Media Release

**UNDERMINING ABORIGINAL GOVERNANCE IS NOT IN INTERESTS OF SELF-DETERMINATION
Monday 9 September 2019**

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is urging all parties to stop undermining the decision-making process that has unfolded on the Western Highway.

In this call, the Federation supports its member, the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation **(Eastern Maar)** in their plea for the state government and protestors to respect Aboriginal governance in the interests of self-determination.

Eastern Maar is the peak authority to speak on behalf of the Djab Wurrung clan, and has pursued a native title claim over this area since 2012. In 2016, Eastern Maar was recognised by the State of Victoria as the appropriate Traditional Owner Nation to enter into negotiations under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, and retains all cultural authority over the area in question.

Federation CEO Marcus Stewart said the right mechanisms and procedures had been followed by Eastern Maar who is the right cultural authority to speak for this part of Country, and that needed to be respected.

He said to undermine the process now would be completely contrary to the principle of self-determination.

“What all of this public commentary is doing is undermining the existing representational structures of Traditional Owner Nations which have been long fought for and established over decades of struggle,” Mr Stewart said.

“Traditional Owners have the right to determine their own political structures and representation, so to bring that into disrepute is disrespectful.

“People are, of course, entitled to a difference of opinions, but I think poking holes in our current structures cannot be seen as conducive to Aboriginal governance in Victoria.

**For further comment please call Declan Kelly on 0411 156 308.**

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*We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land we work on as the First People of this country.*