



**Federation of
Victorian Traditional
Owner Corporations**

**SUBMISSION TO THE
INDEPENDENT EXPERT PANEL ON INTERIM TARGETS
13 December 2018**

**A Victorian Traditional Owner
Climate Change mitigation and adaptation strategy**

Introduction

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is the peak body representing the interests of Victorian Traditional Owners who have or are in the process of gaining recognition under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (Vic) or the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic).

In Victoria under the Traditional Owner Settlement legislation, Traditional Owner groups from across the State are being recognised and settling with the State to own, manage or use natural resources and to develop economic and investment opportunities and for participation in the development of policy. This is formally required through the Recognition and Settlement Agreement between groups and the State.

Traditional Owners have a unique set of roles and functions, with both legal and cultural rights and responsibilities. An holistic world view and a values-driven and long term and intergenerational perspective, require recognition of integrated social, cultural, environmental and economic outcomes. This is increasingly being seen in the State's policy requirements for self-determination, for partnerships and procurement, or outcomes across the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework, and in key policies such as biodiversity, the State Water Plan and in acknowledging opportunities for cultural fire.

Traditional Owners have been managing the landscapes of what we now call Victoria for over 40,000 years. During this time the climate changed and the landscapes and biodiversity changed, and Traditional Owners adapted. Traditional Owners are actively managing parts of their Country and continue to adapt their practices in response to climate change. Traditional Owner knowledge has a long history and can make great contributions to both climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Focus of submission

While we acknowledge that the Panel's terms of reference refer to socio-economic groups and vulnerable communities, we believe that specific reference needs to be given to the First Peoples of Victoria, as the traditional guardians of the lands which Victoria now covers.

Our submission focuses on the third aspect of the Panel's work – **Potential opportunities** across the Victorian economy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the most cost-effective manner in each interim target period.

Policy

- Support the development of a Victorian Traditional Owner Climate Change mitigation and adaptation strategy that sits within or alongside the like strategy of the State Government
- Commit resources to the development of a Victorian Traditional Owner Climate Change Strategy to enable full participation of Traditional Owners in co-designing this strategy

Opportunities for mitigation

Traditional Owners have rights and interests for managing carbon offsets, particularly in tandem with other benefits, and in some areas are already involved in various activities aimed at emissions reduction for mitigating the effects of climate change. Some of these activities include:

- Restoring indigenous vegetation through remnant protection and revegetation on land Crown Land and land held under Aboriginal Title and other freehold land
- Restoring waterways and riparian zones to protect water resources
- Restoring grasslands and Grassy Woodlands that also builds soil carbon

The potential to leverage the governments procurement targets, through a Traditional Owner emissions reduction program (perhaps to be fully operational by 2025) would provide a significant contribution to community economic resilience and strengthen a focused approach for government.

In 2014-15 the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations commissioned a research report on carbon sequestration opportunities in Victoria. Some things have changed since then, and the report needs updating, but nevertheless it remains a useful starting point for understanding opportunities.

Barriers to further participation

Barriers to Traditional Owner participation in emissions reduction (carbon sequestration) include:

- Access to suitable land is a significant barrier for Traditional Owners in being able to participate in carbon sequestration, despite its clear and strong alignment with Traditional Owner aspirations for actively healing and caring for Country.
- Rules relating to Traditional Owners being able to derive income from carbon sequestration on land under joint management arrangements, including various types of Crown Land (we note that the Traditional Owner Settlement Act opened up some possibilities for this)
- Start-up capital for establishment costs of carbon sequestration projects and services
- Training and skills development for recognising and taking up opportunities for delivering carbon sequestration projects and services

Developing the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plans

In order to fulfil the Guiding principles and Policy Objectives of the Climate Change Act 2017 and the State's legal obligations, we suggest that separate and extensive engagement with Traditional Owner Groups across Victoria is undertaken to inform the strategy and associated action plans because their circumstances, needs and rights are unique. Under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 the State of Victoria and its representatives have the legal obligation to engage and involve directly, Traditional Owner Groups that have settled with the State.

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