

## Media Statement

31 May 2024

# Traditional Owner groups welcome dedicated education funding as a step towards self-determination

Dedicated funding for Traditional Owner groups in today's education reforms is a genuine and welcome recognition of their rights and authority, says 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 has welcomed the Victorian Government's \$51 million investment in education reforms – which includes specific funding to enable the state's 11 registered Traditional Owner groups to speak directly with government through a dedicated staff member role – an important acknowledgement of the authority of Traditional Owner groups.

"This is a landmark moment of recognition for the rights and role of Traditional Owner groups," says Mr Paton.

"This announcement makes clear what we've said for a long time: Traditional Owner groups have a voice in decision-making and significantly contribute towards our children's futures. Speaking with us and sharing power with us isn't a box to tick – it's the only way forward. I congratulate the Victorian Government on today's announcement and welcome its commitment to genuine partnership with Traditional Owner groups."

The announced reforms are recommended in the *Strengthening Aboriginal Self-Determination in Education* report, released today, which outlines six focus areas to enable the education system to better reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences and amplify First Peoples' voices in decision-making.

The Federation's [submission to this year's Victorian Budget](#) urged the Government to recognise the authority of Traditional Owner groups, who speak for approximately 75 per cent of Victoria and perform statutory functions that require institutional resourcing to deliver.

"Traditional Owner groups shoulder significant responsibilities, including in education, and expectations to deliver on these must be met with adequate funding – which is why today's dedicated funding for Traditional Owner groups is so important," says Mr Paton.

"We contribute cultural authority and knowledge to curriculum development, enable students to learn on Country, and support learners to stay engaged with culturally appropriate education and training opportunities. This is careful, important work that can't be rushed or impeded. Today's announcement recognises that.

"This funding is welcome good news that recognises the role of Traditional Owner groups as rights-holders on Country who are best-placed to make decisions for our communities. We look forward to working with the Victorian Government as equal partners in shared decision-making for the benefit of the whole community."

– 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.

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