



## Media Statement

Tuesday 23 May 2023

### ***Victorian Traditional Owners must lead the partnership deciding the future of Victoria's forested Country.***

Victoria's state forests belong in the hands of Traditional Owners. Until the last few hundred years, the resources of Victoria's native forests have long been used by Traditional Owners. With the appropriation of their Country and the establishment of state forests and national parks, Traditional Owners have been locked out from these resources whilst logging and resource removal has benefitted successive governments.

The announcement of the transition out of native forest harvesting in Victoria by 1 January 2024 is a great opportunity for Traditional Owners and the State of Victoria to demonstrate its commitment to land justice and partner in healing and caring for forested Country. An opportunity to be present in the return of forests to health and to benefit from biocultural resources in a way that they have been unable to do for several hundred years.

Commitment in the 2023/24 Victorian state budget to more than \$875million for Victoria's forestry industry continues to remove Traditional Owners from key decisions about managing Country and how to benefit from Country. The current forest management system is broken, systemically prejudicing a cultural landscape approach to be applied to healing Country.

Victoria's native forests have not thrived under the current statutory and regulatory conditions. It is essential that, with the inclusion of 1.8 million hectares to state and native parks, Traditional Owners are enabled, empowered and resourced to apply their cultural knowledge to management of forested Country. We must seize this opportunity to start healing Country, removing bushfire threats and allowing biodiversity to thrive.

Victorian Traditional Owners are mindful of the long history of battle lines being drawn in natural resource removal and benefit. The benefits of forests had not been felt by Victoria's Traditional owners since ownership was removed from them and from there, we can chart the stark decline in forest health and rise in mismanagement.

It is important that the inclusion of 1.8m hectares in state and national parks must include Traditional Owner decision making. The removal of resource benefits from Traditional Owners has impacted cultural and financial wellbeing of Traditional Owners for 200 years, let's not continue for another 200.

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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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