

# Perceptions of corruption

Survey of Victoria Police employees

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December 2017



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# 1 Overview

Victoria Police officers are responsible for upholding the law and promoting a safe, secure and orderly society. Victorians are right to expect that police officers conduct themselves with integrity, and operate in an environment free of misconduct and corruption.

The conduct of police officers should be underpinned by integrity, professionalism and respect. Indeed, Victoria Police officers swear an oath or affirmation to discharge their duties according to the law and are required to report suspected police misconduct.<sup>1</sup>

Victoria Police invests substantial resources to ensure its employees understand their obligations and behave in a way consistent with the values of the organisation. For example, probationary constables are trained in how to identify and report misconduct, and a dedicated department – Professional Standards Command – is responsible for investigating misconduct and promoting high ethical standards within the organisation.

This report outlines the responses of Victoria Police employees following research into their understanding of corruption, perceptions of corruption and misconduct, attitudes to reporting corruption and misconduct, and attitudes towards preventing corruption.

In 2016, IBAC engaged research company Urbis to conduct research on perceptions of corruption. Victoria Police employees were surveyed, as were employees from state and local government, and members of the Victorian community.<sup>2</sup> The other research findings may be found on the IBAC website.

This research was conducted at a time when Victoria Police was responding to a review conducted by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)<sup>3</sup> and working to streamline its complaint handling and discipline system, as well as reviewing policies in a number of relevant areas (including conflict of interest).

For the purpose of this report, Victoria Police employees and respondents includes both sworn officers and public servants.

## Methodology

An online questionnaire was sent to Victoria Police employees. Responses were received from 1 172 employees<sup>4</sup>. Eighty per cent of respondents were sworn police officers; the remainder were public servants.

Substantial differences between the results from Victoria Police, state government and local government employees are noted where relevant.

The results are also compared with the findings of research conducted by IBAC in 2015. It needs to be noted that the methodology and scope of these research projects varied.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Section 167(3) of the *Victoria Police Act 2013*.

<sup>2</sup> The survey of Victoria Police employees differed slightly from the survey conducted of state and local government employees, in a small number of questions, which reflects the different operating environment for Victoria Police employees.

<sup>3</sup> VEOHRC, *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police* – Phase 1 Report, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Approximately six per cent of Victoria Police's 2016/17 workforce. See Victoria Police annual report 2016/17, p 7, [www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?a=internetBridging-Page&Media\\_ID=132934](http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?a=internetBridging-Page&Media_ID=132934).

<sup>5</sup> In 2015, IBAC engaged Emperica to survey community members in relation to their awareness of IBAC and perceptions of corruption.

## 1 Overview

### 1.1 Key findings

The research focused on four areas:

- understanding corruption
- perceptions of corruption and misconduct
- attitudes towards reporting corruption and misconduct
- perceptions and attitudes towards integrity and preventing corruption.

The results suggest Victoria Police employees who responded to the survey have a sound understanding of what corruption is and can distinguish between corruption and misconduct behaviours.

A large majority of Victoria Police respondents were confident they understood what *constitutes corrupt behaviour* (90 per cent). Similar to survey findings with state and local government employees, corruption was more likely to be seen as something that *happens in Victoria* (63 per cent) than as a *problem in my workplace* (8 per cent) by Victoria Police employees.

Five behaviours – *misuse of information, conflict of interest, abuse of discretion, perverting the course of justice and bribery* – were identified by Victoria Police employees as the areas where there was the greatest opportunity for corruption to occur. The first three of these behaviours were also considered most likely to have been suspected of occurring, and most likely to have been observed.

Eighty per cent of Victoria Police respondents said that they would *definitely report corruption if they observed it*, while 64 per cent of respondents agreed they *knew how to report corruption*. This was substantially higher than the proportion of state and local government respondents who said they *knew how to report corruption*.

While 26 per cent of respondents indicated the protections provided to reporters of corruption were adequate, 46 per cent of respondents felt *they would experience personal repercussions* and 18 per cent stated *I could lose my job* if they reported corruption.

Victoria Police officers are obliged to report the suspected misconduct of another officer if they suspect that officer of misconduct. The organisation has an important role in educating its employees about their obligations to report, how to report suspected wrongdoing and the protections available to them under Victoria's protected disclosure regime.<sup>6</sup>

The majority of Victoria Police respondents said they support corruption prevention activities in their unit (86 per cent), that Victoria Police supports anti-corruption activities (69 per cent) and has strong corruption prevention policies in place (56 per cent).

<sup>6</sup> Protected Disclosure Act 2012.

## 2 Understanding corruption

Victoria Police employees were asked about their understanding of corruption and misconduct, and their views about behaving honestly and with integrity.

### 2.1 Where does corruption happen?

While almost two-thirds of Victoria Police respondents agreed that *corruption happens in Victoria* (63 per cent), only a small proportion (8 per cent) agreed that *corruption is a problem in my workplace*.

Victoria Police employees were less likely to agree that corruption was a problem in their workplace (8 per cent), compared with state government (15 per cent) and local government respondents (12 per cent).

Only 9 per cent of Victoria Police respondents believed there was no corruption in Victoria. These results are presented in Table 1 below.

**TABLE 1: VICTORIA POLICE EMPLOYEES' UNDERSTANDING OF CORRUPTION**

	Disagree (%)	Neither disagree nor agree (%)	Agree (%)
Corruption is a problem in my workplace	74	18	8
Corruption is a problem in Victoria	26	39	35
Corruption happens in Victoria	9	29	63

Base: Total sample, n = 1 172. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

### 2.2 Identifying corrupt behaviour

Victoria Police employees were asked about their attitudes to honesty and integrity, and what constitutes corrupt behaviour. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that *behaving with honesty and integrity is important*, with only three per cent of respondents disagreeing with this statement. This is consistent with state and local government respondents (both 98 per cent).

Victoria Police officers are bound by professional and ethical standards. Victoria Police reinforces to its employees that they are obliged to uphold those standards and conduct themselves with integrity. The survey results suggest respondents understand their obligations to behave with honesty and integrity.

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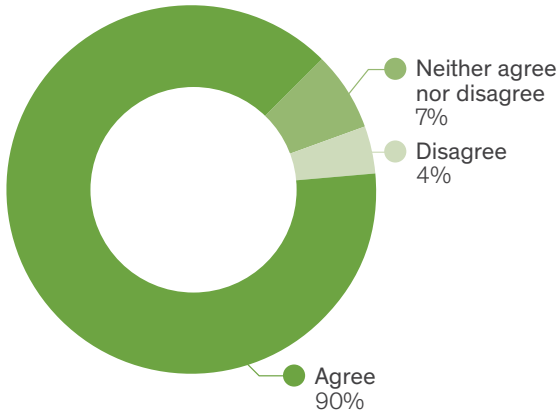
*'Policing relies on integrity, values and trust to survive.'*

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Respondent

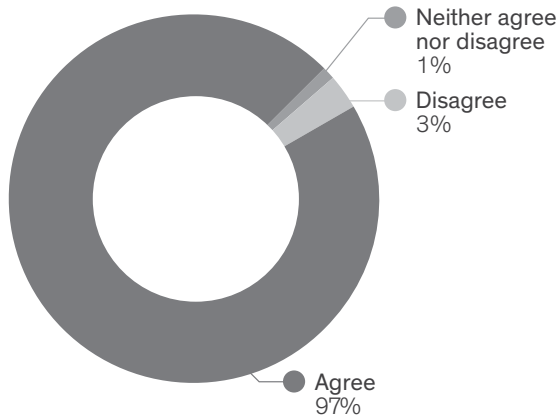
**FIGURE 1: IDENTIFYING CORRUPT BEHAVIOUR**

**I know what constitutes corrupt behaviour**



A large majority of Victoria Police respondents believe they understand what constitutes corrupt behaviour (90 per cent), slightly higher than state government (79 per cent) and local government (84 per cent) respondents. Respondents' answers also indicated a high level of understanding of the difference between corruption and misconduct. This is discussed in the next chapter.

**Behaving with honesty and integrity is important**



Base: Total sample, n = 1172. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.



## 3 Perceptions of corruption and misconduct

Behaviours and scenarios were presented to respondents to gauge perceptions of corruption and whether these behaviours had or could occur in their workplace. Respondents were also asked to rate scenarios as involving corruption, misconduct or neither.

### 3.1 Corruption and misconduct opportunities

When presented with a list of potentially corrupt behaviours, a substantial proportion of respondents identified that there was an opportunity for *misuse of information* (87 per cent), *conflict of interest* (86 per cent), *abuse of discretion* (79 per cent), *perverting the course of justice* (73 per cent) and *bribery* (70 per cent) to occur within Victoria Police.

While a lower proportion of respondents said they suspected these behaviours had occurred in Victoria Police or had witnessed such conduct, more than half of respondents suspected conflicts of interest had occurred in Victoria Police (58 per cent) and almost one-third said they had observed conflicts (32 per cent). In comparison, around one-third of state and local government respondents said they suspected conflicts of interest had occurred in their workplace (34 and 37 per cent respectively) while one-fifth said they had observed a conflict of interest (21 and 20 per cent respectively). Failure to declare or properly manage conflicts of interest is not, in and of itself, corrupt conduct but it can represent misconduct or be an element in corrupt conduct. Conflicts of interest routinely occur in the public sector but many conflicts present no issue when they are declared and managed transparently.

Across the board, Victoria Police, state and local government respondents agreed there were opportunities for abuse of discretion, misuse of information and conflict of interest, however, Victoria Police respondents were more likely to agree that there was opportunity for these behaviours to occur. For example, for *misuse of information*, 87 per cent of Victoria Police respondents agreed there was opportunity for this behaviour to occur, compared with 61 per cent of local government respondents and 56 per cent of state government respondents. Although misuse of information is a corruption risk throughout the public sector, it is a particular risk in law enforcement as police regularly have access to sensitive information (for example, through the Law Enforcement Assistance Program, a Victoria Police database). Under the *Victoria Police Act 2013*, it is a criminal offence for Victoria Police personnel to access, use or disclose police information without a reasonable excuse.<sup>7</sup>

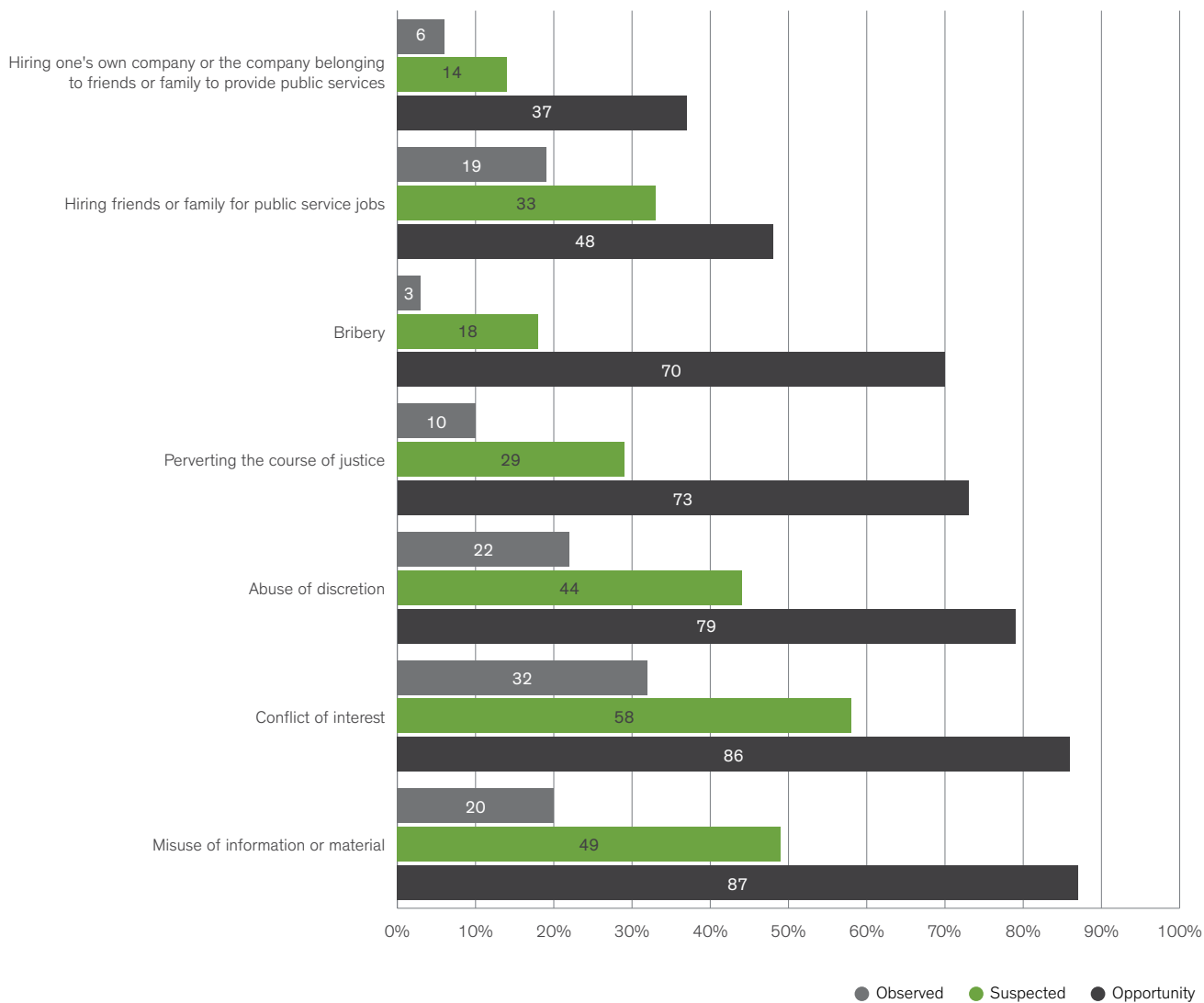
Almost three-quarters of Victoria Police respondents agreed that there was opportunity for *perverting the course of justice* to occur. State and local government respondents were far less likely to agree that there was opportunity for this behaviour to occur (14 per cent and 17 per cent), which is likely explained by the nature of police work and the greater opportunity for this behaviour to occur.

Almost half (43 per cent) of the respondents reported they had not observed any of the listed corruption or misconduct behaviours in Victoria Police, while three per cent did not believe there was an opportunity for any of the behaviours to occur in Victoria Police.

<sup>7</sup> Section 227(1) of the *Victoria Police Act 2013*.

### 3 Perceptions of corruption and misconduct

**FIGURE 2: SUSPECTED AND OBSERVED CORRUPTION IN VICTORIA POLICE**



Base: Total sample, n = 1172.

### 3.2 Corruption or misconduct?

Financial rewards and bribes were clearly identified as corrupt conduct by Victoria Police respondents:

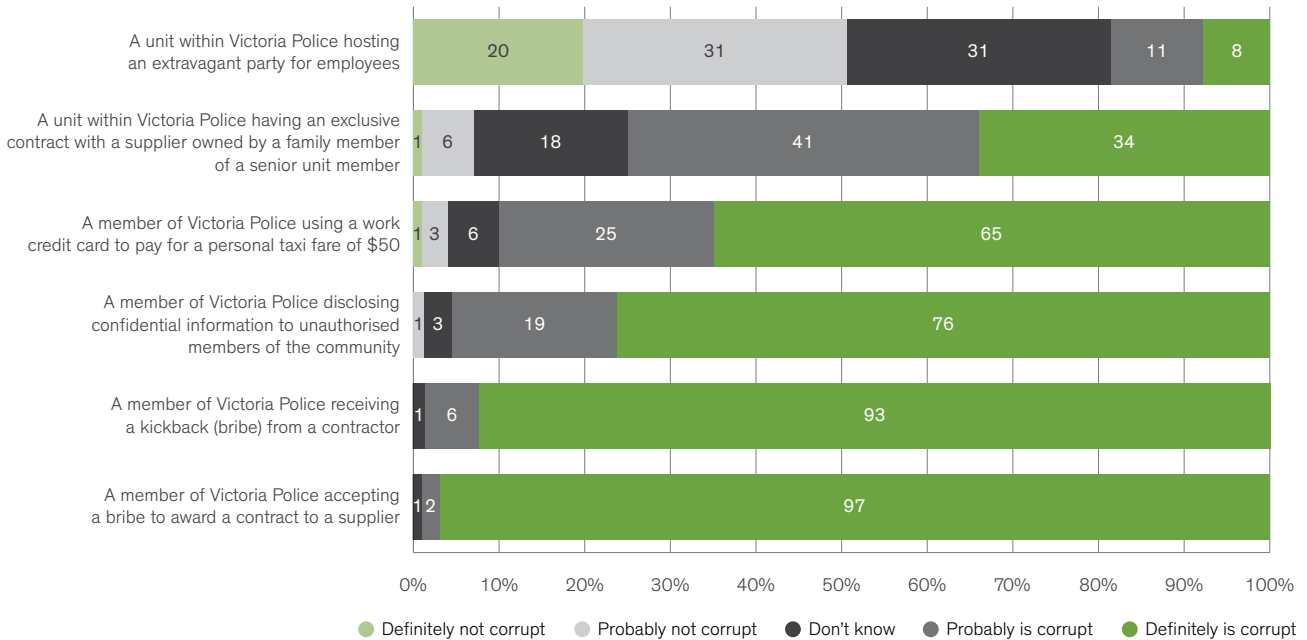
- Ninety-seven per cent identified as corrupt behaviour a member of Victoria Police accepting a bribe to award a contract to a supplier.
- Ninety-three per cent identified as corrupt behaviour a member of Victoria Police receiving a kickback (bribe) from a contractor.

The unauthorised disclosure of information was also seen as corrupt conduct by the majority of respondents (76 per cent) in the context of a member of Victoria Police disclosing information to unauthorised members of the community.

Only one scenario prompted mixed responses as to whether it represented corrupt conduct. Only 19 per cent of respondents felt that a unit within Victoria Police hosting an extravagant party for employees was corrupt. This scenario was presented to respondents to assess their ability to distinguish corruption from misconduct. The results for this question suggests that respondents generally understand the difference between corruption and misconduct.

State and local government respondents generally provided similar responses in relation to their perceptions of corruption<sup>8</sup>, although Victoria Police respondents were less certain about whether a unit having an exclusive contract with a supplier owned by a family member of a senior unit member. Thirty-four per cent of Victoria Police respondents believed this was definitely corrupt, compared with 60 per cent of state government and 53 per cent of local government employees.

FIGURE 3: PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION BEHAVIOURS



Base: Total sample, n = 1172. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

<sup>8</sup> Ninety-six per cent of both state and local government respondents identified a state/local government employee accepting a bribe to award a contract to a supplier as a corrupt behaviour. Ninety-two per cent of local government respondents and 93 per cent of state government respondents identified a state/local government employee receiving a kickback (bribe) from a contractor as a corrupt behaviour. Forty-six per cent of state government respondents and 33 per cent of local government respondents felt that a local council hosting an extravagant party for employees was corrupt.

### 3 Perceptions of corruption and misconduct

Victoria Police respondents were also asked to identify whether a series of police-specific scenarios were corruption or misconduct. Respondents demonstrated a strong understanding of the difference between the two.

A large majority of respondents identified a *police officer accepting bribes to avoid investigating illegal activity* (98 per cent) and a *police officer removing drugs from a crime scene and keeping them for personal use* (89 per cent) as definitely corrupt.

Around three quarters of respondents identified a *police officer repeatedly asking a victim out on a date* (74 per cent) and a *police officer using racial slurs against a suspect* (78 per cent) as misconduct, but not corruption.

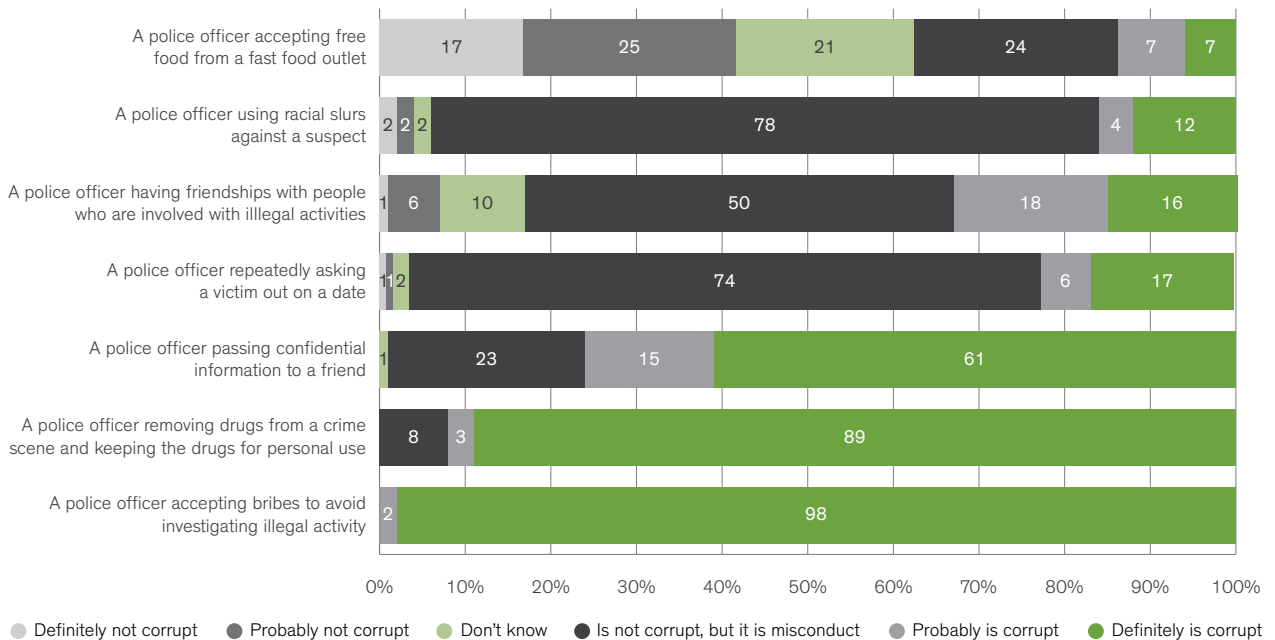
There were mixed responses for the scenario a *police officer accepting free food from a fast food outlet*. A similar proportion of respondents said it was not corrupt but it is misconduct (24 per cent), probably not corrupt (25 per cent) or I don't know (21 per cent). This suggests a variety of views and a degree of uncertainty amongst respondents as to whether this is corruption, misconduct or acceptable behaviour.

*'Misconduct is a bigger struggle; corruption is black and white.'*

Respondent

While the majority of respondents identified a *police officer having friendships with people who are involved in illegal activities* as either corruption or misconduct, 10 per cent stated that they did not know, again suggesting a degree of uncertainty about this type of behaviour.

**FIGURE 4: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN CORRUPTION AND MISCONDUCT**



## 4 Attitudes to reporting corruption and misconduct

Understanding attitudes towards reporting corruption and whether people know how to report helps to identify and overcome any barriers – real or perceived – to reporting.

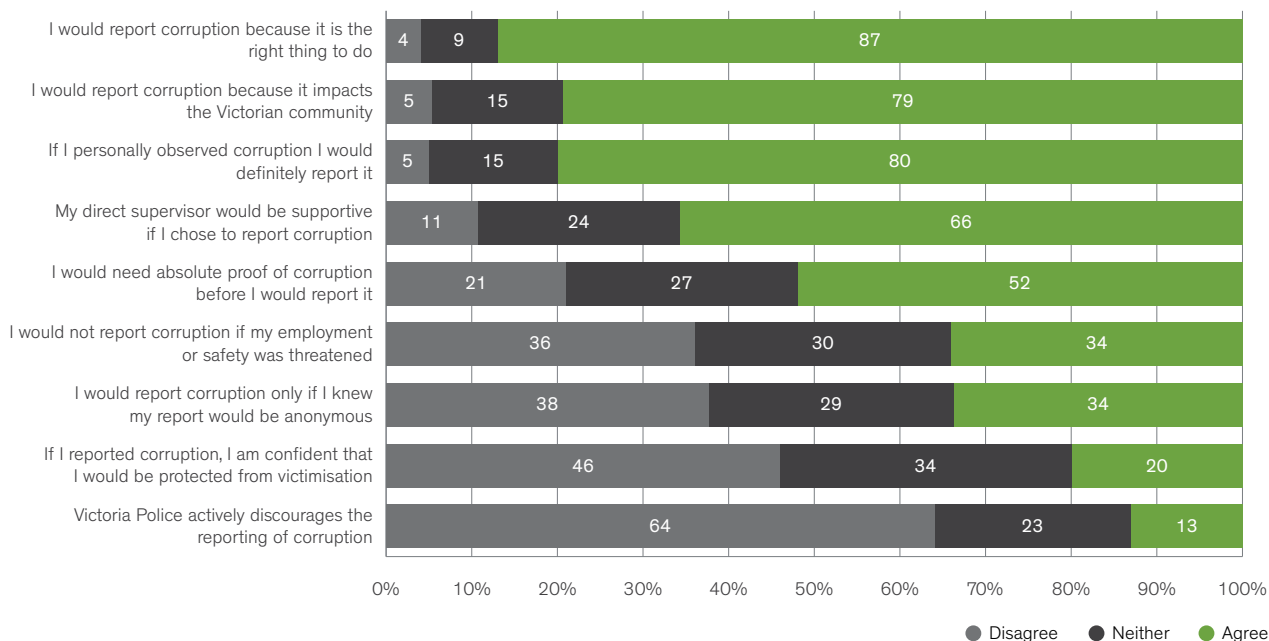
Victoria Police respondents were asked about their attitudes to reporting, whether they knew how to report corruption and how confident they felt about the protections offered if they were to report corruption.

### 4.1 Drivers for reporting corruption

Victoria Police employees indicated they would tend to report corruption for social and moral reasons. Eighty-seven per cent agreed that reporting corruption is the right thing to do and 79 per cent agreed they would report corruption *because it impacts the Victorian community*. Eighty per cent of respondents said they would report if they personally observed corruption. This is slightly higher than the 71 per cent of community members (surveyed by IBAC in 2015) who said they would report if they witnessed a police officer acting corruptly.

It is of concern that a substantial proportion of respondents did not agree with the statements about the need to report corruption. For example, 20 per cent of respondents did not agree with the statements *if I personally observed corruption I would definitely report it* and *I would report corruption because it impacts the Victorian community*.

FIGURE 5: DRIVERS FOR REPORTING CORRUPTION



Base: Total sample, n = 1172. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

## 4 Attitudes to reporting corruption and misconduct

While there are strong indications that Victoria Police respondents would report corruption for social or moral reasons, only 20 per cent of respondents felt they would be *protected from victimisation* if they reported corruption. Concerningly, 13 per cent felt Victoria Police *actively discourages the reporting of corruption*. These results were similar to those reported for state government employees.<sup>9</sup>

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*'There is fear of retribution. Whilst Victoria Police is a large employer, it is also very small!'*

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Respondent

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*'I have come across corruption and reported it. I was ostracised and bullied for doing so.'*

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Respondent

Victoria Police employees who said they would not report corruption even if they observed it, were more likely to say they were not confident of protection than those who said they would definitely report (73 per cent compared with 40 per cent). Respondents who said they would not report if they observed corruption were also more likely to agree that:

- *their direct supervisor would not be supportive if they chose to report* (73 per cent compared with four per cent of respondents who said they would definitely report)
- *their organisation discouraged reporting* (25 per cent compared with 12 per cent).

However, most respondents agreed their *direct supervisor would be supportive if I chose to report corruption* (66 per cent). A similar proportion disagreed with the statement *Victoria Police actively discourages the reporting of corruption* (64 per cent). These results suggest respondents generally perceived Victoria Police to be supportive of reporting, which is important to ensure employees feel confident to report.

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*'Managers promote ethical behaviour and reporting of behaviours that aren't consistent with the standards of Victoria Police or the individual work unit. I am very confident that if I were ever to become aware of any corruption and reported it, I would be supported and appropriate action/s would be taken.'*

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Respondent

Unlike state and local government respondents, most Victoria Police employees who said they would not report corruption, were still reluctant to report it even if they could report anonymously. Only 33 per cent of Victoria Police employees who said they would not report corruption if they personally observed it, said they would report it if they knew their report was anonymous. This compared with 62 per cent of state government and 64 per cent of local government employees.

These results suggest that Victoria Police respondents who are less willing to report tend to have doubts about Victoria Police's openness to reports of corruption, including the support of their direct supervisor and protection from victimisation. The assurance of anonymity would not necessarily encourage them to report.

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<sup>9</sup> 21 per cent of state government respondents believed they would be *protected from victimisation* if they reported corruption, and 13 per cent said their *organisation actively discourages the reporting of corruption*.

## 4.2 Reporting corruption

The willingness of Victoria Police employees to report suspected corrupt conduct is affected by their understanding of the reporting process and their level of comfort in reporting corruption to someone within Victoria Police or externally.

Victoria Police employees demonstrated higher levels of confidence in their understanding of how to report corruption, compared with state and local government respondents. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64 per cent) said they were confident they knew how to report corruption, compared with 41 per cent of local government and 33 per cent of state government respondents.

Victoria Police respondents were most likely to report serious corruption internally, to Professional Standards Command (PSC) (46 per cent) or to their immediate manager (25 per cent). Twenty-one per cent said they would report to IBAC. Only one per cent said they would not report corruption.

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*'I guess it also depends on the confidence [in] the person [to] whom you're reporting...are [they] able to maintain confidentiality.'*

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Respondent

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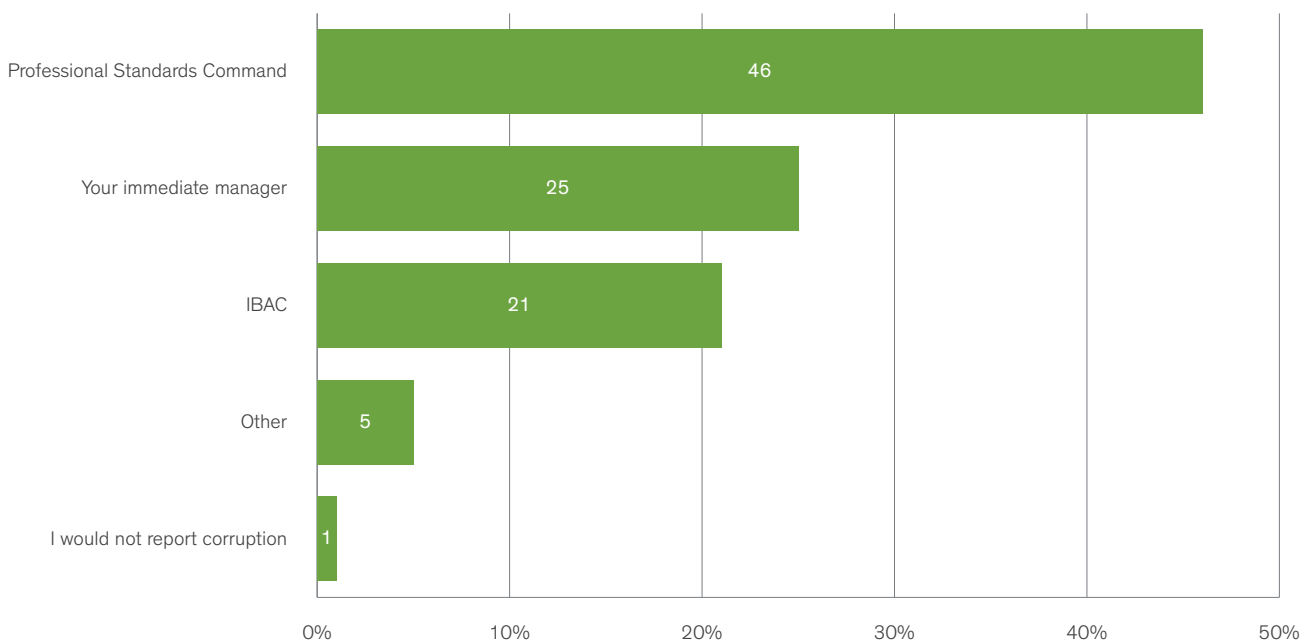
*'We were taught to sort it out, contain. And then if you can't, escalate it up the line. Not externally.'*

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Respondent

By contrast, state government respondents were most likely to report corruption to IBAC (28 per cent) or their immediate manager (26 per cent), and local government respondents to their immediate manager (33 per cent) or the protected disclosure coordinator (21 per cent).

**FIGURE 6: WHO WOULD YOU REPORT SERIOUS CORRUPTION TO?**



Base: Total sample, n = 1172. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

## 4 Attitudes to reporting corruption and misconduct

### 4.3 Protecting those who report

Uncertainty about the level of protection available to people reporting corruption, as well as perceptions of the potential repercussions of reporting, were concerns for some Victoria Police respondents. These issues can create barriers to reporting.

More than two-thirds of Victoria Police respondents agreed their organisation *has channels through which I can report corruption* (69 per cent). This is substantially higher than that reported for local government and state government respondents (48 per cent and 36 per cent respectively).

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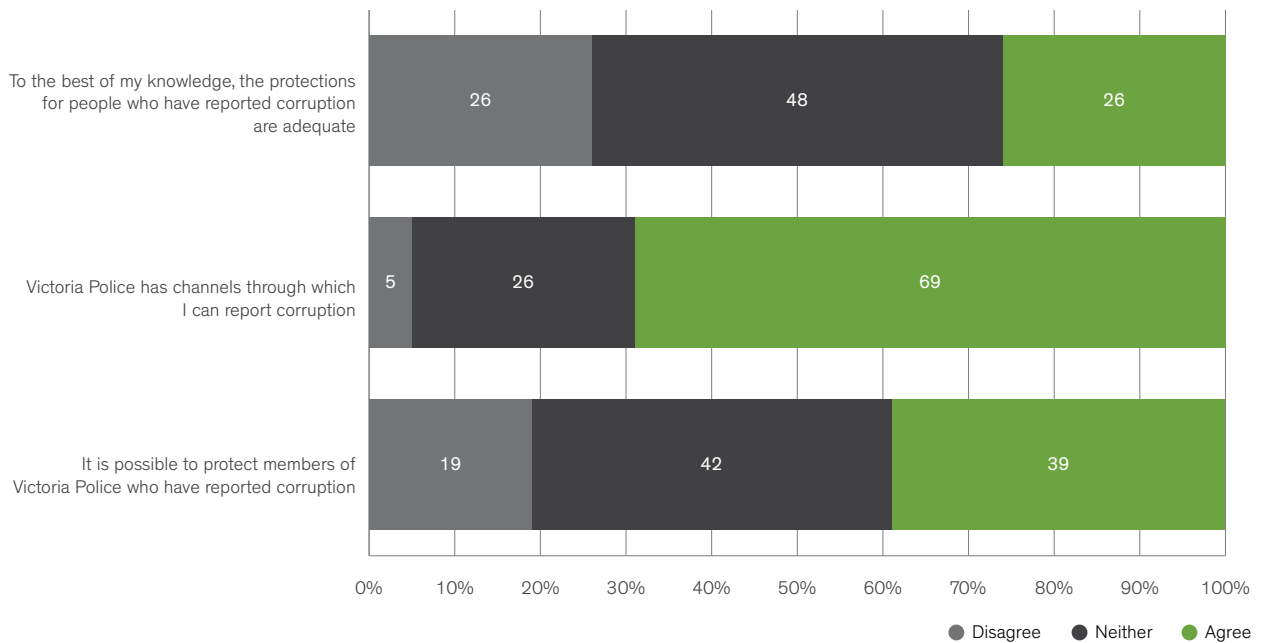
*'Most people are aware of the reporting mechanisms and equally aware of path and stresses associated with where [reporting corruption] leads to.'*

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Respondent

While one in four Victoria Police respondents agreed that the protections for people who have reported corruption are adequate, the same proportion did not agree. This suggests there is potential to improve understanding and awareness of the protections available to support those who report corruption in Victoria Police.

**FIGURE 7: PROTECTING THOSE WHO REPORT**



Base: Total sample, n = 1172. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.



## 4.4 Perceptions of the impacts of reporting

Concern around the potential personal costs of reporting corruption may be a barrier to reporting in Victoria Police. Nearly half of respondents agreed that *if I reported corruption, I would experience personal repercussions (other than losing my job)* (46 per cent), while nearly one in five respondents agreed with the statement *if I reported corruption, I could lose my job* (18 per cent).

Thirty-eight per cent of Victoria Police respondents agreed that *meaningful action would be taken* if corruption was reported. However 46 per cent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Comments made by respondents indicate Victoria Police still needs to demonstrate to its employees that it values reports and will take appropriate action.

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*'You try to get by, and in some cases a young person will not put their hand up as they'll see it as the end of their career.'*

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Respondent

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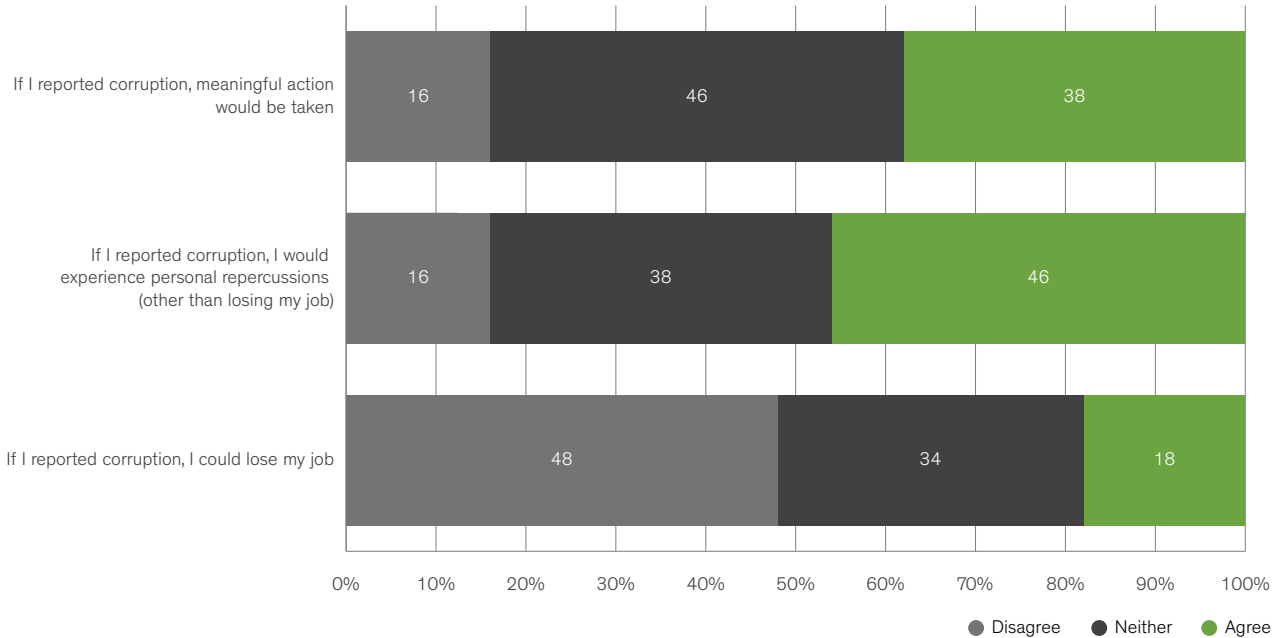
*'You ask yourself – is this career ending?'*

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Respondent

The substantial numbers of Victoria Police respondents in the neither agree nor disagree range for all three questions in Figure 8 below, suggests a high-level of uncertainty around these issues. This may influence an individual's decision to report.

**FIGURE 8: THE COST OF REPORTING**



Base: Total sample, n = 1172.

## 5 Perceptions of integrity and preventing corruption

The research looked at the role of organisational culture, personal integrity and organisational practices in preventing corruption.

### 5.1 Organisational support for corruption prevention

Victoria Police employees generally agreed with the statement *I support corruption prevention activities in my unit* (86 per cent) while just over half agreed that Victoria Police has strong corruption prevention policies in place (56 per cent).

Victoria Police respondents were also asked about the extent to which Victoria Police communicated about reporting corruption and Victoria Police's support for anti-corruption activities. 69 per cent of Victoria Police respondents agreed that their organisation *supports anti-corruption activities*, although only 36 per cent agreed that Victoria Police regularly communicates about reporting corruption. However, 64 per cent of respondents said they knew how to report corruption, which suggests confidence in and awareness of reporting channels in Victoria Police may be influenced by factors additional to dedicated communication strategies about reporting corruption.

A substantial majority of Victoria Police respondents agreed that *preventing corruption in my unit is my responsibility* (77 per cent) indicating there is a strong sense of personal responsibility for corruption prevention within Victoria Police.

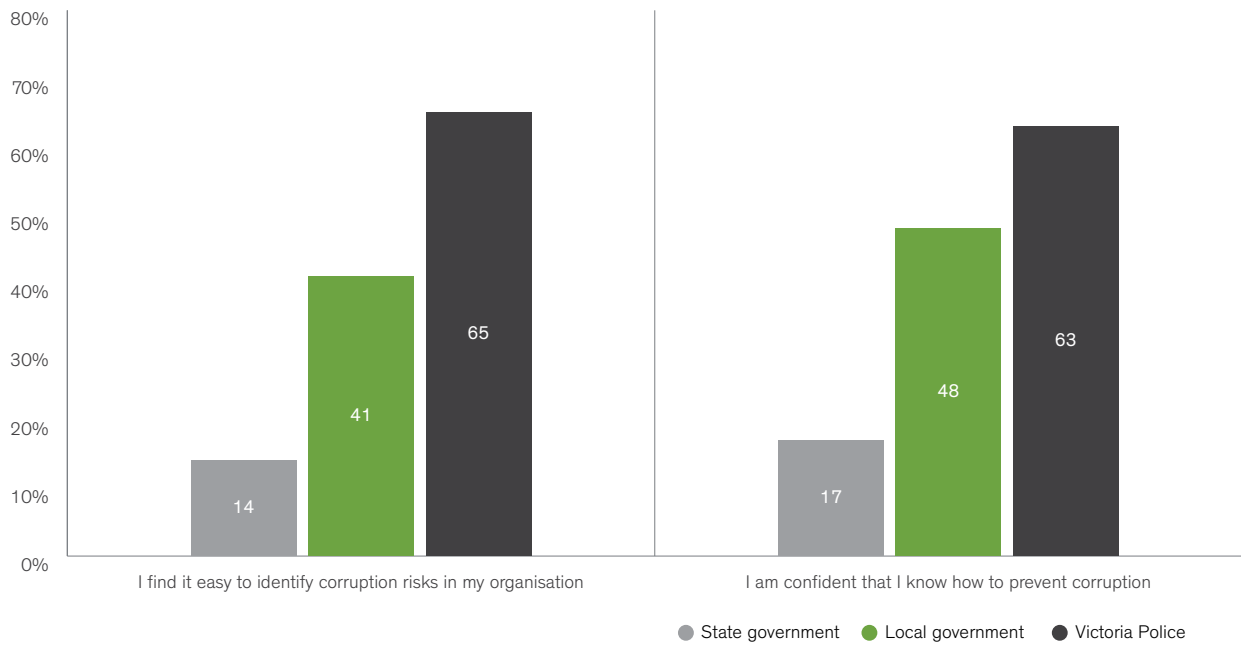
### 5.2 Identifying corruption risks

As shown in Figure 9, nearly two-thirds of Victoria Police respondents agreed that they *find it easy to identify corruption risks in my organisation* (65 per cent) and were confident they knew how to *prevent corruption* (63 per cent).

In comparison, a substantially lower proportion of state and local government respondents expressed confidence in preventing corruption and identifying corruption risks in their organisations. This may reflect a greater alignment between the nature of police work and being aware of corruption risks.

Less than half of local government respondents were confident they knew how to prevent corruption (48 per cent) and a lower proportion said they found it easy to identify corruption risks (41 per cent). State government respondents reported substantially lower results for these two measures (17 per cent and 14 per cent respectively).

**FIGURE 9: VICTORIA POLICE, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS PREVENTING CORRUPTION**



Base: Total sample, n = 4542 (state government), n = 1019 (local government), n=1172 (Victoria Police).

## 5 Perceptions of integrity and preventing corruption

### 5.3 Organisational culture

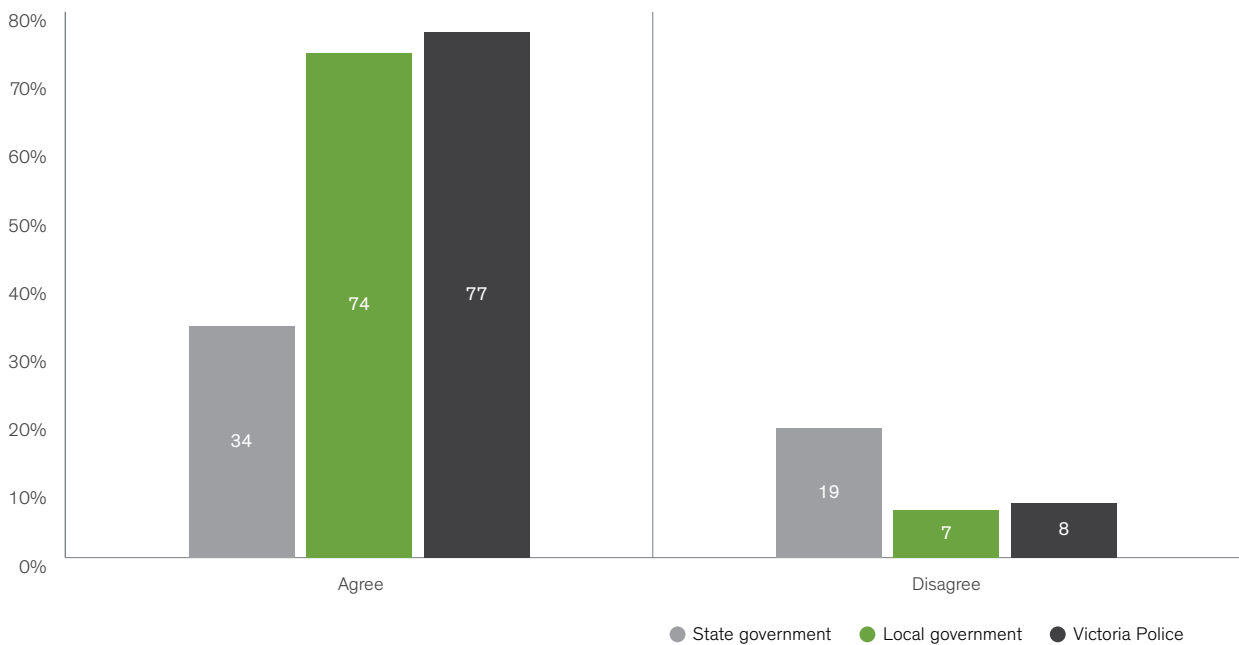
More than three-quarters of Victoria Police respondents agreed with the statement *the culture at my organisation encourages people to act with honesty and with integrity* (77 per cent) and less than one in ten disagreed (eight per cent).

A substantially lower proportion of state government respondents agreed that *their organisation encouraged people to act with honesty and integrity* (34 per cent).

The strong response to questions about organisational support for honesty and integrity may suggest Victoria Police is more effective at promoting an organisational culture in which employees believe they are encouraged to act with honesty and integrity. This is consistent with the obligations imposed on police officers through their oath or affirmation, and the law.

**FIGURE 10: VICTORIA POLICE, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE**

#### The culture at my organisation encourages people to act with honesty and integrity



Base: Total sample, n = 4542 (state government), n = 1019 (local government), n=1172 (Victoria Police).

## 6 Conclusion

This research shows that Victoria Police employees demonstrated a strong personal commitment to the values of integrity and honesty and most agreed that their organisation shares these values. Support is strong for corruption prevention and education activities, and respondents are confident they can identify corruption behaviours and risks.

However, the research reveals concern among Victoria Police employees about the repercussions of reporting and protection for those who report.

This research provides valuable insights into the awareness of corruption, attitudes and behaviours of Victoria Police employees towards corruption prevention and reporting. The report also highlights there is an opportunity for Victoria Police to do more to raise awareness among its employees about how to identify, report and prevent corruption, including ensuring its officers understand their obligations to report misconduct and corruption. Victoria Police has informed IBAC that the issues identified in this report are consistent with PSC's primary areas of focus. For example, it advises PSC is currently reviewing policies covering conflict of interest, gifts and benefits, declarable associations and secondary employment. Victoria Police is also improving complaint handling and discipline systems in response to a review conducted by VEOHRC.

