

Media Statement

30 June 2024

Aboriginal dispossession must wind up with VicForests

Traditional Owner groups whose stolen land was irreversibly damaged and commodified by the state's native timber logging must now receive compensation and lead decision-making about the future use of their Country, 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 welcomed the formal end of VicForests, urging the Victorian Government to recognise the logger's end as an opportunity to redress dispossession as it plans for future forest management by compensating and partnering with Traditional Owner groups.

"Decades of logging Country locked Traditional Owners out of our land and caused irreversible cultural, economic and ecological damage," says Mr Paton.

"The end of VicForests marks the close of a sad chapter of dispossession and harm, where Traditional Owners were prevented from managing and caring for Country, while governments [earned billions](#) from schemes intentionally designed to exclude us from owed royalties. This is an opportunity for the Victorian Government to rights the wrongs of the past, and that starts with recognising and respecting Traditional Owners as decision-makers for Country."

The Federation calls on the Victorian Government to:

- Pay compensation to Traditional Owner groups for historic and ongoing land dispossession
- Back-pay Traditional Owner groups logging royalties not received due to VicForest's unprofitability
- Ensure its new Public Land Act doesn't continue dispossessing Traditional Owners of their land rights
- Embed Traditional Owners in all land management categories as direct managers of public land
- Genuinely partner with Traditional Owner groups to plan for future forest management, using a [Cultural Landscapes](#) approach that respects the holistic knowledge of Traditional Owner land management
- Only pursue land management decisions that have the free, prior and informed consent of relevant Traditional Owner groups.

The Federation also expresses concern that a proposed 500,000-hectare Great Forest National Park to protect forests previously logged by VicForests would only continue to perpetuate the injustice of dispossession, due to the rigidity of national park legislation.

"A big national park locks future management of Country to the objectives of the Victorian Government, which retains the right to occupy, use, control and manage even jointly managed national parks," says Mr Paton.

"Environmentalists who want to stand in solidarity with Traditional Owners will recognise and respect our rights to make decisions for Country. We all want the same thing: for our beautiful forests to be protected and enjoyed for centuries to come, just as they have been for 65,000 years under Traditional Owners' care."

– 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 Owners 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 in advancing shared interests in policy, economic opportunity and caring for Country.

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