



Federation of
Victorian Traditional
Owner Corporations

Media Statement

Let's talk about Cultural Fire

Monday 5 September 2022

For over 60,000 years, 'cultural fire' has been an essential way for Traditional Owners to care for Country. Practicing culture is our right. Healing and caring for Country through applying the 'right fire at the right time in the right way' is our responsibility.

Traditional Owners across Victoria are partnering with others to lead the reintroduction of cultural fire on their Country for the benefit of Country and all Victorians.

Cultural burning describes Traditional Owners burning practices and knowledge utilised to promote the health of Country and its people. Cultural fire is healing. Cultural burning also protects the health and abundance of particular plants and animals, reduces fuel loads, creates habitat variety, and assists in maintaining important cultural sites. Cultural burning is ceremonial, spiritual and practical.

"As Traditional Owners, fire is an essential way for us to manage Country. Except it's more than that. Our relationship to Country is holistic, spiritual and intrinsically linked to our wellbeing. We use fire to regenerate Country, to cleanse through ceremony and in our day to day lives. Traditional Owners in Victoria, like elsewhere, must be able to practice cultural fire to heal Country so that everyone on Country can benefit."

Paul Paton, CEO, Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations

In 2019, Traditional Owners led the development of the [Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy](#) and launched this in partnership with Victorian Government partners.

Today, however, the momentum is stalling. Legislative, regulatory and resourcing arrangements largely continue to be barriers to the reintroduction of cultural fire to Country across the state of Victoria. This often holds us back from taking this leadership role and from using our cultural fire knowledge and practice to contribute to keeping people and Country safe, healthy and prosperous. An inter-generational change is required to reinvigorate and reintroduce cultural fire through Traditional Owner leadership. Let's continue working together to make this happen.

Here in Victoria, Traditional Owners have strong aspirations to increase collaboration with land and fire management agencies to facilitate the re-introduction of cultural burning in Victoria's natural landscapes; allowing for healing and caring for Country.

The Victorian government's fire management agencies have to date applied a risk-based approach that emphasises the protection of life and property, sometimes at the expense of Traditional Owner rights and obligations to care for Country.

The Federation urges the Victorian Government to commit to funding for Traditional Owners, prioritising this practice, and implementing the Strategy through a model which embeds Traditional Owner leadership.

Don't stop now, let's take the partnership to another level and work together more deeply to keep people safe, heal Country and strengthen culture and communities.