



Federation of  
Victorian Traditional  
Owner Corporations

## Media Statement

Tuesday 28 March 2023

### ***Eastern Maar Peoples' significant native title determination***

We should not have to prove ourselves, our cultural and spiritual connection to Country. And yet we do.

The road to recognition of our rights through law is a long and painful one. Many of our people, our warriors, fall on the path. And yet we continue.

*"Doing the hard work gets results. Our ancestors and Elders have formed alliances and sought to work together to share knowledge, preserve culture, care for Country and fight for recognition of our inherent rights. Our Elders have and continue to guide us in our pathway to self-determination through restoring culture and authority back into Country."*

Paul Paton, CEO of the Federation

Today marks one of the very few days when our people have reached a milestone on this journey.

Today, the Maar, Eastern Gunditjmara, Tjap Wurrung, Peek Whurrong, Kirrae Whurrung, Kuurn Kopan Noot and/or Yarro waetch (Tooram Tribe), and Gulidjan and/or Gadubanud, known collectively as the Eastern Maar or Eastern Maar peoples, have been granted native title rights.

Statutory recognition through any of the three legislations that govern recognition of Traditional Owner rights to culture and Country in Victoria, is predicated on forming an inclusive and representative corporation.

The Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation has been a strong member of the community, receiving native title recognition of Country shared with the Gunditjmara in 2011 and registered Aboriginal party status in 2013. In 2020, the extent of their Country under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic) was expanded and today a further expansion under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth).

Cassandra Lewis, Chairperson of the Federation, said that:

*"A rising tide lifts all boats. When the rights of any groups of Traditional Owners is recognised, enabling them to fulfil their inherited responsibilities for Country and culture, we are all strengthened."*

We applaud the Eastern Maar peoples and their corporation on pursuing this determination. They are truly deserved of the benefits to Country, culture and community that will flow from recognition of their fundamental rights.

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## About the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is the Victorian state-wide body that convenes and advocates for the rights of Traditional Owners while progressing wider social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives. We support the progress of agreement-making and participation in decision-making to enhance the authority of Traditional Owner Corporations on behalf of their communities.

The Federation was established in 2013 by Traditional Owner Corporations who recognised that through a path of working together Traditional Owner Groups could be stronger and could advance their shared interests in policy engagement, and in creating economic opportunities and caring for Country.

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## About Paul Paton

Paul is a Gunnai and Monaro man with a long involvement in reconnecting individuals and communities with language, culture and identity. He has held several executive roles and directorships including as the Executive Officer at the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages and as a Director on the Board of First Nations Legal & Research Services.

Paul is committed to building on the Federation's success as a key organisation that strengthens the voice of Traditional Owners in Victoria. He brings his knowledge, skills and networks to work closely with Traditional Owners across the State to support their aspirations for community and Country whilst taking up the challenge for self-determination and Treaty.

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## About Cassandra Lewis

Cassandra is a proud Dja Dja Wurrung and Wamba Wamba women raised on the beautiful Murray River Country of Wamba Wamba.

The Granddaughter of Nola Charles and Bruce Baxter and Great Grand Daughter of Leonard Charles and Cora Day, she is a descendant of John Charles. She is a mother of five children born and raised on djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country).

Cassandra joined DJAARA initially working in the Repatriation of Dja Dja Wurrung Language and Malamiya (Cultural Heritage) before her more recent appointment as General Manager.

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