

## Media Statement

29 July 2024

# Victorian Opposition must end racist blame and get the facts straight on cultural heritage

The Victorian opposition leader's incorrect claim that cultural heritage approval processes impede development are racist, baseless, and utterly unacceptable, 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, dismissed John Pesutto's misguided and unsubstantiated comments blaming cultural heritage processes for delays in housing development as farce that nevertheless requires rebuttal to prevent racist attacks on Traditional Owner groups.

"Mr Pesutto's comments are nothing but a baseless dog-whistle that will set racists upon the Traditional Owner groups working hard to carefully preserve and generously share their cultural knowledge and heritage with all Victorians," says Mr Paton.

"His harmful and incorrect conflation of cultural heritage processes with building timelines shouldn't be dignified with any more attention but does require a response so the public has the facts."

Victoria's cultural heritage legislation requires a cultural heritage management plan approved by the area's Registered Aboriginal Party when a high-impact development is planned in an area of cultural heritage sensitivity.

Developers – not Traditional Owner groups – are responsible for initiating cultural heritage management planning processes, which includes engaging a heritage advisor to complete a plan for which the area's Registered Aboriginal Party has 30 days to approve, reject or request further information.

Mr Paton says Registered Aboriginal Parties have consistently complied with heritage response timeframes, approving [approximately 600 per year](#), and setting arbitrary deadlines on developers' advisors producing heritage plans – as Mr Pesutto suggested – won't progress construction work.

"If we're serious about housing supply, we must look at the shortage of builders, broken supply chains, council planning approvals, and market forces blowing out costs – not cultural heritage," says Mr Paton.

"That's how we know this baseless idea is just an excuse to distract from the real issues facing our communities. Cultural heritage planning laws have existed for 17 years – there are no surprises in heritage planning anymore. Inventing deadlines to hasten the heritage process risks corners being cut and precious culture being damaged or destroyed, forever."

– 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.

**Media enquiries** – Sophie Raynor, 0434 578 933 or [sophie.raynor@fvtoc.com.au](mailto:sophie.raynor@fvtoc.com.au)