



Media Statement

Wednesday 26 July

Congratulations to the new Co-Chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria

The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria (**Assembly**) plays a critical role in affecting real change in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this state.

The announcement of the new co-Chairs, Rueben Berg and Ngarra Murray, is an important one.

The new Assembly will negotiate a Treaty with the Victorian Government and Rueben and Ngarra will lead those discussions. The task ahead is not an easy one and will require real leadership and great fortitude.

We congratulate all new and returning members as respected members of their communities. As we discuss a Voice for Aboriginal People in this country, let's look to those who have already come together to lead discussions and make decisions.

Here in Victoria, Traditional Owner Corporations (**Corporations**) provide representation for the clans, tribes and family groups who make up those corporations. The application of cultural governance structures to imposed systems provides robustness and cultural safety to the decision making and assurity in the decisions themselves.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (**UNDRIP**) provides self-determined representative structures as a right and one that we are upholding in Victoria. We do this both through the Assembly and the eleven Corporations who have statutory responsibility for 75% of the state.

The process of gaining formal recognition, through the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic), *Victorian Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (Vic) or *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), is long and rigorous. Our people must work together, have hard conversations, revisit intergenerational trauma and do it all within the constructed process of colonisation.

The Assembly provides reserved seats for the Corporations, recognising their unique responsibility to speak for Country and Cultural Heritage. Newly appointed co-Chair, Rueben Berg, is one of those members, representing the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation.

Those individuals representing their corporations and those as independently elected members bear a great responsibility. Their capacity to come together and make decisions will be tested but, the result will be a Treaty in Victoria that brings a new acknowledgement of shared sovereignty and benefits all Aboriginal people.

We hope that our work will support all Assembly members and that the example they set will assure all Australians that a Voice can and does work.

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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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