

⁷³ Ibid; Abbas Valadkhani and Alperhan Babacan, 'Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia' (2014) 69 *Energy Policy* 179; Arezoo Ghazanfari, 'What Drives Petrol Price Dispersion across Australian Cities?' (2022) 15(16) *Energies* 6025.

⁷⁴ 'What affects fuel prices', *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission* (Web Page); Australian Institute of Petroleum, *How are Petrol Prices Determined in Australia?* (At a Glance, 1 May 2023); Abbas Valadkhani and Alperhan Babacan, 'Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia' (2014) 69 *Energy Policy* 179; Abbas Valadkhani, 'Seasonal patterns in daily prices of unleaded petrol across Australia' (2013) 46 *Energy Policy* 720.

⁷⁵ Australian Institute of Petroleum, *How are Petrol Prices Determined in Australia?* (At a Glance, 1 May 2023).

⁷⁶ 'What affects fuel prices', *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission* (Web Page); 'Excise duty rates for fuel and petroleum products', *Australian Taxation Office* (Web Page, 31 July 2024) <<https://www.ato.gov.au/businesses-and-organisations/gst-excise-and-indirect-taxes/excise-on-fuel-and-petroleum-products/excise-duty-rates-for-fuel-and-petroleum-products>>.

⁷⁷ 'What affects fuel prices', *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission* (Web Page); Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Petrol price cycles in Australia* (Petrol Industry Report, 6 December 2018).

⁷⁸ 'What affects fuel prices', *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission* (Web Page); Zhongmin Wang, 'Station level gasoline demand in an Australian market with regular price cycles' (2009) 43(4) *Australian journal of agricultural and resource economics* 467.

⁷⁹ Zhongmin Wang, 'Station level gasoline demand in an Australian market with regular price cycles' (2009) 43(4) *Australian journal of agricultural and resource economics* 467.

⁸⁰ Australian Institute of Petroleum, *How are Petrol Prices Determined in Australia?* (At a Glance, 1 May 2023); Zhongmin Wang, 'Station level gasoline demand in an Australian market with regular price cycles' (2009) 43(4) *Australian journal of agricultural and resource economics* 467.

Within this model, there are three stages.⁸¹ The falling stage occurs when retailers undercut each other's prices to gain a greater market share and to increase their sales or match competitors prices to not lose sales.⁸² This occurs gradually until the price reaches the marginal cost – the cost added by supplying an additional unit – so that retailers are not making any profit.⁸³ When the price is at its lowest all retailers want to increase prices to regain a profit margin, but none want to be the first as they will lose market share until other retailers follow.⁸⁴ Eventually, a retailer will raise its price to a significantly higher price, and the majority of other retailers will follow - generally to a slightly lower price so as to maintain a greater market share than their competitors.⁸⁵ Then the cycle begins again.

The ACCC has a role in monitoring these price cycles – analysing average petrol prices daily in Australia's capital cities and 190 regional locations.⁸⁶ Generally, even if competing retailers are selling petrol at the same or similar price levels (parallel pricing) this does not constitute collusive behaviour if it is a result of independent decisions made by each retailer.⁸⁷ However, anomalies in the price cycle do trigger ACCC investigations into whether these outcomes are due to cartel conduct.⁸⁸

Recommendation

The ACCC should include Melton in the published petrol price data they currently collect. If anomalies or anti-competitive conduct is found, then follow up action should be undertaken.

If Melton is not included, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, with Consumer Affairs Victoria, should be part of a delegation to the ACCC advocating for Melton's inclusion.

Further, if a state-run petrol price tracking application is created, it should join the ACCC's Fuel Consultative Committee like WA FuelWatch.

⁸¹ Zhongmin Wang, 'Station level gasoline demand in an Australian market with regular price cycles' (2009) 43(4) *Australian journal of agricultural and resource economics* 467.

⁸² Ibid; Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Petrol price cycles in Australia* (Petrol Industry Report, 6 December 2018).

⁸³ Zhongmin Wang, 'Station level gasoline demand in an Australian market with regular price cycles' (2009) 43(4) *Australian journal of agricultural and resource economics* 467.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid; Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Petrol price cycles in Australia* (Petrol Industry Report, 6 December 2018).

⁸⁶ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Petrol price cycles in Australia* (Petrol Industry Report, 6 December 2018).

⁸⁷ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Petrol price cycles in Australia* (Petrol Industry Report, 6 December 2018).

⁸⁸ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Petrol price cycles in Australia* (Petrol Industry Report, 6 December 2018).

4.3 Local Pricing Factors

Specific characteristics of an area which influence supply and demand for petrol account for a considerable part of petrol price differences between areas.⁸⁹ Areas that share similar characteristics should generally have similar petrol prices.⁹⁰ This section discusses a range of factors in relation to Melton and comparable areas.

Competition

In terms of competition, there are two key elements to consider – the density of stations and whether there are any independent stations.

Station Density

It is well established that increased competition drives down prices as retailers decrease profit margins to gain market share - this applies to petrol retailers.⁹¹ It has been found that stations located in areas with a high density of petrol stations have lower retail petrol prices.⁹² However, it has also been found that it is not only regional or isolated locations that have large profit margins, but that excessive profit margins can be found in metropolitan Melbourne too.⁹³ This can often be due to a lack of vigorous competition between retailers.⁹⁴

Independent Retailers

The retailers that tend to most vigorously compete and therefore have the lowest prices are independent fuel retailers.⁹⁵ In 2017, overall, the lowest priced major retailer in Melbourne was United – an independent chain.⁹⁶ In each of Australia's largest cities, independent chains had the lowest prices in 2017.⁹⁷ Case studies have also shown smaller independent brands and independent retailers generally raise prices later than major chains.⁹⁸ As such, a larger presence of independent petrol retailers can increase competition.⁹⁹

⁸⁹ Arezoo Ghazanfari, 'What Drives Petrol Price Dispersion across Australian Cities?' (2022) 15(16) *Energies* 6025; Abbas Valadkhani and Alperhan Babacan, 'Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia' (2014) 69 *Energy Policy* 179; 'What affects fuel prices', *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission* (Web Page).

⁹⁰ Arezoo Ghazanfari, 'What Drives Petrol Price Dispersion across Australian Cities?' (2022) 15(16) *Energies* 6025.

⁹¹ Ibid; Australian Institute of Petroleum, *How are Petrol Prices Determined in Australia? (At a Glance, 1 May 2023)*.

⁹² Arezoo Ghazanfari, 'What Drives Petrol Price Dispersion across Australian Cities?' (2022) 15(16) *Energies* 6025.

⁹³ Abbas Valadkhani and Alperhan Babacan, 'Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia' (2014) 69 *Energy Policy* 179.

⁹⁴ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Petrol price cycles in Australia* (Petrol Industry Report, 6 December 2018).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Petrol prices are not the same: report on petrol prices by major retailer in 2017* (Petrol Industry Reports, 13 May 2018).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Petrol price cycles in Australia* (Petrol Industry Report, 6 December 2018).

⁹⁹ Abbas Valadkhani and Alperhan Babacan, 'Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia' (2014) 69 *Energy Policy* 179.

Recommendation

The City of Melton Local Council and the Victorian Department of Transport and Planning, in consultation with the Victorian Planning Authority, should review land use and planning restrictions in Melton to ensure there are no impediments to entry to the market by an independent petrol retailer.

Fuel Price Transparency Schemes

Further, price-monitoring applications such as FuelWatch in WA and FuelCheck in NSW can also stimulate competition.¹⁰⁰ This is because it enhances transparency and knowledge of petrol prices for consumers.¹⁰¹ In the case of FuelWatch, there is a 24 hour stay on prices, which may mute the competitive benefits because brands are not able to promptly undercut other retailers.¹⁰² Therefore, a system based on FuelCheck in NSW may be preferable, as prices can be changed at will by retailers, but must be reported within 30 minutes so consumers can view them online.¹⁰³

Although there are similar informal applications in Victoria, they have limitations.¹⁰⁴ For example, prices may be in bands so not specific; information is user supplied so may not be correct or always available; detailed information is sometimes behind a paywall; or information is not comprehensive in covering all retailers - ultimately these apps do not provide timely or complete data for consumers.¹⁰⁵ In contrast, every other state and territory now has a fuel price transparency scheme that provides near real-time pricing data for each petrol retailer.¹⁰⁶

Although there does not appear to be evidence that fuel price transparency schemes decrease prices overall, the ACCC states that monitoring fuel prices and filling up at strategic times can contribute to substantial savings for households, and that these schemes support consumers in finding the cheapest options.¹⁰⁷ Particularly for areas with less vigorous competition, access to reliable data would allow consumers to decide whether it is worth driving to another area that has lower prices.

Review of the Victorian Parliamentary Hansard indicates that a fuel price transparency scheme has not been seriously considered for implementation, despite other state schemes being

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 'There are tools available to save money on fuel' (Media Release, 20 August 2024).

¹⁰³ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 'There are tools available to save money on fuel' (Media Release, 20 August 2024).

¹⁰⁴ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 'There are tools available to save money on fuel' (Media Release, 20 August 2024).

¹⁰⁵ Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into fuel prices in regional Victoria* (February 2018).

¹⁰⁶ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 'There are tools available to save money on fuel' (Media Release, 20 August 2024).

¹⁰⁷ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 'There are tools available to save money on fuel' (Media Release, 20 August 2024); Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into fuel prices in regional Victoria* (February 2018).

occasionally mentioned in brief.¹⁰⁸ In the *Inquiry into fuel prices in regional Victoria* produced by the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, the different state and territory fuel transparency schemes in place before February 2018 were considered.¹⁰⁹ Notably, while the findings wanted to encourage the use of petrol monitoring applications, and they acknowledged the limitations of existing applications then available in Victoria as a result of not having a fuel price transparency scheme, they did not recommend the implementation of such a scheme.¹¹⁰

Recommendation

The Victorian Parliament should legislate the implementation of a state-run petrol price tracking application similar to FuelCheck in NSW. This could be administered by Consumer Affairs Victoria in the way NSW Fair Trading administers FuelCheck.

Melton, Bacchus Marsh, Caroline Springs and Sunbury Comparison

Melton has 12 petrol stations and no independents.¹¹¹ Bacchus Marsh has seven stations but one is an independent.¹¹² Caroline Springs technically only has four major stations.¹¹³ However, it has bordering suburbs which have petrol stations, including an independent only 3.5km away from the centre of Caroline Springs, so competition can be considered high in the area.¹¹⁴ As such, the lack of an independent retailer in Melton may account for a portion of the price difference between Melton, Bacchus Marsh and Caroline Springs, as this lack of a vigorous competitor allows for higher profit margins in Melton.

As in Melton, Sunbury does not have any independent stations, and it only has seven stations – suggesting less competition in the area.¹¹⁵ However, Sunbury’s average price per litre is still lower than Melton’s in the year to 18 September 2024.¹¹⁶

Transport Costs

Transport costs also effect retail petrol prices.¹¹⁷ This is particularly relevant for regional areas as they often have higher transportation costs due to their distance from terminal gates where

¹⁰⁸ See, eg, Victoria, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Council, 14 September 2016, (Jaclyn Symes).

¹⁰⁹ Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into fuel prices in regional Victoria* (February 2018).

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, ‘Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set’ (Looker Studio).

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ ‘Google Maps’, Google (Map) <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/OOM+Energy+-+Melbourne%E2%80%99s+24+Hours+Fuel+Station,+Western+Highway,+Burnside+VIC/caroline+springs/@-37.7546851,144.7372947,14.43z/data=!4m13!4m12!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad68bb5440d8b07:0x4a8b4153b2d9df1!2m2!1d144.7570811!2d-37.7627235!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f4e167faac63:0x5045675218cf6b0!2m2!1d144.7356782!2d-37.7431281?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI0MDkyNC4wIjKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D>.

¹¹⁵ Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, ‘Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set’ (Looker Studio).

¹¹⁶ Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, ‘Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set’ (Looker Studio).

¹¹⁷ Valadkhani, Abbas and Alperhan Babacan, ‘Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia’ (2014) 69 *Energy Policy* 179; ‘What

petrol tankers fill up.¹¹⁸ Generally, transportation costs are passed onto consumers.¹¹⁹ Measuring an area's distance from the major Victorian terminals that are in the Yarraville/Newport area and Geelong, can provide an insight into transportation costs.

Melton, Bacchus Marsh, Caroline Springs and Sunbury Comparison

Taking the shortest route from the Yarraville Mobil Terminal, the approximate distance away for each area is: Melton, 38km; Bacchus Marsh, 49km; Caroline Springs, 21km; and Sunbury, 44km.¹²⁰ As Melton is not the furthest away from the terminal, this factor does not seem to explain its higher prices.

Taking the shortest route from the Geelong Viva Energy Refinery, the approximate distance away for each area is: Melton, 59km; Bacchus Marsh, 50km; Caroline Springs, 60km; and Sunbury, 83km.¹²¹ Again, Melton would not seem to have significantly higher transport costs as its distance from the terminal is not the highest.

affects fuel prices', *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission* (Web Page); Australian Institute of Petroleum, *How are Petrol Prices Determined in Australia?* (At a Glance, 1 May 2023).

¹¹⁸ Arezoo Ghazanfari, 'What Drives Petrol Price Dispersion across Australian Cities?' (2022) 15(16) *Energies* 6025.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ 'Google Maps', *Google* (Map)

<[https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Mobil+Yarraville+Terminal,+29+Francis+St,+Spotswood+VIC+3015/Melton+VIC/@-37.7572431,144.6490358,12z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6673504f7284b:0xff732b5f8fdffc31!2m2!1d144.8961849!2d-](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Mobil+Yarraville+Terminal,+29+Francis+St,+Spotswood+VIC+3015/Melton+VIC/@-37.7572431,144.6490358,12z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6673504f7284b:0xff732b5f8fdffc31!2m2!1d144.8961849!2d-37.8220679!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6ecdffb149633:0x99962ac4a94dca9e!2m2!1d144.5779508!2d-37.6835831!3e0?entry=tту&_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D)

[37.8220679!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6956b81d87165:0x5045675218cd000!2m2!1d144.4463206!2d-37.6763789!3e0?entry=tту&_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Mobil+Yarraville+Terminal,+29+Francis+St,+Spotswood+VIC+3015/Bacchus+Marsh+VIC/@-37.753754,144.5041153,11z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6673504f7284b:0xff732b5f8fdffc31!2m2!1d144.8961849!2d-37.8220679!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6956b81d87165:0x5045675218cd000!2m2!1d144.4463206!2d-37.6763789!3e0?entry=tту&_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D)>; 'Google Maps', *Google* (Map)

<[https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Mobil+Yarraville+Terminal,+29+Francis+St,+Spotswood+VIC+3015/Bacchus+Marsh+VIC/@-37.753754,144.5041153,11z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6673504f7284b:0xff732b5f8fdffc31!2m2!1d144.8961849!2d-](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Mobil+Yarraville+Terminal,+29+Francis+St,+Spotswood+VIC+3015/Caroline+Springs+VIC/@-37.7841269,144.7794631,13z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6673504f7284b:0xff732b5f8fdffc31!2m2!1d144.8961849!2d-37.8220679!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f4e167faac63:0x5045675218cf6b0!2m2!1d144.7356782!2d-37.7431281!3e0?entry=tту&_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D)

[37.8220679!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f4e167faac63:0x5045675218cf6b0!2m2!1d144.7356782!2d-37.7431281!3e0?entry=tту&_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Mobil+Yarraville+Terminal,+29+Francis+St,+Spotswood+VIC+3015/Caroline+Springs+VIC/@-37.7841269,144.7794631,13z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6673504f7284b:0xff732b5f8fdffc31!2m2!1d144.8961849!2d-37.8220679!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f4e167faac63:0x5045675218cf6b0!2m2!1d144.7356782!2d-37.7431281!3e0?entry=tту&_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D)>; 'Google Maps', *Google* (Map)

<[https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Mobil+Yarraville+Terminal,+29+Francis+St,+Spotswood+VIC+3015/Caroline+Springs+VIC/@-37.7841269,144.7794631,13z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6673504f7284b:0xff732b5f8fdffc31!2m2!1d144.8961849!2d-](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Mobil+Yarraville+Terminal,+29+Francis+St,+Spotswood+VIC+3015/Sunbury+VIC/@-37.7011545,144.6584739,11z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6673504f7284b:0xff732b5f8fdffc31!2m2!1d144.8961849!2d-37.8220679!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f9776c84f27b:0x5045675218cce30!2m2!1d144.7116286!2d-37.5787769!3e0?entry=tту&_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D)

[37.8220679!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f9776c84f27b:0x5045675218cce30!2m2!1d144.7116286!2d-37.5787769!3e0?entry=tту&_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Mobil+Yarraville+Terminal,+29+Francis+St,+Spotswood+VIC+3015/Sunbury+VIC/@-37.7011545,144.6584739,11z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6673504f7284b:0xff732b5f8fdffc31!2m2!1d144.8961849!2d-37.8220679!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f9776c84f27b:0x5045675218cce30!2m2!1d144.7116286!2d-37.5787769!3e0?entry=tту&_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D)>; 'Google Maps', *Google* (Map)

<[\[37.7011545,144.6584739,11z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6673504f7284b:0xff732b5f8fdffc31!2m2!1d144.8961849!2d-\]\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Melton+VIC/@-37.877625,144.1733803,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecdf3fce29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-37.8220679!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f9776c84f27b:0x5045675218cce30!2m2!1d144.7116286!2d-37.5787769!3e0?entry=tту&_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D\)](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Melton+VIC/@-37.877625,144.1733803,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecdf3fce29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-37.7011545,144.6584739,11z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6673504f7284b:0xff732b5f8fdffc31!2m2!1d144.8961849!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

¹²¹ 'Google Maps', *Google* (Map)

<[https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Melton+VIC/@-37.877625,144.1733803,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecdf3fce29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Melton+VIC/@-37.877625,144.1733803,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecdf3fce29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-37.8220679!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f9776c84f27b:0x5045675218cce30!2m2!1d144.7116286!2d-37.5787769!3e0?entry=tту&_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D)

Market Size

Population as a proxy for market size has also been found to influence prices.¹²² However, there is conflicting evidence as to whether a larger population is positively or negatively correlated with petrol prices.¹²³ For example, a larger population means there will likely be more people consuming petrol and this greater demand would put upward pressure on prices.¹²⁴ However, a larger population would generally be associated with greater economies of scale and scope.¹²⁵ This would put downward pressure on prices as retailers could achieve larger profits from selling petrol at lower prices due to an increased volume of petrol and convenience store sales.¹²⁶

Melton, Bacchus Marsh, Caroline Springs and Sunbury Comparison

In terms of the populations in Melton, Bacchus Marsh, Caroline Springs and Sunbury, Melton has the highest population – with an estimated population of 50,490.¹²⁷ (See appendix 13 for a

[>
<\[¹²² Ibid; Valadkhani, Abbas and Alperhan Babacan, 'Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia' \\(2014\\) 69 *Energy Policy* 179; Australian Institute of Petroleum, *How are Petrol Prices Determined in Australia? \\(At a Glance, 1 May 2023\\)*.\]\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Sunbury+VIC/@-37.8253678,144.2879933,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecdf3fce29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-38.0764989!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f9776c84f27b:0x5045675218c30!2m2!1d144.7116286!2d-37.5787769!3e0?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D>.</p></div><div data-bbox=\)](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Bacchus+Marsh+VIC/@-37.8757804,144.0725163,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecdf3fce29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-38.0764989!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6956b81d87165:0x5045675218cd000!2m2!1d144.4463206!2d-37.6763789!3e0?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D>; 'Google Maps', Google (Map)
<<a href=)

¹²³ Arezoo Ghazanfari, 'What Drives Petrol Price Dispersion across Australian Cities?' (2022) 15(16) *Energies* 6025; Valadkhani, Abbas and Alperhan Babacan, 'Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia' (2014) 69 *Energy Policy* 179.

¹²⁴ Arezoo Ghazanfari, 'What Drives Petrol Price Dispersion across Australian Cities?' (2022) 15(16) *Energies* 6025.

¹²⁵ Valadkhani, Abbas and Alperhan Babacan, 'Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia' (2014) 69 *Energy Policy* 179.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ 'Growth Statistics', *City of Melton* (Web Page) <<https://www.melton.vic.gov.au/Council/About-the-City/Demographics/Growth-statistics#:~:text=The%20population%20estimate%20for%20the,as%20of%202023%20was%20206%2C070.&text=The%20Australian%20Bureau%20of%20Statistics%20regularly%20releases%20regional%20d>

detailed discussion). As the effect of a higher population is unknown, this does not definitively explain why Melton's prices are so high. Even if a larger population increased prices, because Melton has a greater number of petrol stations, this would likely mitigate some of these effects due to the greater supply.

Number of Motor Vehicles

It has been found that an increase in the number of petrol vehicles is associated with an increase in petrol prices.¹²⁸ This aligns with the economic theory that increased demand increases prices.

Melton, Bacchus Marsh, Caroline Springs and Sunbury Comparison

The 2021 census indicated that in the Greater Melbourne Area, 51% of households owned two or more motor vehicles.¹²⁹ In the City of Melton – which includes both Melton and Caroline Springs - 63% of households owned two or more cars in 2021.¹³⁰ In comparison, 65% of households in Moorabool Shire (Bacchus Marsh's Local Government Area) and 61% of households in Hume (Sunbury's Local Government Area) owned two or more cars in 2021.¹³¹ Based on these figures, it can be concluded that multiple car ownership does not explain the higher petrol prices in Melton.

Public Transport Availability

It has been found that access to public transport is correlated with lower petrol prices.¹³² A sustainable public transport system decreases reliance on motor vehicles by providing a substitute service.¹³³ This in turn decreases reliance on petrol and increases demand elasticity because petrol is less essential, as consumers are not as obliged to continue purchasing petrol when the price is high.

[ata%20on,birth%2C%20deaths%20and%20migration>](https://dbr.abs.gov.au/); 'Data by Region', *Australian Bureau of Statistics* (Web Page) <<https://dbr.abs.gov.au/>>.

¹²⁸ Abbas Valadkhani and Alperhan Babacan, 'Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia' (2014) 69 *Energy Policy* 179; Arezoo, Ghazanfari 'What Drives Petrol Price Dispersion across Australian Cities?' (2022) 15(16) *Energies* 6025.

¹²⁹ 'City of Melton: Numbers of Cars Per Household', *Informed Decisions* (Web Page) <<https://profile.id.com.au/melton/car-ownership>>.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ 'Moorabool Shire: Number of Cars Per Household', *Informed Decisions* (Web Page) <<https://profile.id.com.au/moorabool/car-ownership?WebID=10>>; 'Hume City: Number of Cars Per Household', *Informed Decisions* (Web Page) <<https://profile.id.com.au/hume/car-ownership?WebID=10>>.

¹³² Ghazanfari, Arezoo, 'What Drives Petrol Price Dispersion across Australian Cities?' (2022) 15(16) *Energies* 6025.

¹³³ Ibid.

Melton, Bacchus Marsh, Caroline Springs and Sunbury Comparison

Melton, Bacchus Marsh and Caroline Springs are only serviced by V-line trains, whereas Sunbury has V-Line trains and Metro Trains.¹³⁴ All these suburbs are additionally serviced by buses.¹³⁵ For a detailed account of the services and their frequency see appendix 14.

Generally, V-line services from Melton and Caroline Springs to Melbourne run every 20 to 30 minutes during the day on weekdays.¹³⁶ The peak frequency of buses in the City of Melton Local Government Area (which includes Caroline Springs) is approximately 30 minutes for most routes.¹³⁷ As the bus lines are indirect, travel times are often double the travel time in a car.¹³⁸ As a result of poor service, only 1% of trips made in the local government area are by bus.¹³⁹

Bacchus Marsh is generally serviced less by the V-line service than Melton.¹⁴⁰ Bus service frequency in Bacchus Marsh appears to be comparable to Melton.¹⁴¹

Sunbury's Metro Train service to Melbourne during peak hour tends to run far more frequently than the V-line services in Melton.¹⁴² Sunbury train station is additionally serviced by a V-line.¹⁴³

¹³⁴ 'Victorian train network map', Public Transport Victoria (Network Map PDF)

<<https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/more/maps/>>.

¹³⁵ City of Melton, 'Bus Network', *Moving Melton* (Web Page)

<<https://www.movingmelton.com.au/busnetwork#:~:text=Peak%20frequency%20of%20most%20routes,the%20minimum%20service%20level%20criteria>>; Bacchus Marsh, VIC 3340, Australia', Public Transport Victoria (Map)

<https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/place/#PlacePage:::isModalOpen=false&label=Bacchus%20Marsh%2C%20VIC%203340%2C%20Australia&lat=-37.67564&lon=144.4363&_auth=4424a7eea3b91b78dbf3c446cc622cc7a84f638862d441e87543f4a022bba8ea>; 'Sunbury, VIC 3429, Australia', Public Transport Victoria (Map)

<https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/place/#PlacePage:::isModalOpen=false&label=Sunbury%2C%20VIC%203429%2C%20Australia&lat=-37.58006&lon=144.7291&_auth=9768c44990fd01792c303a690f2a4dc21e874fc253a6defcf9ded21a4cfc622a>.

¹³⁶ 'Ballarat-Wendouree - Melbourne via Melton', Public Transport Victoria (Timetable)

<<https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/route/timetable/1728/ballarat-wendouree-melbourne-via-melton/>>.

¹³⁷ City of Melton, 'Bus Network', *Moving Melton* (Web Page)

<<https://www.movingmelton.com.au/busnetwork#:~:text=Peak%20frequency%20of%20most%20routes,the%20minimum%20service%20level%20criteria>>.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ 'Ballarat-Wendouree - Melbourne via Melton', Public Transport Victoria (Timetable).

¹⁴¹ 'Bacchus Marsh, VIC 3340, Australia', Public Transport Victoria (Map)

<https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/place/#PlacePage:::isModalOpen=false&label=Bacchus%20Marsh%2C%20VIC%203340%2C%20Australia&lat=-37.67564&lon=144.4363&_auth=4424a7eea3b91b78dbf3c446cc622cc7a84f638862d441e87543f4a022bba8ea>.

¹⁴² 'Sunbury Line', Public Transport Victoria (Timetable)

<<https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/route/timetable/14/sunbury/>>.

¹⁴³ 'Sunbury Railway Station', Public Transport Victoria (Web Page)

<https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/stop/1187/sunbury-station/3/regional-train/#StopPage:::datetime=2024-10-23T08%3A56%3A37.408Z&directionId=-1&showAllDay=false&_auth=023dfcbbdd16ac25c274737ef2d89923604272012bcb37faa12af737cf38fd20>.

The buses in Sunbury overall tend to run slightly more frequently than in the other comparable suburbs.¹⁴⁴

While Sunbury seems to have better public transportation options, the other comparable suburbs do not, so this does not seem to explain Melton's higher prices.

¹⁴⁴ 'Sunbury, VIC 3429, Australia', Public Transport Victoria (Map)
<https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/place/#PlacePage:::isModalOpen=false&label=Sunbury%2C%20VIC%203429%2C%20Australia&lat=-37.58006&lon=144.7291&_auth=9768c44990fd01792c303a690f2a4dc21e874fc253a6defcf9ded21a4cfc622a>.

5. The Effect of Petrol Prices

5.1 High Petrol Prices Threaten Wellbeing

It has been found that increases in petrol prices significantly reduce subjective wellbeing (SWB) and is associated with heightened psychological distress.¹⁴⁵ Further, it has been found that price volatility has a negative effect on SWB.¹⁴⁶ This could be due to the unpredictable nature of petrol prices making budgeting household expenses more difficult.¹⁴⁷ It has been found that people can adapt better to a certainty which is unpleasant, compared to continued uncertainty.¹⁴⁸ This could partially explain why studies have shown that rises in petrol prices have a greater negative impact on SWB than the loss of purchasing power it accounts for.¹⁴⁹

5.2 Factors That May Worsen the Effects in Melton

There are certain factors that, on average, increase the negative effect petrol price rises have on SWB. Factors that are relevant in the Melton context are: the reliance on cars and lower than average incomes. There may also be negative flow on effects in Melton.

Reliance On Cars

In Australia, urban sprawl and the lack of public transportation means there is often the problem of ‘forced car ownership’.¹⁵⁰ This has been strongly associated with households who live on the urban fringe and have low incomes.¹⁵¹ The issue has been raised in local media, with Melton resident Paul Dymock stating: “[w]ith a lack of public transport here you’re forced to use fuel”.¹⁵² Forced car ownership means consumers must absorb higher prices and allocate more of their disposable income to petrol as they do not have access to an adequate substitute.¹⁵³ Evidence shows that forced car ownership is associated with transport poverty which “occurs when a household is forced to consume more travel costs than it can reasonably afford,

¹⁴⁵ Kushneel Prakash, Sefa Awaworyi Churchill and Russell Smyth, ‘Petrol Prices and Subjective Wellbeing’ (2020) 90 *Energy Economics* Article 104867; Carol Graham and Soumya Chattopadhyay, ‘(Un?)Happiness and Gasoline Prices in the United States’ (Research Report, Brookings Institution, 19 October 2010).

¹⁴⁶ Kushneel Prakash, Sefa Awaworyi Churchill and Russell Smyth, ‘Petrol Prices and Subjective Wellbeing’ (2020) 90 *Energy Economics* Article 104867.

¹⁴⁷ Carol Graham and Soumya Chattopadhyay, ‘(Un?)Happiness and Gasoline Prices in the United States’ (Research Report, Brookings Institution, 19 October 2010).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid; Kushneel Prakash, Sefa Awaworyi Churchill and Russell Smyth, ‘Petrol Prices and Subjective Wellbeing’ (2020) 90 *Energy Economics* Article 104867.

¹⁵⁰ Graham Currie, Alexa Delbosc and Katerina Pavkova, ‘Alarming Trends in the Growth of Forced Car Ownership in Melbourne’ (Research Paper, Australasian Transport Research Forum, 30 October – 1 November 2018); Kushneel Prakash, Sefa Awaworyi Churchill and Russell Smyth, ‘Petrol Prices and Subjective Wellbeing’ (2020) 90 *Energy Economics* Article 104867.

¹⁵¹ Graham Currie, Alexa Delbosc and Katerina Pavkova, ‘Alarming Trends in the Growth of Forced Car Ownership in Melbourne’ (Research Paper, Australasian Transport Research Forum, 30 October – 1 November 2018).

¹⁵² Liam McNally, ‘Petrol ‘price gouging’’, *Melton & Moorabool Star Weekly* (online, 25 March 2024) <<https://meltonmoorabool.starweekly.com.au/news/petrol-price-gouging/>>.

¹⁵³ Kushneel Prakash, Sefa Awaworyi Churchill and Russell Smyth, ‘Petrol Prices and Subjective Wellbeing’ (2020) 90 *Energy Economics* Article 104867.

especially costs relating to motor car ownership and usage”.¹⁵⁴ This can also result in spending being directed away from other wellbeing enhancing activities.¹⁵⁵ Consequently, it has been found that those who do not live in the city or inner suburbs, and therefore do not have access to reliable, and frequent public transportation options are disadvantaged more by high petrol prices than those who live in the inner suburbs and city.¹⁵⁶

The Melton local government area is more reliant on cars than Victoria and Australia on average. In 2016, the percentage of people living in Melton that travelled to work by car was 78.2% and those that took public transport accounted for 8.6%.¹⁵⁷ Comparable numbers for Victoria as a whole are 68% and 12.6% respectively.¹⁵⁸ (While figures are available for 2021, they were impacted by ‘Covid era’ work from home policies). Further, in the City of Melton, 63% of households owned two or more cars in 2021 compared to 51% of households in the Greater Melbourne Area.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, between 2011 and 2016 Melton was identified as an area which had the highest levels of growth (50%+) in forced car ownership.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, it is likely that the high petrol prices in Melton are having a significant negative effect on resident’s wellbeing because residents in Melton overall have a higher dependency on cars.

Recommendation

In collaboration with the Department of Transport and Planning and VicRoads, Public Transport Victoria should review the public transportation in Melton to determine how best to increase public transportation options to decrease the reliance on cars in Melton.

Low Income

It has been widely established that households with income levels below the median are more adversely affected by high petrol prices than those who are richer.¹⁶¹ This is likely due to the

¹⁵⁴ Brendan Gleeson and Bill Randolph, ‘Social Disadvantage and Planning in the Sydney Context’ (2002) 20(1) *Urban Policy and Research* 101, 102; Graham Currie, Alexa Delbosc and Katerina Pavkova, ‘Alarming Trends in the Growth of Forced Car Ownership in Melbourne’ (Research Paper, Australasian Transport Research Forum, 30 October 2018 – 1 November 2018).

¹⁵⁵ Kushneel Prakash, Sefa Awaworyi Churchill and Russell Smyth, ‘Petrol Prices and Subjective Wellbeing’ (2020) 90 *Energy Economics* Article 104867.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘Melton’, 2016 Census All persons QuickStats (Web Page) <<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2016/UCL211004>>.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ ‘City of Melton: Numbers of Cars Per Household’, Informed Decisions (Web Page).

¹⁶⁰ Graham Currie, Alexa Delbosc and Katerina Pavkova, ‘Alarming Trends in the Growth of Forced Car Ownership in Melbourne’ (Research Paper, Australasian Transport Research Forum, 30 October 2018 – 1 November 2018).

¹⁶¹ Abbas Valadkhani and Alperhan Babacan, ‘Modelling how much extra motorists pay on the road: A cross-sectional study of profit margins of unleaded petrol in Australia’ (2014) 69 *Energy Policy* 179; Arezoo Ghazanfari, ‘What Drives Petrol Price Dispersion across Australian Cities?’ (2022) 15(16) *Energies* 6025; Carol Graham and Soumya Chattopadhyay, ‘(Un?)Happiness and Gasoline Prices in the United States’ (Research Report, Brookings Institution, 19 October 2010).

budget constraint effect where, because they have less disposable income, it is more difficult for these households to absorb the higher costs.¹⁶²

The individual median weekly income in Melton is lower than the median Victorian at \$786 compared to \$803.¹⁶³ The median weekly income for families in Melton was \$2,051 compared to \$2,136 in Victoria as a whole.¹⁶⁴ High inflation in recent years has also decreased the purchasing power of Australian households overall, and this is likely worsening the financial stress resulting from high petrol prices.¹⁶⁵ Residents were quoted in the local newspaper, with Paul Dymock saying: “In this cost of living crisis...every cent counts”, and Jackie Licitra saying: “the cost of living is already crippling households” and that “Melton is one of the most challenged suburbs with people who cannot afford to live in other suburbs and yet [they] pay the highest fuel prices”.¹⁶⁶ It is likely the high petrol prices in Melton are having a substantial negative effect on the wellbeing of residents.

Effect on Community Connections

Although difficult to quantify, there is a well-founded concern that the Melton community may be negatively affected due to changing consumer behaviour resulting from high petrol prices. For example, some Melton residents have been driving to nearby suburbs to fill their cars, and encouraging others to do so via the ‘Melton Fuel Group’ – a community Facebook page.¹⁶⁷ Paul Dymock was quoted in the local newspaper saying they “end up going to Bacchus Marsh or Taylors Hill to get [their] fuel, then plan all [their] shopping around going to a cheaper fuel place, so Melton loses [their] money entirely”.¹⁶⁸ This has the risk of reducing business activity more broadly in Melton, where local business may already be under pressure due to overall consumption growth already slowing.¹⁶⁹

Further, it has been found that driving can be important for maintaining social networks which influences overall happiness, and that decreased driving reduces out-of-home activity.¹⁷⁰ Residents may attempt to cut out less essential trips such as those involving the maintenance of social networks in order to save money. Overall, this could result in a less vibrant community with flow on effects to mental health.

¹⁶² Carol Graham and Soumya Chattopadhyay, ‘(Un?)Happiness and Gasoline Prices in the United States’ (Research Report, Brookings Institution, 19 October 2010).

¹⁶³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘Melton’, *2021 Census All persons QuickStats* (Web Page).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Benjamin Beckers et al, ‘Developments in Income and Consumption Across Household Groups’ (Bulletin, Reserve Bank of Australia, 25 January 2024).

¹⁶⁶ Liam McNally, ‘Petrol ‘price gouging’’, *Melton & Moorabool Star Weekly* (online, 25 March 2024) <<https://meltonmoorabool.starweekly.com.au/news/petrol-price-gouging/>>.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Melton Fuel Group’, Facebook (Facebook Group).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Monthly Household Spending Indicator: Experimental estimates of household spending’, *Australian Bureau of Statistics* (Web Page, 4 October 2024).

<<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/finance/monthly-household-spending-indicator/latest-release>>; Beckers, Benjamin et al, ‘Developments in Income and Consumption Across Household Groups’ (Bulletin, Reserve Bank of Australia, 25 January 2024).

¹⁷⁰ Kushneel Prakash, Sefa Awaworyi Churchill and Russell Smyth, ‘Petrol Prices and Subjective Wellbeing’ (2020) 90 *Energy Economics* Article 104867.

6. Conclusion

This report sought to investigate the high petrol prices in Melton. Of the typical western suburbs, it was found that Melton has the highest average petrol price per litre. It was also established that Melton has very little petrol price variation. By analysing some determinants of petrol prices, it appears that Melton has disproportionately high prices compared to other similar areas. Together, this provides prima facie evidence that there may not be effective and vigorous competition in Melton.

This report also highlighted the law surrounding cartel conduct set out in the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010*. It was found that there is a high bar for establishing cartel conduct, but that the ACCC does have the ability to enforce this legislation in relevant cases.

The effects of high petrol prices were also discussed. Here, the report found that the volatility and high petrol prices in Melton are likely having a significant, negative effect on the wellbeing of Melton residents.

Recommendations for how market conditions could be improved were provided throughout the text and collated as part of the [executive summary](#).

Appendix

Appendix 1: Melton - report collected data set

Melton Fuel Prices 5-Aug to 24-Aug																					
	5-Aug	6-Aug	7-Aug	8-Aug	9-Aug	10-Aug	11-Aug	12-Aug	13-Aug	14-Aug	15-Aug	16-Aug	17-Aug	18-Aug	19-Aug	20-Aug	21-Aug	22-Aug	23-Aug	24-Aug	
EG Ampol Melton (Coburns Road)	209.9	207.9	203.9	199.9	193.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	
7-Eleven Melton	209.9	207.9	205.9	199.9	197.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	
7-Eleven Melton South	209.9	207.9	205.9	199.9	197.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	
Coles Express Melton	209.9	207.9	205.9	199.9	193.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	181.9	181.9	181.9	179.9	179.9	
BP Melton	209.9	207.9	205.9	200.9	197.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	191.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	181.9	181.9	181.9	179.9	179.9	
Coles Express Melton South	209.9	207.9	205.9	199.9	193.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	
7-Eleven Melton East	209.9	207.9	205.9	199.9	197.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	
Coles Express Melton High St	209.9	207.9	205.9	199.9	193.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	179.9	
EG Ampol Melton (Melton Highway)	209.9	207.9	203.9	199.9	193.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	
Ampol Melton	209.9	207.9	205.9	199.9	197.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	219.9	219.9	219.9	179.9	179.9	
Ampol Melton (Gisborn Melton Road)	209.9	207.9	205.9	199.9	197.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	180.9	179.9	
EG Ampol Melton South		207.9	205.9	199.9	197.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	
Average	209.9	207.9	205.5667	199.9833	196.2333	193.9	193.9	191.9	190.0667	189.9	187.9	184.5667	183.9	183.9	183.9	184.9	184.9	184.9	180.3167	179.9	
Median	209.9	207.9	205.9	199.9	197.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	181.9	181.9	181.9	179.9	179.9	
Minimum Price	209.9	207.9	203.9	199.9	193.9	193.9	193.9	191.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	

Melton Fuel Prices 25-Aug to 12-Sep																			
	25-Aug	26-Aug	27-Aug	28-Aug	29-Aug	30-Aug	31-Aug	1-Sep	2-Sep	3-Sep	4-Sep	5-Sep	6-Sep	7-Sep	8-Sep	9-Sep	10-Sep	11-Sep	12-Sep
EG Ampol Melton (Coburns Road)	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
7-Eleven Melton	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
7-Eleven Melton South	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Coles Express Melton	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
BP Melton	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Coles Express Melton South	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
7-Eleven Melton East	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Coles Express Melton High St	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
EG Ampol Melton (Melton Highway)	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Ampol Melton	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Ampol Melton (Gisborn Melton Road)	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	177.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
EG Ampol Melton South	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Average	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	175.15	175.15	175.15	175.15	201.4833	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Median	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Minimum Price	179.9	179.9	179.9	176.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9

Appendix Source 1: The Report Collected Data Set collated data from 'PetrolSpy Aus/NZ', PetrolSpy (Web Page) <<https://petrolspy.com.au/map/station/538ec34003643dbe108ca39d>>.

Appendix 2: Western Freeway between Melton and Caroline Springs - report collected data set

Western Freeway Between Melton and Caroline Springs 5-Aug to 24-Aug																				
	5-Aug	6-Aug	7-Aug	8-Aug	9-Aug	10-Aug	11-Aug	12-Aug	13-Aug	14-Aug	15-Aug	16-Aug	17-Aug	18-Aug	19-Aug	20-Aug	21-Aug	22-Aug	23-Aug	24-Aug
BP Rockbank Inbound	205.9	205.9	199.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	179.9
BP Rockbank Truckstop	205.9	205.9	199.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.8	179.9	179.9
7-Eleven Rockbank	205.9	205.9	199.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	179.9	179.9
Average	205.9	205.9	199.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	182.5333	179.9	179.9
Median	205.9	205.9	199.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	183.8	179.9	179.9
Minimum Price	205.9	205.9	199.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	179.9	179.9

Western Freeway Between Melton and Caroline Spring 25-Aug to 12-Sep																				
	25-Aug	26-Aug	27-Aug	28-Aug	29-Aug	30-Aug	31-Aug	1-Sep	2-Sep	3-Sep	4-Sep	5-Sep	6-Sep	7-Sep	8-Sep	9-Sep	10-Sep	11-Sep	12-Sep	
BP Rockbank Inbound	179.9	179.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	171.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
BP Rockbank Truckstop	179.9	179.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	171.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
7-Eleven Rockbank	179.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	171.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Average	179.9	178.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	171.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Median	179.9	179.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	171.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9
Minimum Price	179.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	176.9	171.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9

Appendix Source 2: The Report Collected Data Set collated data from 'PetrolSpy Aus/NZ', PetrolSpy (Web Page) <<https://petrolspy.com.au/map/station/538ec34003643dbe108ca39d>>.

Appendix 3: Bacchus Marsh - report collected data set

Bacchus Marsh Fuel Prices 5-Aug to 24-Aug																					
	5-Aug	6-Aug	7-Aug	8-Aug	9-Aug	10-Aug	11-Aug	12-Aug	13-Aug	14-Aug	15-Aug	16-Aug	17-Aug	18-Aug	19-Aug	20-Aug	21-Aug	22-Aug	23-Aug	24-Aug	
7-Eleven Bacchus Marsh	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	181.9	179.9	179.9
Caltex Darley	181.5	181.9	181.5		181.5	181.5	181.5		181.5				181.5		181.5						177.9
EG Ampol Bacchus Marsh	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	181.9	179.9	179.9
APCO Bacchus Marsh	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5		181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9
Coles Express Bacchus Marsh	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	181.9	181.9	179.9
Caltex Bacchus Marsh	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	182.7	181.5	181	177.9
BP Bacchus Marsh				189.9							189.9										179.9
Average	183.9	183.9667	183.9	185.3	184.38	183.9	183.9	184.38	183.9	184.38	185.3	184.38	183.9	184.38	183.9	184.4667	183.66	181.02	180.4167		178.9
Median	184.3	184.3	184.3	185.9	185.9	184.3	184.3	185.9	184.3	185.9	185.9	185.9	184.3	185.9	184.3	185.9	185.9	181.9	181		178.9
Minimum Price	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	181.5	177.9	177.9		177.9
Bacchus Marsh Fuel Prices 25-Aug to 12-Sep																					
	25-Aug	26-Aug	27-Aug	28-Aug	29-Aug	30-Aug	31-Aug	1-Sep	2-Sep	3-Sep	4-Sep	5-Sep	6-Sep	7-Sep	8-Sep	9-Sep	10-Sep	11-Sep	12-Sep		
7-Eleven Bacchus Marsh	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	
Caltex Darley	177.9	177.9				173.9	173.9					171.9								171.9	
EG Ampol Bacchus Marsh	179.9	179.9	179.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	
APCO Bacchus Marsh	177.9	177.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	171.9	171.9	171.9	171.9					171.9	171.9	
Coles Express Bacchus Marsh	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	179.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	
Caltex Bacchus Marsh	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	175.9	175.5	175.5	175.5	175.9	175.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9				173.9	171.9	
BP Bacchus Marsh						179.9			175.9											175.9	
Average	178.9	178.9	178.3	177.9	177.5	177.2714	176.8333	177.42	175.5667	175.5	174.7	174.2333	174.3	174.3	175.2333	174.3	173.9	173.5667	174.2333		
Median	178.9	178.9	179.9	177.9	177.9	176.7	176.7	177.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	174.9	173.9	173.9	175.9	173.9	172.9	172.9	172.9	173.9	
Minimum Price	177.9	177.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	171.9	171.9	171.9	171.9	173.9	171.9	171.9	171.9	171.9	171.9	

Appendix Source 3: The Report Collected Data Set collated data from 'PetrolSpy Aus/NZ', PetrolSpy (Web Page)
 <<https://petrolspy.com.au/map/station/538ec34003643dbe108ca39d>>.

Appendix 4: Caroline Springs and surrounds - report collected data set

Caroline Springs and Surrounds 5-Aug to 24-Aug																							
	5-Aug	6-Aug	7-Aug	8-Aug	9-Aug	10-Aug	11-Aug	12-Aug	13-Aug	14-Aug	15-Aug	16-Aug	17-Aug	18-Aug	19-Aug	20-Aug	21-Aug	22-Aug	23-Aug	24-Aug			
Coles Express Taylors Hill	191.9	189.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	179.9	179.9	177.9	177.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	173.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9			
EG Ampol Taylors Hill	191.9	189.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	179.9	179.9	177.9	177.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	173.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9			
7-Eleven Caroline Springs	191.9	189.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	179.9	177.9	177.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	173.9	171.9	170.5	170.5	170.5	170.5			
BP Connect Caroline Springs	191.9	189.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	187.9	187.9	179.9	179.9	177.9	177.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	173.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9			
Coles Express Burnside	191.9	189.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	185.9	181.9	179.9	179.9	177.9	177.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	173.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9			
BP Deer Park	189.9	189.9	189.9	187.9	185.9	183.9	179.9	179.9	177.9	177.9	175.9	175.9	175.9	173.9	171.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9			
OOM Energy Deer Park	187.9	185.9	183.9	183.9	183.9			177.9	177.9	173.9	173.9			171.9	173.9	169.9	166.9	166.9	166.9	169.9			
Ampol St Albans	198.9	198.9	198.9	190.9	190.9	189.9	189.9	188.9	188.9	184.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	173.9	219.9	219.9	173.9	169.9			
7-Eleven St Albans (Gillespie Road)	198.9	198.9	198.9	190.9	190.9	189.9	189.9	188.9	186.9	184.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	169.9	169.9			
7-Eleven St Albans (Kings Road)	198.9	198.9	198.9	190.9	190.9	189.9	189.9	188.9	186.9	184.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	169.9			
Coles Express St Albans	198.9	198.9	198.9	190.9	189.9	189.9	189.9	188.9	186.9	184.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	169.9	169.9			
United Deer Park	198.9	198.9	190.9	197.9	197.9	185.9	189.9	189.9	189.9	189.9	177.9	185.9	185.9	185.9	173.9	173.9	189.9	169.9	169.9	169.9			
EG Ampol Deer Park	198.9	198.9	198.9	190.9	189.9	189.9	189.9	185.9	183.9	181.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	169.9	169.9			
United Deer Park (Ballarat Road)	193.9	193.9	191.9	191.9	191.9	187.9	183.9	181.9	179.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	173.9	171.9	171.9	173.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9			
Average	194.6143	193.7571	192.9	190.4	189.4	187.7571	187.4385	184.1857	182.7571	180.7571	177.4714	177.3286	177.2846	176.6143	175.0429	172.7571	175.8714	174.4429	170.3	169.9429			
Median	192.9	191.9	190.4	190.4	188.9	187.9	183.9	179.9	177.9	177.9	177.9	176.9	175.9	175.9	173.9	172.9	170.2	169.9	169.9	169.9			
Minimum Price	187.9	185.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	183.9	179.9	177.9	177.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	173.9	171.9	171.9	169.9	166.9	166.9	166.9	169.9			
Caroline Springs and Surrounds 25-Aug to 12-Sep																							
	25-Aug	26-Aug	27-Aug	28-Aug	29-Aug	30-Aug	31-Aug	1-Sep	2-Sep	3-Sep	4-Sep	5-Sep	6-Sep	7-Sep	8-Sep	9-Sep	10-Sep	11-Sep	12-Sep				
Coles Express Taylors Hill	167.9	167.9	167.9	167.9	165.9	166.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	166.9	165.9	305.5	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9				
EG Ampol Taylors Hill	169.9	167.9	167.9	167.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9				
7-Eleven Caroline Springs	168.5	168.5	167.9	167.9	166.5	166.5	166.5	166.5	166.5	166.5	165.9	164.5	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9				
BP Connect Caroline Springs	167.9	167.9	167.9	167.9	165.9	209.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	163.9	189.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9				
Coles Express Burnside	167.9	167.9	167.9	169.9	165.9	209.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9				
BP Deer Park	167.9	167.9	167.9	167.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9				
OOM Energy Deer Park	164.9	164.9	164.9	164.9	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.5	161.5	161.5	161.5	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.9				
Ampol St Albans	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	208.9	208.9				
7-Eleven St Albans (Gillespie Road)	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	208.9	208.9				
7-Eleven St Albans (Kings Road)	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	208.9	208.9				
Coles Express St Albans	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	208.9	208.9				
United Deer Park	169.9	169.9	169.9	171.9	171.9	171.9	169.9	169.9	165.9	168.9	168.9	208.9	164.5	208.9	208.9	208.9	208.9	163.9	163.9				
EG Ampol Deer Park	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	169.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	164.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	209.9	208.9	208.9				
United Deer Park (Ballarat Road)	167.9	167.9	167.9	167.9	167.9	165.9	169.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	164.5	164.9	164.9	164.9	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9				
Average	168.7286	168.5857	168.5429	168.8286	167.6571	173.8714	166.5143	165.9143	165.6286	169.0571	168.7286	193.6	182.1571	183.4714	183.4714	183.4	179.8286	179.8286	179.8286				
Median	169.2	168.2	167.9	168.9	167.2	169.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	165.9	186.7	164.7	164.4	164.4	163.9	163.9	163.9	163.9				
Minimum Price	164.9	164.9	164.9	164.9	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.5	161.5	161.5	161.5	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.9	161.9				

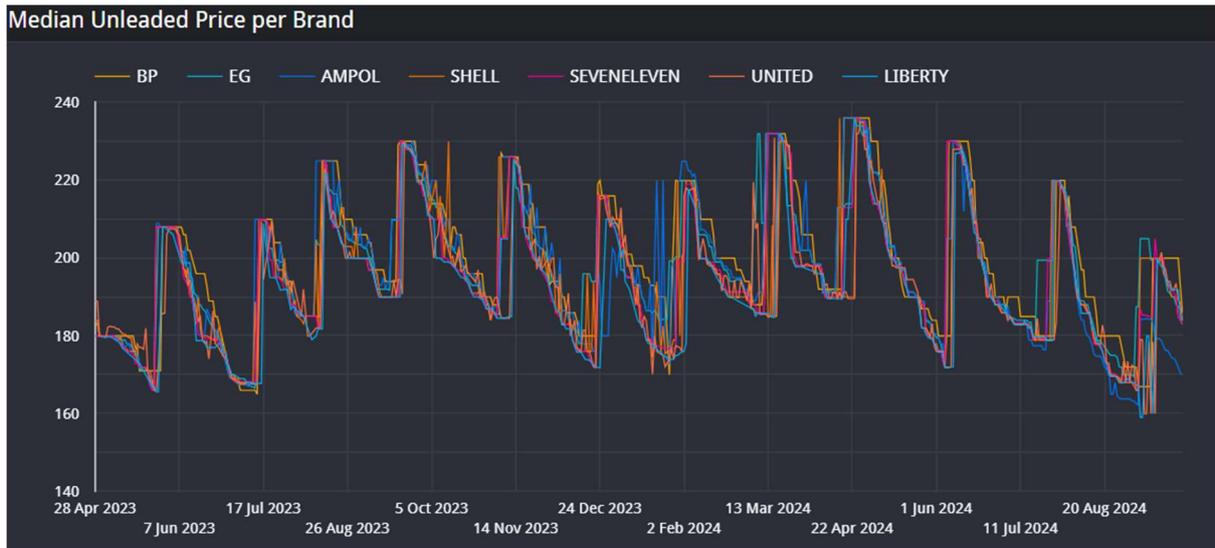
Appendix Source 4: The Report Collected Data Set collated data from 'PetrolSpy Aus/NZ', PetrolSpy (Web Page)
 <<https://petrolspy.com.au/map/station/538ec34003643dbe108ca39d>>.

Appendix 5: Suburbs included in the analysis of the western suburbs

Suburb	Area	Suburb	Area
Altona	Altona	Point Cook	Point Cook
Altona Meadows	Altona	Ravensthorpe	Caroline Springs
Altona North	Altona	Riddells Creek	
Ardeer	Ardeer	Rockbank	Rockbank
Avondale Heights	Avondale Heights	Seabrook	Altona
Bacchus Marsh	Bacchus Marsh	Seaholme	Altona
Braybrook	Braybrook	St Albans	St Albans
Brooklyn	Brooklyn	St Albans North	St Albans
Bulla		Sunbury	Sunbury
Calder Park	Calder Park	Sunshine	Sunshine
Caroline Springs	Caroline Springs	Sunshine North	Sunshine
Darley	Bacchus Marsh	Sydenham	Taylors Lakes
Deer Park	Deer Park	Tarneit	Tarneit
Derrimut	Derrimut	Tarneit North	Tarneit
Gisborne		Tarneit West	Tarneit
Hillside	Hillside	Taylors Hill	Taylors Hill
		Taylors Lake	Taylors Lakes
Hoppers Crossing	Hoppers Crossing	Taylors Lakes	Taylors Lakes
Kealba	Kealba	Toolern Vale	
Keilor	Keilor	Tottenham	
Keilor East	Keilor	Truganina	Truganina
Keilor Park	Keilor	Werribee	Werribee
Laverton	Laverton	Williams Landing	Laverton
Laverton North	Laverton		
		Wyndham Vale	Wyndham Vale
Melbourne Airport	Melbourne Airport	Tarneit Central	Tarneit
Melton	Melton	Williamstown	
Melton South	Melton	Ravenhall	Caroline Springs

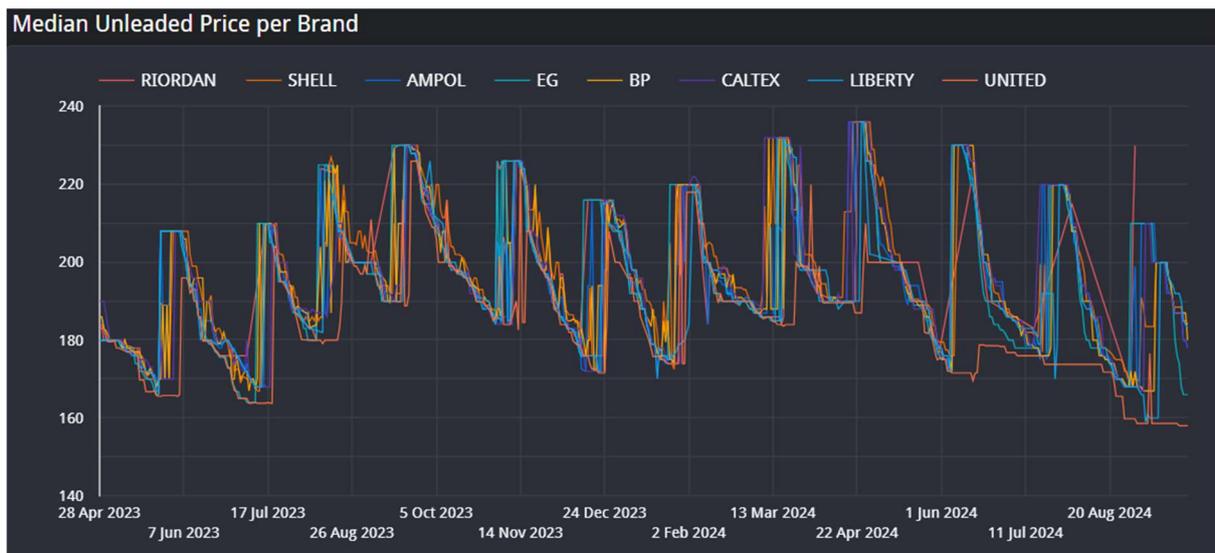
Appendix Source 5: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Raw Data' (Google Sheets).

Appendix 6: Median unleaded petrol price per brand in Altona



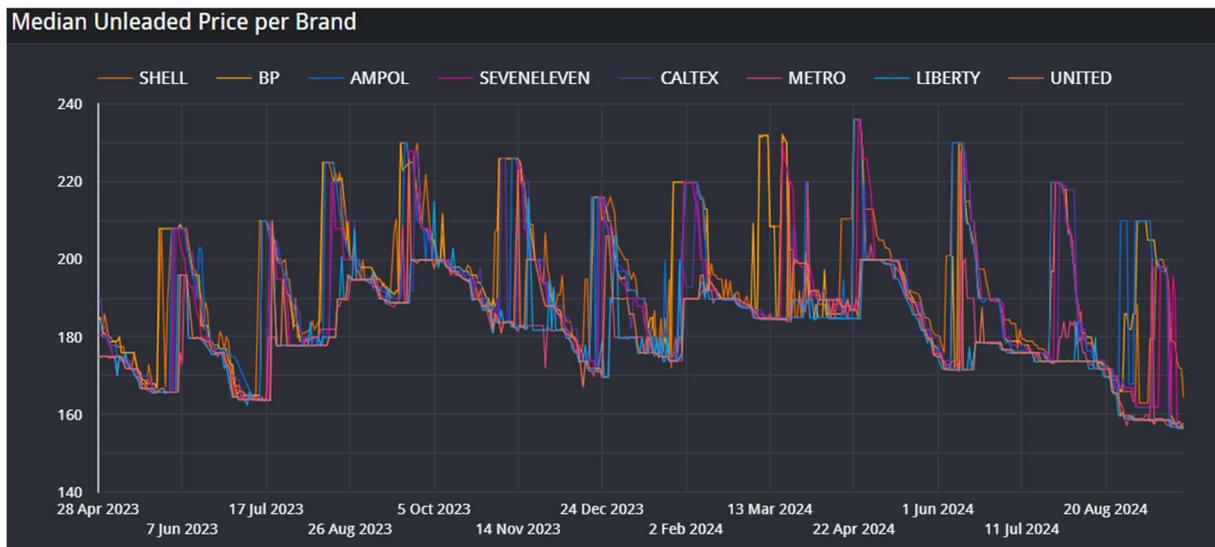
Appendix Source 6: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Appendix 7: Median unleaded petrol price per brand in Laverton



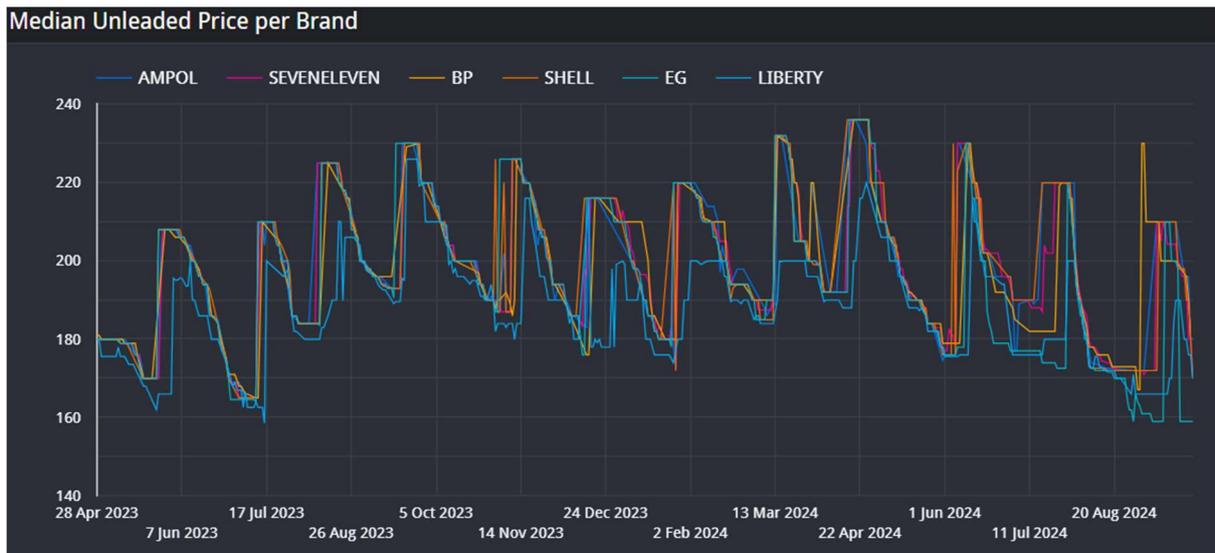
Appendix Source 7: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Appendix 8: Median unleaded petrol price per brand in Truganina



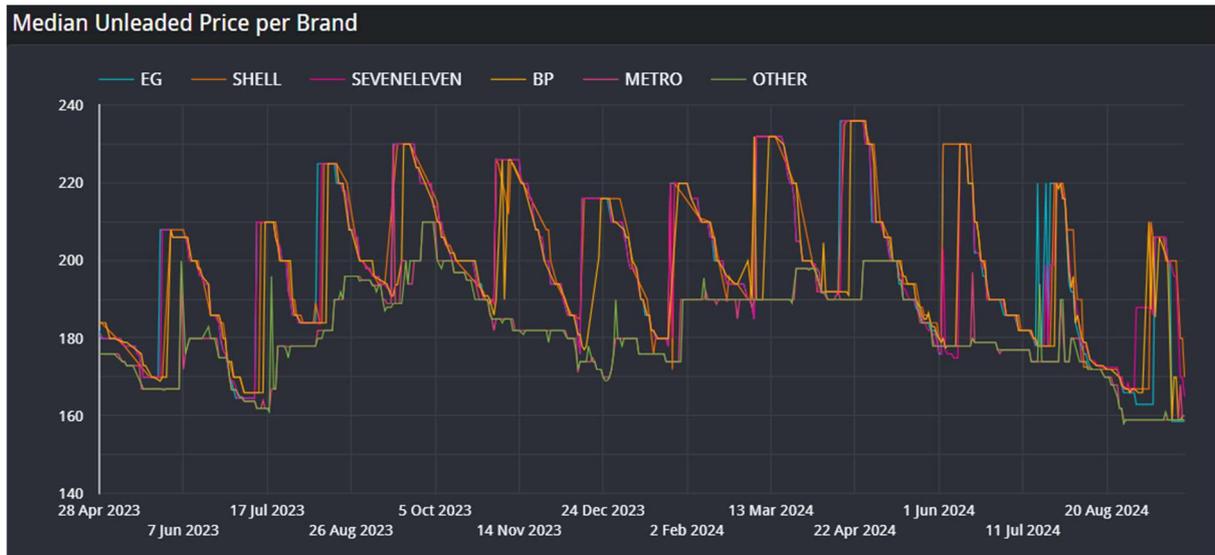
Appendix Source 8: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Appendix 9: Median unleaded petrol price per brand in Werribee



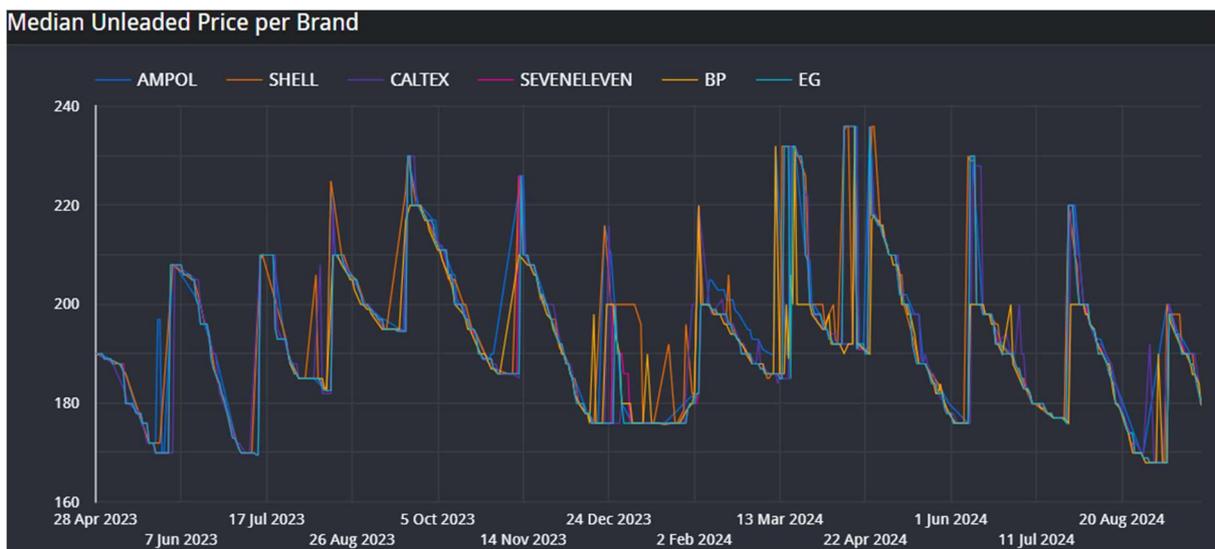
Appendix Source 9: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Appendix 10: Median unleaded petrol price per brand in Tarneit



Appendix Source 10: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Appendix 11: Median unleaded petrol price per brand in Sunbury



Appendix Source 11: Western Suburbs Fuel Watch, 'Western Suburbs Fuel Watch Data Set' (Looker Studio).

Appendix 12: “Example 3.1 – Concerted practice”

Example 3.1 – Concerted practice

In a small country town, there are three petrol stations: X, Y and Z. Immediately before adjusting its prices, X sends an email to Y and Z with a price. After several emails, it becomes clear to Y and Z that immediately after sending the email with the price, X changes its price to match the email. Y and Z join in, and each emails their own proposed price adjustments to the other two. A practice develops so that, with a few exceptions, where one petrol station emails their prices, the three stations all change their prices to match the price in the email.

At no point do any of them expressly or implicitly agree to reciprocate the communication or to change their prices accordingly. On some occasions after one of the stations announces a price rise, one of the other stations chooses not to match the price, and thereby gains extra customers on that occasion by increasing their price by less than the other two stations and having the lowest price. There are no consequences of this occasional divergence from the usual practice.

X, Y and Z are each likely to have contravened section 45 by engaging in a concerted practice with the purpose, effect or likely effect of substantially lessening competition. Even though none of the parties committed to communicate or change their prices, and even though there were some occasions where a petrol station did not change its prices in accordance with the email, the effect of the overall practice was that the petrol stations could increase their prices safe in the knowledge that this would be unlikely to result in a loss of customers as the others would most likely reciprocate. This practice has substantially reduced price competition for petrol in the town.

Appendix Source 12: Explanatory Memorandum, Competition and Consumer Amendment (Competition Policy Review) Bill 2017 (Cth).

Appendix 13: Population by area

By Local Council

The population estimate for the City of Melton, which includes the suburbs of Melton, Melton West, Melton South and Caroline Springs, as of 2023 was 206,070.¹⁷¹ Bacchus Marsh belongs to the Moorabool Council, which had an estimated population of 39,092 in 2023.¹⁷² Sunbury’s local government area of Hume had an estimated population of 262,764 in 2023.¹⁷³

By Region

Using the ABS’s data by region, Melton, Melton West, and Melton South had a combined estimated population of 50,490.¹⁷⁴ The Bacchus Marsh region had an estimated population of

¹⁷¹ ‘Growth Statistics’, *City of Melton* (Web Page) <<https://www.melton.vic.gov.au/Council/About-the-City/Demographics/Growth-statistics#:~:text=The%20population%20estimate%20for%20the,as%20of%202023%20was%20206%2C070.&text=The%20Australian%20Bureau%20of%20Statistics%20regularly%20releases%20regional%20data%20on,birth%2C%20deaths%20and%20migration>>

¹⁷² ‘Data by Region’, *Australian Bureau of Statistics* (Web Page) <<https://dbr.abs.gov.au/>>.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

26,055 in 2023.¹⁷⁵ The regions of Sunbury, Sunbury West and Sunbury South had an estimated population of 41,654.¹⁷⁶

The Caroline Springs region has an estimated population of 20,942.¹⁷⁷ However, it is different to the other comparative suburbs as it borders other populated suburbs that may also use Caroline Springs' petrol stations.

Appendix 14: Availability of public transport

Melton's train station is serviced by the Ararat, Ballarat, Daylesford, Maryborough and Mt Gambia V-Line.¹⁷⁸ However, all of these services tend to be combined and terminate at Ballarat or Wendouree, with the occasional service extending beyond that. All the trains going the other direction terminate in Melbourne's CBD. Generally, services to Melbourne run every 20 to 30 minutes during the day on weekdays.¹⁷⁹ Of the several bus lines in the City of Melton Local Government Area, the peak frequency is approximately 30 minutes for most routes and as the lines are indirect, travel times are often double the travel time in a car.¹⁸⁰ As a result of poor service, only 1% of trips made in the local government area are by bus.¹⁸¹

Caroline Springs' station is serviced by the Ararat, Ballarat and Maryborough V-Line. Caroline Springs is generally serviced by the same number of services to Melbourne as Melton.¹⁸² As Caroline Springs belongs to the City of Melton, the bus services are also underperforming.

Bacchus Marsh's station is serviced by the Ararat, Ballarat, Daylesford, Maryborough and Mt Gambia V-Line – the same lines as Melton.¹⁸³ Melton is generally serviced more by these lines than Bacchus Marsh, as they rarely bypass Melton but often terminate early in Melton, not reaching Bacchus Marsh.¹⁸⁴ Buses in Bacchus Marsh during the day on weekdays, tend to run every 20-30 minutes during peak hours, but drop to as few as one bus approximately every hour during off peak times.¹⁸⁵

Sunbury's Metro Train service terminates in Sunbury and the Melbourne CBD.¹⁸⁶ Services during peak hour tend to run every 10-20 minutes, with a maximum of 40min between services to Melbourne during non-peak times.¹⁸⁷ Sunbury's V-Line services are part of the Bendigo, Echuca/Moama, Lancefield, Mildura and Swan Hill Lines, which are often combined and only

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ 'Melton Railway Station', Public Transport Victoria (Web Page)

<https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/stop/1121/melton-station/3/regional-train/#StopPage:::datetime=2024-10-23T10%3A16%3A04.430Z&directionId=-1&showAllDay=false&_auth=525511c99f4e7455735c2e9c0379513c2ba574074144528d08bf78e823359a7c>.

¹⁷⁹ 'Ballarat-Wendouree - Melbourne via Melton', Public Transport Victoria (Timetable).

¹⁸⁰ City of Melton, 'Bus Network', *Moving Melton* (Web Page)

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² 'Victorian train network map', Public Transport Victoria (Network Map PDF).

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ 'Ballarat-Wendouree - Melbourne via Melton', Public Transport Victoria (Timetable).

¹⁸⁵ 'Bacchus Marsh, VIC 3340, Australia', Public Transport Victoria (Map).

¹⁸⁶ 'Sunbury Line', Public Transport Victoria (Timetable)

<<https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/route/timetable/14/sunbury/>>.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

run between the Melbourne CBD and Bendigo.¹⁸⁸ These V-Line services during peak hour on weekdays tend to run every 30 to 50 minutes, and otherwise run every hour to hour and 30 minutes.¹⁸⁹ The buses in Sunbury tend to run every 30-40 minutes during the day on weekdays except for the 485 which is more frequent.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ 'Sunbury Railway Station', Public Transport Victoria (Web Page).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ 'Sunbury, VIC 3429, Australia', Public Transport Victoria (Map).

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[\[\\[‘Google Maps’, *Google* \\\(Map\\\)\\]\\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Bacchus+Marsh+VIC/@-37.7431281?entry=tту&g_ep=EgoyMDI0MDkyNC4wKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D></p></div><div data-bbox=\\)\]\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Bacchus+Marsh+VIC/@-37.7627235!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f4e167faac63:0x5045675218cf6b0!2m2!1d144.7356782!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=\)](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Bacchus+Marsh+VIC/@-37.7546851,144.7372947,14.43z/data=!4m13!4m12!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad68bb5440d8b07:0x4a8b4153b2d9df1!2m2!1d144.7570811!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

[\[\\[\\\[‘Google Maps’, *Google* \\\\(Map\\\\)\\\]\\\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Bacchus+Marsh+VIC/@-37.6763789!3e0?entry=tту&g_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D></p></div><div data-bbox=\\\)\\]\\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Bacchus+Marsh+VIC/@-38.0764989!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6956b81d87165:0x5045675218cd000!2m2!1d144.4463206!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=\\)\]\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Bacchus+Marsh+VIC/@-37.8757804,144.0725163,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecd3fcee29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=\)](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Bacchus+Marsh+VIC/@-37.8757804,144.0725163,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecd3fcee29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

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[\[\\[\\\[‘Google Maps’, *Google* \\\\(Map\\\\)\\\]\\\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Melton+VIC/@-37.6835831!3e0?entry=tту&g_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D></p></div><div data-bbox=\\\)\\]\\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Melton+VIC/@-38.0764989!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6ecdfbb149633:0x99962ac4a94dca9e!2m2!1d144.5779508!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=\\)\]\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Melton+VIC/@-37.877625,144.1733803,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecd3fcee29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=\)](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Melton+VIC/@-37.877625,144.1733803,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecd3fcee29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

[\[\\[\\\[‘Sunbury, VIC 3429, Australia’, Public Transport Victoria \\\\(Map\\\\)\\\]\\\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Sunbury+VIC/@-37.5787769!3e0?entry=tту&g_ep=EgoyMDI0MTAyMC4xKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D></p></div><div data-bbox=\\\)\\]\\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Sunbury+VIC/@-38.0764989!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad6f9776c84f27b:0x5045675218cce30!2m2!1d144.7116286!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=\\)\]\(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Sunbury+VIC/@-37.8253678,144.2879933,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecd3fcee29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=\)](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Viva+Energy,+Refinery+Road,+Corio+VIC/Sunbury+VIC/@-37.8253678,144.2879933,10z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x6ad417620ce80fe7:0xecd3fcee29385c8!2m2!1d144.378492!2d-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

[https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/place/#PlacePage:::isModalOpen=false&label=Sunbury%2C%20VIC%203429%2C%20Australia&lat=-](https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/place/#PlacePage:::isModalOpen=false&label=Sunbury%2C%20VIC%203429%2C%20Australia&lat=-37.58006&lon=144.7291&_auth=9768c44990fd01792c303a690f2a4dc21e874fc253a6defcf9de)

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H. Other

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