

# OpenVoiceNews Australia

Transparent. Unbiased. Yours.

## Victoria's New Police Chief Mike Bush Backs Permit-Free Protests

July 27, 2025

– Categories: Defence & Security



Victoria's new Chief Commissioner of Police, Mike Bush, has stated that protests should not require permits, a position that has sparked debate amid rising crime and public unrest in the state. Appointed in June 2025, Bush seeks to balance the right to free expression with public safety while addressing a significant increase in crime rates. This article examines his stance, its implications, and the challenges facing his leadership.

Mike Bush, who served 42 years in the New Zealand Police, began leading Victoria Police on June 27, 2025, inheriting a force confronting a 17.1% increase in offences, the highest

since 2016. In an interview, Bush rejected adopting a protest permit system similar to New South Wales, describing it as ineffective. He emphasized protecting the right to protest, stating that police are there to ensure safety during demonstrations. However, Bush drew a clear line at behaviour that endangers public safety, referencing recent pro-Palestine rallies where chants perceived as inflammatory prompted public concern. While some labelled these chants as hate speech, Bush cited legal advice confirming they do not constitute criminal offences.

Bush's position has faced opposition from the Police Association of Victoria and the state opposition, both advocating for stricter controls on protests to reduce violence and hateful conduct, particularly involving extremist groups. Public confidence in Victoria Police is currently at a 14-year low of 61.9%, well below the target of 82%. Bush has acknowledged these challenges, committing to rebuilding trust through prevention-focused policing and improving officer morale, which suffered following a no-confidence vote against his predecessor amid a pay dispute.

The surge in youth crime and incidents such as 140 firebombings connected to criminal activity add pressure on police resources. Critics argue that government underfunding, including over 1,100 unfilled police vacancies, hampers the force's ability to respond effectively. As Bush promotes a "prevention first" approach, his success will depend on balancing the protection of free speech with the need to maintain public safety and restore confidence in the police service.