FEDERATION OF VICTORIAN TRADITIONAL OWNER CORPORATIONS

**CORPORATE CAPABILITY STATEMENT**

# INTRODUCTION

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is the State-wide body that convenes and advocates for the rights and interests of Traditional Owner groups and their communities.

The Federation was established by Traditional Owners in 2013 to advance shared interests towards systemic reform in government policy engagement and in creating economic opportunities and caring for Country. It is the only organisation of its kind in Australia, and in 2018 became a fully-fledged organisation.

As an Aboriginal controlled organisation, with a board derived from Traditional Owner Corporations, our success is determined by and grounded in the strategies and aspirations of Traditional Owners.

We continue to grow and work closely with groups around Victoria to support and empower current and future generations to have a voice in enabling and advocating outcomes to Government. We have also continued to develop and strengthen our partnerships with Government and other stakeholders based on and giving voice to the cultural knowledge, values and practices of Traditional Owners as the custodians of Country.

# OUR PURPOSE

To amplify Traditional Owner voices by facilitating outcomes to a wider audience. The Federation supports Traditional Owner voices to self-determine their futures and strengthen their collective interests and opportunities.

# OUR VISION

To have Traditional Owner voices strong on Country and ensure Victoria is leading in supporting self-determined social, political, economic and cultural outcomes for Community.

# OUR VALUES

* Community: We put Community first and value all Traditional Owners, Traditional Owner groups and Traditional Owner communities.
* Culture: We respect and empower all individual Traditional Owner groups and the cultural values, knowledge and practices they follow.
* Country: We recognise all Traditional Owners and come together to keep Country strong.
* Collaboration: We enable all voices to be heard and aspirations to be realised by facilitating and convening Traditional Owner interests. We’re stronger together.

# VALUE PROPOSITION

As a convenor and facilitator, we build and bring relationships and understanding of the roles, responsibilities and interests of Traditional Owners, focusing on recognising and respecting the cultural authority of Traditional Owners in the way we work and in the advice we provide to government, partners and stakeholders.

Key differentiators

We do not duplicate - or compete with - the functions of our member organisations. Rather, we seek to enhance the efforts of Traditional Owner Corporations and their communities and promote and strengthen collective interests and opportunities.

We do not work in silos – we bring an understanding of the holistic and integrated long- term relationships and understand that it is important to bring this lens whether considering all issues, whether language, health, cultural heritage, employment and economic development, water and fire, financial sustainability or local government planning.

We bring a strengths-based approach, focusing on empowering and enabling the capacity for Traditional Owners to drive and achieve their strategies and aspirations, to respectfully integrate western science with Aboriginal knowledge, and to implement self-determination through appropriate governance, decision-making and program design.

# OUR WORK

Our work focuses on four key areas:

Advocacy: We advocate for the rights, interests and objectives of Traditional Owner groups and their communities to strengthen policies and build opportunities for Community through a unified voice.

Accountability: We are accountable to each other and to Community by ensuring the Victorian Government is accountable for enabling the principles of self-determination.

Nation building: We work with Traditional Owner groups and their communities to understand and support sustainable development within Community, creating greater capability and capacity to activate Traditional Owners’ rights and interests and the objectives of their people.

Knowledge sharing: We amplify Traditional Owner voices by facilitating outcomes to a wider audience through supporting the knowledge, systems, practices and beliefs they follow through the promotion of resources, events, and information sharing opportunities.

# KEY COMPETENCIES

Core services – what we do? Our key competencies are:

* Providing informed and insightful expert advice through our experience, knowledge and understanding of the Traditional Owner context, organisations, infrastructure and people
* Bridging and building on-the-ground support and information with advice and advocacy for long term and systemic change to regulatory, policy and institutional arrangements
* Convening and facilitating to bring Traditional Owner people, knowledge and views together, and to connect and link with partners and opportunities.

Core client and market

*Traditional Owner groups, communities and Corporations*

We have a range of ways by which we facilitate and convene, bringing together Traditional Owners as Elders, knowledge holders, corporation representatives, businesses. This includes forums such as:

* Our Board comprises of CEOs and Directors from Traditional Owner Corporations, providing direct insight and strategic direction
* Permanent forums or strategic engagement such as: CEOs Forum, Board Chairs and CEOs meetings, NRM Committee
* Project based forums such as:
  + key knowledge holders and Elders (eg a specific group was established to provide leadership and direction in relation to the cultural fire strategy)
  + other matters (eg for the First Principles Review of the Traditional Owner Settlement Act)
  + project control and co-governance committees

*Government, stakeholders and partners*

Through participation in formal committees and bodies, and providing a range of reports, factsheets, submissions and technical advice

* Membership of a range of strategic committees such as: Aboriginal Executive Council, Victorian Aboriginal Economic and Employment Council, Right People for Country Committee.
* Working with government as advisors, providing and guiding strategy development and processes for enabling and strengthening the role and relationships of Traditional Owners in policy design and development
* Liaison and communication, supporting identification of risks and opportunities, information and evidence to support and enhance strategies and policies

# GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENT

Our work is often strategic and a ‘front end’, with outcomes only seen after periods of

change and implementation. Some recent examples are:

* Convened the 2014 Traditional Owner Water Symposium with participation from MLDRIN, NAILSMA and Traditional Owner representatives from around Victoria, culminating in a new vision and strategic policy advocating for water rights and interests which set a basis for government’s Water for Victoria plan
* Placed a submission to inform the *Productivity Commission National Water Reform Report*, seeking a stronger and integrated approach to the Aboriginal interest in water management, and developing the recognition of economic as well as cultural and environmental purposes
* Contributed to the 2018 Independent Expert Panel on Interim Targets for the Climate Change, advocating for greater use and participation of Traditional Owners in renewable energy investments
* Negotiated the establishment of a collaborative body between DELWP and Traditional Owner Corporations to operate as a high-level forum to set systemic and policy priorities
* Attended the *United Nations Permanent Forum* on Indigenous Issues to learn from and strengthen our ties with our international counterparts, particularly from New Zealand and British Columbia, with regards to implementing a Treaty for our First Nations People, leading to key concepts being incorporated into the progress towards Treaty, including Treaty readiness and recognising Traditional Owner structures
* Invited to participate in the 2020 Ministerial Roundtables on bushfire recovery. We developed a range of strategies to improve how Country is managed which included how fire is used on Country, supporting and leading to significant changes to the national approach and focus, funding for implementation
* Advocated for funding and funding reform to support the sustainability and capacity of the Traditional Owner Corporations, leading to funding of positions and projects for natural resource management, economic development, Treaty and nation building.
* Developed partnerships to take on the role of holding and managing programs including grant funding.

# PARTNERSHIPS

We are currently a part of the following partnerships:

* Djakitjuk Djanga program

Partnership with Agriculture Victoria to support Aboriginal-owned businesses and organisations to develop a local native foods and botanicals industry

* Nation-building Support Service Partnership

Comprising the Federation, First Nations Legal & Research Services and Aboriginal Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet

# PERFORMANCE AND TRACK RECORD

Since establishment in 2013, the Federation has grown significantly. Here’s a snapshot of

some key areas of our advocacy and advice:

* Advocated for the establishment of a *State Aboriginal Procurement Policy* and targets in Victoria, resulting in the commitments made in Tharamba Bugheen, the Victorian Aboriginal Business Strategy
* Established and supported the development and delivery of programs for Country Planning and Reading Country, and on a range of significant resource management issues for cultural fire, water and native foods and botanicals
* Supported the *legislation and establishment of Treaty and First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria* to ensure the government drew on the knowledge, experience and voice of Traditional Owners and ensuring the process will align with rather than undermine the structures and authority of Traditional Owners
* Negotiated a revised approach to enable a Traditional Owner led approach to articulate and advocate for Cultural Water to fulfil the Aboriginal Water Roadmap within Water for Victoria
* Facilitated the development of the *Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy* - the first of its kind in the State and in Australia, which was launched with the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change and the co-governance group
* Negotiated for the inclusion of recognised Traditional Owner groups within

Victoria’s *Local Government Bill 2019*

* Establishing and administering *grant funding programs*, enabling tailored support that recognises the drivers and operations of Traditional Owner Corporations and Aboriginal businesses, including in relation to fire workshops, nation building, corporation capacity, nation building, native foods and botanicals
* Convened and consulted Traditional Owner interests to develop a *Cultural Landscapes Strategy*, as a far-reaching framework of principles and strategies for implementing values, practices and systems that can be reflected in public land planning and management.
* Facilitated, researched and brought together the *Traditional Owner Native Foods and Botanicals Strategy*, which articulates a new approach for Traditional Owner interests to share in the emerging industry and to ensure its authenticity.
* Facilitated and convened the *Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy*, bringing together the evolving approaches to land management to enable self-determination, biodiversity and cultural landscapes outcomes
* Produced six *Treaty Discussion Papers* on a range of topics, including sovereignty, UNDRIP and enshrining rights and lessons from native title and Traditional Owner Settlements, to support the establishment and foundations for the First People Assembly of Victoria.

# MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Governance, Quality and Risk management

As an advocacy body of Traditional Owner voices, we value the importance of strong accountability to our Federation Members and the need to be transparent and robust in all our endeavours.

We meet our legal requirements in reporting and accounting standards and adopt good governance practices by:

* Holding annual general meetings and publishing an annual report
* Establishing sub-committees to provide added assurance including the use of

external independent committee’s (e.g., an audit and finance committee)

* Reporting to funding and contracting bodies to ensure compliance and performance and from staff, delivery agents and service providers to be assured of value, integrity and alignment with our strategy

As a registered charity, the Federation is subject to regulation by the *Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission.* We have strong systems and processes in place led through our CFO, General Counsel and COO. This includes:

* We have financial systems in place as required to meet the auditing standards and requirements (and have continued to enjoy unqualified audit opinions), meeting our ACNC and ASIC requirements.
* We have a strong focus on employee and contracting requirements, with policies and procedures covering all aspects of our work including such areas as health and safety and insurances

# OUR STAFF, EXPERTISE AND PARTNERS

**CEO**: Paul Paton

**Board:** Our board comprises the CEOs and directors from Traditional Owner Corporations

Our management team and senior staff have significant experience and expertise with decades of experience to draw on. Within an integrated and holistic approach our areas of expertise cover:

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| --- | --- |
| * Natural Resource Management and Planning * Language and cultural strengthening * Community development * Economic and business development | * Corporate planning, governance and management * Legal and legislative reform * Government relations & communications |

In addition to the staff of the Federation, we partner with a range of organisations to complement our skills and expertise. Our key partners are:

* Traditional Owner Corporations CEOS, management, staff and knowledge leaders
* First Nations Legal and Research Services – particularly with respect to Traditional Owner history, anthropology and native title and Traditional Owner membership.

We also work with a range of organisations as advisory partners, consultants and technical experts including with legal, economic, communications, industry and investment expertise.