**TRADITIONAL OWNER SETTLEMENT NEGOTIATIONS COULD RESOLVE WESTERN HIGHWAY DISPUTE
Monday 9 September 2019**

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation is calling on the state government to expedite their drawn-out settlement negotiations in order to resolve the road dispute on the Western Highway.

The Traditional Owner nation publicly support the road project which will save the culturally significant trees and will continue to undergo due diligence with an ongoing invitation for the Djab Wurrung community to participate.

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (**Eastern Maar**) is the peak authority to speak on behalf of the Djab Wurrung clan and has pursued a native claim over this area since 2012. 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* in 2016 and retains all cultural authority over the area.

Eastern Maar understand the complexities and sensitivities around widening the highway but what also needs to be understood is that the appropriate measures and processes have been followed.

Eastern Maar agrees no process will ever be entirely perfect. We are also strengthened by the voice of our citizens who like anybody have the right to question any decision-making process. This underpins the foundations of Aboriginal governance in Victoria which the public should now respect rather than undermine.

Eastern Maar strongly believes preserving our cultural heritage is crucial to the integrity and identity of our nation and will always take priority in our decision-making processes.

This is why the Eastern Maar nation will continue to fight for our rights and interests while working with the state on the Western Highway project to reach a peaceful resolution.

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