

# Bunnings ID face-to-face

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**STORY, PAGE 15**

# Customer facial data fears

## Meeting of Bunnings boss and minister spurs 'surveillance' concern

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During a Bunnings trial that ran across 63 Victorian and NSW stores between 2018 and 2021, an FRT system analysed real-time CCTV images of people's faces as they entered the store, comparing them to a company database of individuals assessed as being high-risk due to recorded instances of violent or criminal behaviour.

Bunnings managing director Michael Schneider met with Police Minister Felix Ellis and Tasmania Police commander Jason Elmer on March 30, discussing the issue of retail crime and Bunnings' eagerness to deploy FRT in its stores.

According to the most recent Tasmania Police data, shoplifting rose 8 per cent in 2024-25.

A Bunnings spokeswoman said the company took safety "very seriously", adding that there had been a 253 per cent increase in "threatening situations" in its Tasmanian stores between the 2021-22 and 2024-25 financial years.

The spokeswoman did not say how Bunnings defined such incidents.

"While we're not currently using the technology in Australia, we are exploring how FRT can be introduced to address the serious issue of violent and threatening incidents in our stores," she said.

The head of policy at Digital Rights Watch, Tom Sulston, warned that FRT had "baked-in" racial biases and involved "offshoring" Australians' biometric data for "storage and processing".

"Consumers should vote with their feet and reject shops

that treat them like a criminal from the moment they enter the store," he said. "You wouldn't tolerate being followed around by a policeman everywhere you go; we shouldn't tolerate this."

Independent Nelson MP Meg Webb, an outspoken critic of FRT, said it would be "deeply concerning" if Bunnings began deploying the technology in Tasmania, citing a "wealth" of evidence attesting to the "extreme sensitivity" of biometric data.

"At the very least, the government should ... investigate imposing an immediate mora-

torium upon FRT use by private businesses until we have a rigorous evidence-based legislative framework in place," she said.

Mr Ellis said the state government supported the use of FRT as "a tool for the prevention and detection of crime", provided it complied with federal privacy laws.

The Privacy Commissioner's 2024 ruling noted that Bunnings customers did not consent to the collection of biometric data during the FRT trial. But in February this year, the ART set aside the decision after a Bunnings application.