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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Tuesday 14 December 2021**

**TRADITIONAL OWNERS CALL FOR MINDFULNESS ON COUNTRY THIS CHRISTMAS BREAK**

Traditional Owners of Victoria are calling on all holiday-makers in Victoria to be respectful while on Country this festive season.

With borders open across the nation and interstate travelers planning on visiting friends and family this Christmas, it is expected tens of thousands of visitors will be visiting regional Victoria after another turbulent year of lockdowns. This projection predicts increased foot traffic in rural areas, especially Cultural Heritage locations in Victoria.

With these numbers in mind, the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations (the Federation) implores Victorians to minimise their impact on Country while camping this holiday season and encourages those who are on Country to take steps to protect the ancient landscapes.

Whether it’s a daytrip to one of Victoria’s stunning national parks, or a week-long camping adventure, the Federation is encouraging visitors to respect Country and leave their surroundings as they found them. Some examples of protecting Country include; leaving pets at home, lighting fires only in designated fireplaces, observing fire bans and restrictions, being mindful and considerate of native plants and animals, keeping to the roads and tracks provided, properly disposing of rubbish and waste, and paying respect to Traditional Owners and Country wherever possible.

Victoria is home to more than 100 National Parks, including the Great Ocean Road, Twelve Apostles and UNESCO World Heritage Listed Budj Bim Cultural Landscape in South West Victoria. These sites of Australian Cultural Heritage must be preserved for future generations.

Traditional Owners in Victoria have been calling for stronger Cultural Heritage Protection laws for decades. Many argue the current *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* falls short, often leaving them traumatised by the continuous destruction of Cultural Heritage.

Earlier this year, the Federation urged the Victorian Government to strengthen the *Act* to meet the changing international standards and maintain Victoria’s place as the state or territory with the strongest laws in Australia.

So, this holiday season, protect Country where possible. By following these simple measures everyone will be able to enjoy Country and ensure Victoria’s beautiful landscape is maintained for centuries to come.

**ENDS**

**QUOTES ATTRIBUTABLE TO:**

**Paul Paton, CEO, Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations:**

“We’re excited to welcome all travellers to Victoria once again, a state which is home to one of the world’s oldest living Cultures. We are looking forward to seeing everyone out on Country again and experiencing all that Victoria has to offer.”

“We ask that visitors are respectful while on Country and be mindful of our people’s enduring connection to Country which has existed for more than 65,000 years.”

“Everyone can protect Country, and that is what we are encouraging everyone to do.”

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