

## Media Statement

Wednesday 26 July

### *To Close the Gap, we need a Voice*

The release of the **Productivity Commission's** first overarching review of the **National Agreement on Closing the Gap** shows just little progress has been made.

Whilst overwhelmingly the significant benchmarks have not been met, central to this failure are the core issues that have been identified in this report in harsh but long-known terms.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples must be given real and practical responsibility for decisions that affect them.** This can only be done through the development of real partnerships, based on listening and responding to what is heard. In this way, we need a Voice.

Whilst governments across all jurisdictions speak of engaging in co-design, supporting self-determination and wanting to close the gap, **there has been little reform at a systemic level.**

*We need a voice, we need to be heard and we need to be well.*

*We need to heal Country, practice culture and in doing so, heal ourselves.*

*We need to not just genuinely acknowledge the ongoing effects of colonisation but ameliorate them.*

Paul Paton, CEO, Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations

It is essential that implementation of the Agreement should be driven by the principles of the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP)**, to which Australia is a party.

The principles of self-determination, participation, cultural rights, land rights, ownership, and free prior and informed consent all form the basis for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities in their efforts to set an agenda for improving our wellbeing.

The **loss of rights to self-government and self-determination** effected through colonisation, remains a key factor affecting the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. These political factors must therefore be addressed directly if meaningful reform is to be achieved.

Again we have a report that clearly articulates the relationship between being heard, having decision-making power and the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

And yet another report that shows the myriad of ways that the culture and health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is not prioritised by Governments.

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## About the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is the Victorian state-wide body that convenes and advocates for the rights of Traditional Owners while progressing wider social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives. We support the progress of agreement-making and participation in decision-making to enhance the authority of Traditional Owner Corporations on behalf of their communities.

The Federation was established in 2013 by Traditional Owner Corporations who recognised that through a path of working together Traditional Owner Groups could be stronger and could advance their shared interests in policy engagement, and in creating economic opportunities and caring for Country.

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## About Paul Paton

Paul is a Gunnai and Monaro man with a long involvement in reconnecting individuals and communities with language, culture and identity. He has held several executive roles and directorships including as the Executive Officer at the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages and as a Director on the Board of First Nations Legal & Research Services.

Paul is committed to building on the Federation's success as a key organisation that strengthens the voice of Traditional Owners in Victoria. He brings his knowledge, skills and networks to work closely with Traditional Owners across the State to support their aspirations for community and Country whilst taking up the challenge for self-determination and Treaty.

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## Further Information

[Submission to the Productivity Commission on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, January 2023](#)

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## Media Contact

Alexandra Hill / Senior Communications Advisor  
Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations  
[alexandra.hill@fvtoc.com.au](mailto:alexandra.hill@fvtoc.com.au) / 0434 578 933