

Media Statement

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Victorian Government doesn't fully understand self-determination, Yoorrook Justice Commission hears

The Yoorrook Justice Commission has heard government doesn't fully understand self-determination and fails to recognise the nature and importance of collectively held land rights, in testimony from the state-wide body that advocates for the rights and interests of Victorian Traditional Owner groups.

Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations' CEO Paul Paton today appeared at the Yoorrook Justice Commission's land, sky and waters hearing, where he expanded on a written submission and spoke to specific questions from the Commissioners regarding the holistic nature of land justice and importance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In his testimony Mr Paton highlighted that the state continues to dispossess Traditional Owners of unceded rights and devalues Traditional Owners' authority in delaying shared decision-making.

"Developing strategies and documents isn't enough to achieve self-determination – they need implementing," Mr Paton says.

"Victoria must commit to better resourcing and clear timeframes for shared decision-making."

Mr Paton expanded on the holistic conception of land rights presented in the Federation's written submission – spanning connection to Country, culture, health and wellbeing, and economic independence, which the submission considered integral to future Traditional Owner prosperity:

"Aboriginal self-determination... cannot be achieved without Aboriginal economic development... As such, land justice is not merely a mechanism by which to acknowledge historical injustice but also a contemporary issue critical to the journey of self-determination and the long-term existence of Traditional Owner groups as distinct cultural, social, economic and political entities..."

Mr Paton referred to the Federation's work advocating for an Indigenous worldview as Traditional Owners seek to care for and heal Country, which includes the Traditional Owner [Cultural Landscapes Strategy](#) and [Cultural Fire Strategy](#), which highlight the importance Aboriginal access to and partnership in decision-making processes regarding land and resource management.

"It's not about owning Country – it's about using our knowledge and experience to care for Country, heal Country, and maintain connection to Country and culture," says Mr Paton.

"This starts with recognising and guaranteeing Traditional Owners' rights."

– ENDS –

About the Federation

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is the Victorian state-wide body that convenes and advocates for the rights of Traditional Owner groups while progressing wider social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives. It was established in 2013 by Traditional Owner Corporations who recognised they could be stronger together and advance their shared interests in policy engagement, economic opportunity and caring for Country. [Read the Federation's Yoorrook land injustice written submission.](#)

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