

Media Statement

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Historic truth-telling mandate happens by supporting Traditional Owner groups

The truth of land dispossession laid out by Victoria's historic truth-telling inquiry clearly demonstrates the central role to be played by Traditional Owner groups in a just and reconciled future, says the state-wide body that advocates for the rights and interests of Victorian Traditional Owner groups.

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations welcomed the release yesterday of the final report of Australia's first and only Aboriginal-led truth-telling inquiry, Yoorrook Justice Commission, comprising an Official Public Record of the historic and continuing impact of colonisation on First Nations peoples in Victoria, and a final report containing 100 sweeping recommendations for change in 10 areas.

Federation interim CEO Kaley Nicholson said the 'removal, denial and exclusion' of Traditional Owners from Country documented in Yoorrook's Official Public Record reveals for the first time the extent of colonial dispossession, and the necessity to restore land rights for Traditional Owners to redress past and ongoing harm.

"Land theft and dislocation forced Traditional Owners off Country and severed us from the land and resources so vital for wellbeing and economic prosperity," she said.

"Restoring Traditional Owners' rights in land and resources are at the very heart of what's needed to redress the harms of the past and create a better future. Every one of Yoorrook's historic recommendations would be best fulfilled with strong Traditional Owners, back on Country, leading the social, political and economic landscape."

Traditional Owners are Aboriginal groups with unique and complex connections to particular Country in Victoria, and have cultural authority to make decisions for Country and community, and will negotiate local-level Treaties with the Victorian Government on behalf of their communities.

Ms Nicholson welcomed Treaty as a key approach put forward Yoorrook to implement its recommendations, but urged the Victorian Government not to delay 33 land justice recommendations to local Treaty negotiations.

"Many of Yoorrook's recommendations can be implemented swiftly, with changes to policy, law, and practice, and that's our expectation as Traditional Owners," she said.

The Federation urges the Victorian Government to immediately commit to wholesale reform recommended by Yoorrook Justice Commission, including among others: implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; removing conditions on joint management to provide for Traditional Owner groups' sole management of Country; restoring Country and hand over title to Traditional Owner groups; reforming the Traditional Owner Settlement Act process to enhance self-determination; and working with Traditional Owner Corporations as authoritative representatives of First Nations.

The Federation's submissions and testimony to Yoorrook's inquiry in 2023-24 outline a comprehensive framework for restored [land rights](#), [economic independence](#), and cultural authority for Victorian Traditional Owner groups, and affirmed the role of Traditional Owner groups as authorities and land managers on Country.

"Yoorrook Justice Commission's historic mandate to reveal the truth of colonisation in Victoria shows the central role Traditional Owner groups will play in healing historic harm and transforming the future," says Ms Nicholson.

"Now, we need the Victorian Government to commit to respectful and resourced partnership with Traditional Owners of Country, to support our communities to set the directions of a more just future."

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. Victoria has 12 formally recognised Traditional Owner Corporations, which are inclusive and representative bodies with cultural authority to speak for community and Country across most of Victoria.

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