



Federation of
Victorian Traditional
Owner Corporations

Media Statement

Wednesday 7 February

Governments must commit to the work of Closing the Gap

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

Whilst overwhelmingly, the Agreement's 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.

Paul Paton, CEO of the Federation of Victorian Traditional owner Corporations said:

"As a member of the Coalition of Peaks, we know that entrenched and systemic power imbalances prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples exercising self-determination. To make real change in our lives, government at all levels must engage in genuine decision making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about issues that affect them."

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, with shared decision making.

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 **inability to exercise our 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.

We must listen to Productivity Commissioners Mokak and Siegel-Brown when they say:

"Most critically, the Agreement requires government decision-makers to accept that they do not know what is best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."

Again, we have another report that clearly articulates the relationship between being heard, having decision-making power and the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, but, unfortunately also shows the myriad of ways that the culture and health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is not prioritised by Governments.

----- ENDS -----

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.

About Paul Paton

Paul is a Gonnai 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.

Media Contact

Alexandra Hill / Senior Communications Advisor
Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations
alexandra.hill@fvto.com.au / 0434 578 933