

Zoos Victoria

Chief Executive Officer

Candidate briefing

July 2026

WE KNOW WHERE



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Chief Executive Officer

Title	Chief Executive Officer
Reports to	Chair, Zoological Parks and Gardens Board
Location	Parkville
Department	CEO Office

About Zoos Victoria

An organisation of national and global significance

Zoos Victoria is Australia's oldest wildlife conservation organisation and one of the most recognised zoological institutions in the world. Operating four world-class facilities - Melbourne Zoo, Healesville Sanctuary, Werribee Open Range Zoo, and Kyabram Fauna Park - the organisation welcomes over three million visitors each year and manages one of the most complex, multi-site animal care and conservation operations in the Southern Hemisphere.

What distinguishes Zoos Victoria from many peer institutions is the breadth and seriousness of its conservation mandate. The organisation does not simply exhibit wildlife - it leads recovery programs for threatened species, conducts internationally recognised scientific research, and actively shapes global standards in animal welfare and biodiversity conservation. Its reach extends well beyond the boundaries of its four sites, encompassing field programs, breeding and reintroduction initiatives, and a growing network of scientific and institutional partnerships across the region and internationally.

Zoos Victoria operates as a statutory authority of the Victorian Government, established and mandated under the Zoological Parks and Gardens Act 1995, meaning it carries both a public benefit mission and a responsibility to perform commercially. The organisation delivers approximately \$350 million per annum in economic benefit to Victoria's visitor economy, operates a significant retail operation, and is the State's largest paid membership-based organisation, with over 390,000 members. It functions as a major leisure and cultural destination as well as a conservation institution. This dual identity - mission-driven and commercially active - is central to understanding the organisation's complexity and its leadership requirements.

A legacy of transformation

Over the past two decades, Zoos Victoria has undergone a profound transformation. Under the long-tenured leadership of its former Chief Executive, Jenny Gray, the organisation evolved from a well-regarded metropolitan zoo operator into a globally respected conservation authority. During this period, Zoos Victoria significantly elevated its scientific credibility, expanded its conservation programmes, deepened its government relationships, and established a reputation for leadership in animal welfare that is recognised internationally.

That transformation was not merely operational. It involved a fundamental repositioning of the organisation's identity and a compelling articulation of why zoos matter - to communities, to governments, and to the natural world. Jenny Gray's tenure, spanning nearly two decades, left the organisation with a substantially stronger foundation than she inherited, a deeply committed workforce, and a leadership culture built on purpose, expertise and genuine passion for conservation.

Her departure marks a significant transition point. The organisation acknowledges that certain relationships have been anchored in Jenny's personal standing and advocacy, and that rebuilding and institutionalising those relationships will be among the earliest and most important tasks for the incoming Chief Executive.

Strategic context and operating environment

Zoos Victoria enters this leadership transition at a consequential moment. The organisation is navigating an ambitious development and growth agenda alongside the practical realities of a post-restructure environment - one in which the integration of its multiple sites and functions into a unified operating model remains an active and important priority.

Central to this agenda is the Wild About the Future Development and Growth Plan - a once-in-a-generation, \$500 million vision to transform Melbourne Zoo and Werribee Open Range Zoo into world-leading wildlife destinations. Delivered through a partnership between Zoos Victoria, the Victorian Government and the private sector, this plan is expected to create iconic visitor experiences, drive tourism, generate employment, and cement Victoria's position as a global leader in conservation and nature-based tourism. It represents one of the most significant capital and strategic commitments in the organisation's history, and its delivery will be a defining priority for the incoming Chief Executive.

The scale of the organisation's commercial operations reflects both its reach and its responsibility. With the majority of its revenue self-generated, Zoos Victoria is not a passive beneficiary of public funding - it is an active commercial operator that must continuously earn the resources required to deliver on its conservation mission. At the same time, government support remains integral to the organisation's financial model, and the ability to cultivate and sustain productive relationships with government is a defining requirement of leadership at this level.



Globally, the operating environment for zoological institutions is evolving. Increasing public and policy scrutiny of captive wildlife programmes, growing expectations around animal welfare, and a heightened awareness of biodiversity loss are reshaping the context in which zoos operate and communicate. Zoos Victoria has positioned itself at the leading edge of this debate - as a credible advocate for the role that modern, conservation-focused zoos can play in protecting species and ecosystems. Maintaining and advancing that positioning requires a Chief Executive who can engage confidently and authentically with these conversations across government, media, scientific and public audiences.

The opportunity

The appointment of a new Chief Executive represents one of the most significant leadership decisions in Zoos Victoria's recent history. The incoming leader will inherit an organisation with exceptional strengths: a globally recognised conservation brand, a large and passionate membership base of more than 390,000 members, a talented and experienced senior leadership team, and a compelling pipeline of development, philanthropic and partnership opportunities - anchored by the transformative Wild About the Future plan.

The role calls for a leader who can honour the foundation that has been built while bringing the clarity, commercial acumen and relational capability required for the organisation's next phase.

The incoming Chief Executive will be expected to stabilise and embed the current transformation before shaping new directions - building internal trust and external credibility in equal measure, and positioning Zoos Victoria to deliver on its conservation mission with renewed momentum and financial resilience.

Success in this role will require strong cultural capability, a commitment to diversity and inclusion, and the ability to build authentic partnerships with First Nations peoples that support meaningful engagement, reconciliation and restitution outcomes

This is a rare opportunity to lead an organisation of genuine national and global significance - one committed to ensuring no Victorian terrestrial animal goes extinct on its watch - at a pivotal moment in its evolution.

Additional resources

- Zoos Victoria have published their 2030 Strategy, centred around their moral purpose of “Fighting Extinction and creating a future rich in wildlife”, access the document [here](#)
- Their current Corporate Plan for 2024-27 can be accessed [here](#)
- Annual Report for 2024-25 can be accessed [here](#)
- The Code of Animal Welfare & Ethics – Zoos Victoria's framework for animal welfare, outlining the principles, standards and decision-making approach that guide the care of animals and the delivery of conservation activities. The document can be accessed [here](#)
- Zoos Victoria is a statutory authority, governed by the Zoological Parks and Gardens Board. You can view the Board [here](#).



The advertisement

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

- Lead a world-renowned organisation
- Deliver a once-in-a-generation growth and development agenda
- Shape the future of conservation, tourism and education for Victoria and beyond

About the organisation

Zoos Victoria is a world-leading conservation organisation and Victorian Government statutory authority operating Melbourne Zoo, Werribee Open Range Zoo, Healesville Sanctuary and Kyabram Fauna Park. Welcoming more than three million visitors annually, a paid membership base of over 390,000 and caring for over 5,500 animals, the organisation combines a powerful conservation mission with significant commercial scale and community impact. With ambitious plans for growth and a commitment to creating a future rich in wildlife, Zoos Victoria is enhancing its conservation outcomes, visitor experiences and long-term sustainability.

About the role

The Chief Executive Officer will lead a highly regarded organisation at a pivotal moment in its evolution. Responsible for a workforce of approximately 1,000 staff and 800 volunteers across four sites, the CEO will build on recent organisational transformation while delivering an ambitious growth agenda that strengthens conservation impact, visitor engagement and financial sustainability. The CEO will lead major capital development projects, expand revenue and philanthropic support, and foster strong partnerships across government, research, business and the community. As the public face of Zoos Victoria, the CEO will champion the organisation's mission and help shape its future influence and reputation in Australia and internationally.

About you

You are an accomplished CEO or senior executive with experience leading a complex organisation of significant scale. You bring proven strategic leadership, commercial performance and organisational change capabilities, together with the ability to build trusted relationships across government, philanthropy, business and the broader community. With an inclusive and empowering leadership style, you have sound judgement and an ability to translate vision into results. Above all, you have a genuine commitment to impactful public purpose and be inspired by the opportunity to lead an organisation making a lasting contribution to wildlife conservation for future generations.

Position description

Position details

Role Title:	Chief Executive Officer	Department:	CEO Office
Function:	Executive	Reports to:	Chair, Zoological Parks and Gardens Board
Location:	Parkville	Tenure:	Fixed term
Band:	TBC	Employment Type:	Full time

Moral purpose

Fighting Extinction and creating a future rich in wildlife

Context

Zoos Victoria (ZV) is a world leading zoos based conservation organisation. We are a not-for-profit, State Government statutory authority which is established and mandated under the Zoological Parks and Gardens Act 1995. We proudly welcome over 3 million visitors a year to our four properties - Melbourne Zoo, Werribee Open Range Zoo, Healesville Sanctuary and Kyabram Fauna Park - and have over 5,500 animals in our care. We are committed to ensuring no Victorian terrestrial animal goes extinct on our watch and this guides our conservation efforts.

We are also a large and complex commercial business delivering \$350m per annum in economic benefit to Victoria's visitor economy. We are the State's largest paid member based organisation with over 390,000 members, and deliver education programs to over 150,000 students annually.



Our 2030 Strategy and Corporate Plans guide everything we do against five focus areas: - Working for Wildlife, Living with Wildlife, Creating Special Places, Thriving Ethical Business and Valuing our People. Our important work includes conservation, breeding and recovery programs, emergency wildlife response and we've built partnerships and capacity with local communities, fellow conservationists, like-minded organizations and several sister zoos – close to home, interstate and internationally.

We also have ambitious plans for our future. Our Wild About the Future Development and Growth Plan is a once-in-a-generation \$500 million vision to transform Melbourne Zoo and Werribee Open Range Zoo into world-leading wildlife destinations. Delivered through a partnership between Zoos Victoria and the Victorian Government.

Victoria, the Victorian Government and the private sector, it will create iconic visitor experiences that drive tourism, create jobs, strengthen the visitor economy and cement Victoria's position as a global leader in conservation and nature-based tourism.

Role purpose/statement

The CEO is accountable to the Board and the Minister for providing clear focus, direction and a future vision for Zoos Victoria, achieving the strategic business plan, managing the day-to-day operation of the four zoos and fulfilling all other functions under the Zoological Parks and Gardens Act,

The Chief Executive Officer is expected to lead, advocate and promote ZV's moral purpose – *Fighting Extinction and creating a future rich in wildlife* and to drive the delivery of our Wild about the Future - Development and Growth Plan.

Reporting lines & key stakeholders

Number of Direct Reports:	Chief Executive Officer
Total Workforce Accountability:	1000 staff 800 volunteers

Key internal stakeholders

- Zoological Parks and Gardens Board and Board Committees
- Senior Executive Team (SET).
- Staff and volunteers across the organisation.

Key external stakeholders and partners

- Victorian government and relevant Minister
- Relevant government departments
- Zoos Victoria members
- Philanthropic donors and funding partners
- Commercial partners
- First Nations Groups and First Peoples
- Universities and research institutions
- Zoos, aquariums and conservation organisations nationally and internationally
- RSPCA and other animal welfare organisations
- Visit Victoria, VCCI and industry associations
- Community groups, visitors and the broader public
- International bodies including the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- Sister zoos in Uganda and Papua New Guinea.

Accountabilities

Accountabilities & decision making relating to:

Strategic

- Develop, advocate and deliver a clear vision for Zoos Victoria and lead the translation of this vision into business strategies ensuring Zoos Victoria is positioned as leading zoo-based conservation.
- Ensure that Zoos Victoria continues as a leader in wildlife conservation research and education and environmental sustainability.
- Ensure staff and stakeholders are aligned with the vision.
- Lead major strategic initiatives, including major change proposals, wildlife emergency response, conservation programs, key partnerships and significant capital developments across the four zoos.
- Lead organisational transformation and ensure changes are embedded into practice.
- Lead the organisation's Senior Executive Team to be effective developers of solutions to organisational challenges.
- Identify and respond to emerging social, environmental and policy issues, ensuring the organisation remains a primary advisor to the government and influential within the conservation, animal welfare, education and research sectors.
- Lead the development of relationships between Zoos Victoria and the community.
- Develop the four zoos as destinations of choice for the community and tourists, with strong program and exhibition values that grow and build repeat visitation.
- Develop and deliver a diversified funding model that fosters self-sufficiency and multiple funding sources for capital development, research and conservation investment and education programs.
- Ensure organisational systems, governance and capabilities support long-term sustainability and growth.
- Lead the development of sustainable world-class zoological collections and exhibits in the four zoos, by:
 - Maintaining a very high standard of animal health and welfare
 - Continuing a significant, sustainable role in animal breeding programs.
 - Ensuring acquisitions and developments are consistent with ZV's values, strategic plan and resources.
 - Ensure the development of effective long-range plans for the animal collection.
- Ensure Zoos Victoria provides visitors with engaging exhibits, with zoo facilities that match or exceed visitor expectations, creating memorable three way experiences – Animal – Visitor – Staff/Volunteer engagement that result in high attendance levels and repeat visits.
- Lead the delivery of education and interpretation which is compelling, understandable, and memorable and that connects people to the natural world and inspires them to act to protect it.
- Effectively lead and respond to a wide range of critical external relationships ensuring consistent positive public perception and support for Zoos Victoria.
- Ensure First Nations' voice and strong engagement with First Nations peoples toward acknowledgment, reconciliation and restitution.
- Promote the Zoos Victoria brand, and each unique zoo identity, and build the global ranking and reputation of the organisation.

People and Safety

- Role model and embed an effective integrity culture by:
 - Build and maintain a psychologically safe work environment



- Support and encourage regular integrity conversations and discussions
- Support compliance with integrity obligations
- Identify and manage integrity risks
- Champion the Victorian Public Sector values and ensure workforce meets the high standards of public sector ethics and transparency.
- Build an organisation where its people have an outstanding customer focus, a commitment to animal welfare and passion for continuous improvement.
- Develop a high performance and compassionate workforce culture.
- Foster a culture of learning, innovation, and continuous improvement through the implementation of lean management principles.
- Ensure that targets and standards are set and maintained and that effective performance feedback is provided.
- Build the leadership capability across the organisation.
- Ensure that organisational systems, governance and capabilities support a safe, high-performance environment that meets state-mandated occupational health and safety standards.

Financial sustainability & Governance

- Ensure all activities across the four sites strictly adhere to the statutory functions defined in the Act.
- Ensure all corporate governance issues are proactively managed.
- Ensure that Zoos Victoria complies with all legal, regulatory and statutory requirements including corporate governance, risk management and financial reporting. This includes:
 - Assist Board to meet its legal obligations
 - Maintain transparency on all policy, strategy and compliance issues
 - Identify and mitigate significant risks
 - Ensure the Minister and Department well informed on all significant governance issues and ensure ZV's 2030 strategy is aligned with broader Victorian Government environmental and economic policies
 - Ensure the Board Chair is fully briefed on all relevant issues
- Develop and deliver on a funding model that fosters self-sufficiency and multiple funding sources for capital developments, research and conservation investment and education programs.

Selection criteria

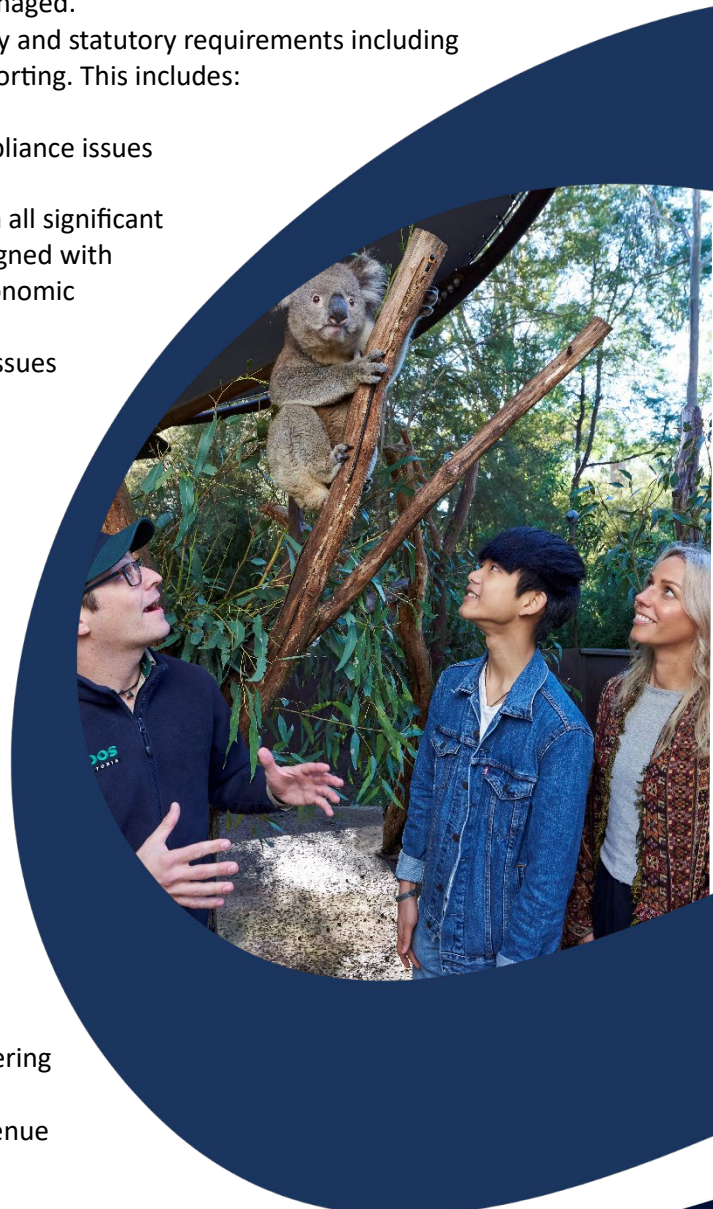
Qualifications

Relevant tertiary qualifications or equivalent senior executive experience that may include:

Bachelor or Post Graduate qualification in a relevant field such as Economics / Law / Science / Business Management / Public Administration / Zoology / Biology / Ecology, Environmental Science, and/or Conservation / Wildlife Science.

Essential capabilities

- Strategic leadership at organisational scale, with a demonstrated record of setting a clear direction and delivering material organisational outcomes
- Commercial and financial acumen in a complex, multi-revenue environment with significant self-generated income



- Builds influential relationships with ministers, departments and key decision-makers, demonstrates strong political intelligence, and a track record of securing major government support, investment or policy outcomes
- Complex change leadership that may include joining organisations mid-transformation
- Demonstrated values alignment with and knowledge of biodiversity conservation, nature and the environment together with experience in a relevant public-purpose, visitor economy or other complex mission-led environment
- Track record of success in external stakeholder relationship-building across government, philanthropy, corporate partners and public audiences
- Empowering leadership in practice, demonstrated through work with capable and expert leadership teams.
- Ability to interpret social values into a dynamic and responsive strategic business approach
- A contemporary business mindset with an understanding of new technologies and the opportunities (and risks) that they present for an organisation such as Zoos Victoria.



Essential experiences

- CEO or equivalent senior executive leadership at material scale, noting the complexity of this appointment
- Managing productive relationships with ministers, departments and key decision-makers, demonstrating strong political intelligence, and a track record of securing major government support, investment or policy outcomes
- Leading through sustained, multi-year organisational transformation, including embedding change over time
- Building or materially expanding a philanthropic program, or direct access to major donor networks in a relevant sector
- Operating with a strong, experienced senior leadership team and genuinely distributing authority
- Managing a geographically distributed or multi-site organisational portfolio.

Leadership style

- Decisive and consultative: supports genuine deliberation, then acts with clarity
- Relational: builds trust through authentic engagement rather than relying on positional authority
- Mission-led: demonstrates a visible and evidenced commitment to conservation and/or public purpose
- Strategically patient: listens before acting and earns credibility before shaping new directions
- Transparent and governance-confident: works with clarity and appropriate boundaries
- Resilient: able to lead confidently following a high-profile or long-tenured predecessor
- Inclusive: able to lead practical inclusion and equity outcomes which reflect Zoos Victoria's purpose and broader community demographics.

Personal attributes

- Clear commitment to conservation and the natural world, evidenced through career choices, professional conduct or other values based alignment
- Intellectual curiosity and genuine respect for specialist expertise, including scientific expertise
- High emotional intelligence and interpersonal warmth
- Comfort with ambiguity and the ability to balance commercial ambition with mission purpose
- Long-term commitment to the mission and the organisation's purpose.



Other requirements

- Current driver's license as role requires travel to all Zoos Victoria properties when appropriate and needed
- Willingness to undertake out of hours work as necessary to attend events and functions
- Working with Children's check
- Police check.

Remuneration and probity

The Total Remuneration Package (**TRP**) for this position is currently equivalent to the Prescribed Entity SES-2 Band (PESES-2), **including** statutory superannuation, now 12%.

A competitive salary will be agreed, within the band as per the Zoos Victoria determination range. Proof of salary may be required.

Guidance based on [VPSC protocols](#) and [VIRT executive](#) remuneration decisions also apply.

Salary packaging options are available post-employment, within the full value of the TRP.

Note this role must adhere to all probity requirements prior to appointment, a current Driver's Licence and a Working with Children Check is mandated. Qualifications must be validated.

How to apply

Zoos Victoria is partnering with SHK Asia Pacific on this search. **Applications are to be submitted online** by visiting <https://www.shk.com.au/jobs> (preferred), scroll down to this opportunity.

- You are not required to separately address the Key Selection Criteria. Your **CV (résumé) must demonstrate achievements** commensurate with the position description.
- **Submit your CV** (no more than five pages) and a **concise cover letter** (one page or an email), broadly addressing your proposition for the role
- See the advertisement for the **close date**.

If you are **unable** to apply online, please email your application to applymel@shk.com.au quoting **#3585791** and **the role title** in the subject line. Please check on email receipt if no reply in five working days, due to email security filters.

Candidates may be contacted by **email or phone, including voicemail message**. Direct and third-party applications will be forwarded to SHK. There is a concurrent search.

Please note, selection processes **may take some time** and may include multiple panel interviews and meetings. You may be invited for a further conversation or invited to an interview with the Consultant. Our client will be consulted throughout the process and will be making decisions on progression stages. If you are shortlisted and invited to meet with Panel, you will be provided with advice on the Panel format.

Referees will be formally requested at the appropriate stage, after Panel. Probity documentation and proof of qualifications as required by Zoos Victoria and the Victorian Public Sector may be requested prior to a candidate being recommended for appointment. All probity requirements must be met.

Applicants should **keep a copy** of the Candidate brief and position description as it cannot be accessed once the job has closed.

For more information **after reviewing this document** and ideally after submitting your CV, please contact Penny Wilson, Senior Partner, SHK on + 61 434 589 284, penny.wilson@shk.com.au or Matthew Belleghem, Managing Partner on + 61 402 740 665, matthew.belleghem@shk.com.au.

Full details of SHK's privacy policy may be found online at <https://www.shk.com.au/privacy-policy>.

Candidate experience

You will receive an email confirming your online application was lodged successfully. Please check junk/filter folders if not seen.

Advice of your status and the outcome regarding next steps will likely be in late July/early August, with interview panels and further processes in the next months – subject to change. SHK will contact you if we require further information or of any updates. All candidates will be notified of the outcome.

Contact

Zoo Victoria is partnering with SHK on this key appointment and has appointed SHK **Managing Partner & Chief Operating Officer, Matthew Belleghem**, and **Senior Partner, Penny Wilson** to lead this search.



Matthew Belleghem is a **Managing Partner** at SHK and is the firm's **Chief Operating Officer**.

With twenty years of experience as an executive search consultant, Matthew has assisted many blue-chip organisations with the recruitment of senior commercial and operational leaders, including AGL, BHP, Boeing, EnergyAustralia, Linfox, Telstra, Transurban and Woolworths.

As Managing Partner, Matthew leads a team of Senior Partner, Partner and Associate-level search consultants across a range of disciplines, with a particular focus on high risk and highly regulated sectors including utilities, property and transport. His primary focus is on technically and/or commercially complex senior leadership roles at GM, EGM and C-Level. As Chief Operating Officer, he has broader strategic and operational responsibilities across the firm, including leadership of the firm's innovation and technology agendas.

Highlights of Matthew's recent work includes his having appointed the chief Operating Officer of ASX-listed Regis Aged Care, the Managing Director of Barwon Water, and both the Executive Director Rail & Infrastructure Delivery and the Chief Operating Officer of the Suburban Rail Loop Authority. He recently led a highly confidential search to appoint the General Manager of Property for Linfox (direct report to Linfox CEO Mark Mazurek) and a successful global search for a Hong Kong-based Director of Group Strategy for China Light and Power, one of Asia's largest utilities and the parent company of EnergyAustralia.

Matthew works and searches globally, having coordinated executive placements in Australia, New Zealand, Asia, North America, Europe, and the Middle East. His thought leadership includes presentations at industry events, regular guest lectures at Monash University, and participation as an expert member for government, industry and higher education panels.

Matthew holds Masters degrees from The University of Melbourne and Monash University (by research and coursework respectively) and an MBA (Senior Executive) from Melbourne Business School.



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Penny Wilson is a Senior Partner and Sector Lead, Government and Public Policy for SHK across senior executive search and advisory.

Penny specialises in regulatory and public policy-based leadership C-Suite and Board appointments and advisory projects. She has deep and specific expertise in delivering assignments in complex governance, highly visible and accountable areas at the executive level within government, not-for-profit organisations and the private sector.

With more than 20 years of government, not-for-profit and consulting leadership experience, Penny brings to her search practice s practical understanding, broad cross-sectoral networks and an appreciation of contemporary leadership methodologies. She began her professional career in the Commonwealth Public

Service, returning to the Victorian Public Service as an executive after a series of leadership roles in public policy, research, lobbying, regulation, community services and peak bodies. Penny was subsequently the Chief Executive Officer for non-profit organisations within Victoria, before joining the executive search practice at SHK.

Currently Penny is leading a number of public and confidential searches for government, non-profit and private sector clients. A trusted adviser, has interests in women and leadership, and in assisting internal candidates to fully participate in external selection processes.

With a long history serving on board and committees, Penny has extensive governance experience, including serving three terms as a Governor-in Council appointed member of the Adult, Community and Further Education Board of Victoria.

Penny holds a First-Class Honours degree in Social Sciences from La Trobe University, complemented by qualifications in business, communication and training. Penny is a Williamson Fellow with Leadership Victoria and a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



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