**­­Media Statement**

***Enough is enough***

**Thursday 25 August 2022**

To have the inherited responsibilities of Traditional Owners respected and our rights recognized, we should not have to raise our voices or share our grief. These are the same rights that are defined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and realise fundamental principles of self-determination.

Today, Traditional Owners have said enough is enough. It is time that our knowledge of Country, inherited from our Ancestors for over 60,00 years, is as respected as modern science. In the words of Rodney Carter, DJAARA CEO, “science is just a tool for the human to make a decision on that data. Science is not the master, science doesn’t clearly tell us what to do - we need to bring an emotion to that, we need to bring our identity and presence around science.”

If we apply respect for this knowledge, respect for the oldest living Culture on earth and the basic respect extended out of courteousness, we will together enable a healthy Country and ensure the wellbeing of our communities.

I am alarmed at the increase in the accepted criticism of Traditional Owner knowledge as being ‘folk’ knowledge and somehow less than contemporary science. This is both hurtful and wrong. For over 60,000 years, our people have lived on Country and applied their observations, experiences and learnings to manage Country. It has only been recently, after the management of Country was taken from us, that Country became unwell and created situations that pose a potential threat to the wellbeing and safety of those who live on it. The State of the Environment Report 2021 details the ways in which Traditional Owners should be provided a regulatory environment in which to manage Country and the ways in which their connection to Country provides the best management principles and knowledge for wellbeing and environmental impact.

I am a proud Gunnai and Monaro man with a long involvement in reconnecting individuals and communities with language, culture and identity. But this cannot be done in isolation. We need to be custodians, leaders and practitioners of our culture.

Whilst our voice is being heard at all levels of government and we applaud the consideration of enshrining our voice in the Australian constitution, we can’t stop now. Unfortunately, we still have a long way to go in applying this respect through statutory and legislative mechanisms. Traditional Owners need to be practically enabled to manage and heal Country according to their own principles and experience. We must approach the management of and care for Country through the lens of a cultural landscape, across tenure and biodiversity types.

To do this, many of government’s own Traditional Owner led strategies for Country, including game management, water access and fire management, must have their implementation adequately funded so that they cease to remain lifeless policy documents sitting on shelves.

Let’s work together to respect Traditional Owner knowledge and rights.

Paul Paton, CEO, Federation of Victorian Traditional Owners Corporations