

Media Statement

21 November 2024

Traditional Owner groups welcome Treaty negotiations

Today's commencement of statewide Treaty negotiations is an historic moment to reset the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the state of Victoria, restore respect, and more meaningfully recognise the inherent rights First Nations peoples have long fought for, 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, hailed the commencement of negotiations for a statewide Treaty between the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the Victorian Government as an opportunity for systemic change that will improve Aboriginal peoples' life outcomes.

"This is an historic moment in Victoria's story and represents the start of the first fair Treaty in this state's history," says Mr Paton.

"For the first time, big structural change that can help redress the harmful impacts of colonisation will be available to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria – which will enable us to make decisions about our communities and the issues that affect us."

First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is a democratically elected community body that will negotiate a statewide Treaty with the Victorian Government on topics that include recognising historic wrongs, making commitments to self-determination, and giving expression to rights to practice culture and manage resources.

"The Assembly has spent five years doing careful work in communities to hear our diverse views and synthesise what matters most to mob, and has our full trust and confidence in entering these negotiations," says Mr Paton.

"Treaty is about ensuring decisions about Aboriginal communities are made by Aboriginal people. Treaty recognises Aboriginal people as the experts on Aboriginal communities, culture and Country, and are best-placed to come up with practical solutions at the local level. Today is a landmark day and something to celebrate."

Nation-level Traditional Owner Treaty negotiations will follow statewide Treaty, and reflect the unique priorities and inherent rights of Traditional Owner groups in specific areas of Country.

Victoria's 12 formally recognised Traditional Owner Corporations – representative and inclusive community governance bodies with recognised cultural authority to speak for their Country – have 'existing status' for Treaty negotiations and are automatically eligible to participate in Treaty negotiations over their Country.

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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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