

Media Statement

2 August 2025

Land rights and economic justice key to Closing the Gap

A new Federal Government approach to working with First Nations communities as “economic decision-makers” reconnected to “the wealth of their land and waters” is a welcome and important change, says the statewide body that advocates for the rights and interests of Victorian Traditional Owner groups – but must not leave behind groups without recognised native title or ignore the Victorian research outlining a Traditional Owner-led pathway to economic justice.

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations welcomes media reporting that the Prime Minister will announce today at Garma Festival a new economic decision-making partnership with the Coalition of Peaks, as well as a \$75 million investment for native title holders, \$70 million for renewable energy projects, and \$35 million for mobile TAFE – which would provide an important avenue for greater governmental accountability to Aboriginal communities, as well as much-needed investments in First Nations-led projects.

The Federation has long advocated for a reimagined approach to First Nations development, grounded in rights-based economic independence as a means for realising both social development outcomes and the self-determining direction of strong Traditional Owner groups on-Country.

“Money isn’t a dirty word when we’re talking about strong First Nations, because money is what enables us to set our own priorities, make our own decisions, and do what’s best for our communities,” says Federation interim CEO Kaley Nicholson.

“The Prime Minister will announce today what sounds like a fresh approach to First Nations economic development – one that finally recognises us as the experts for our Country and communities. We have always had the authority and capability to deliver for our communities, and now, finally, it seems like that’s being recognised in a meaningful way.”

Ms Nicholson says the success of any new approach will be in its implementation, not rhetoric, reminding the Government of the economic modelling presented by the Federation in March that shows \$1 billion in benefit to the Victorian community from a \$300 million investment in Traditional Owner corporations’ activities – regardless of whether the group holds formally recognised native title rights

“We were forced off our land and pushed into poverty by government, so today, nothing less than decision-making will be accepted. And it’s more than selecting mentorships for mob – we’re calling for an economic transformation that genuinely puts us as Traditional Owners back in control of our lives. Economic independence as outlined in the Roadmap will drive generational change for First Nations communities and help realise justice for our people.”

The [Victorian Traditional Owner Economic Development Roadmap](#) outlines 11 steps to create independent wealth for First Nations communities, and address the systemic barriers that lock Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples out of the economy and stymie self-determination. The collective rights of Indigenous peoples – as held and managed by Traditional Owner corporations, including those that are not Prescribed Bodies Corporate – are key to its success: preserving cultural integrity while accelerating wealth creation, following wholesale policy and legislative reform to re-orient economies towards First Nations’ economic independence.

Ms Nicholson says the Prime Minister’s Garma keynote could represent a new high water mark for understanding and achieving prosperity for First Nations communities across Australia.

“If we do this right, tomorrow could mean a new reality for First Nations communities –strong in culture, with our communities thriving, and our til-now untapped potential rising the economic tide across the board. That’s

what we want to see, and it starts with genuine partnership, joint decision-making, restored land rights and the economic reform Victorian Traditional Owners have revealed in the Roadmap.”

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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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