

Media Statement

20 October 2025

Wildlife Act review delay is unacceptable, disrespectful

The Victorian Government's decision to defer implementation of expert recommendations to improve Traditional Owners' governance, rights and connection to native wildlife is another unacceptable delay after years of inaction, says the statewide body advocating for Traditional Owner groups' rights and interests.

The Government quietly released the independent expert panel's Review of the Wildlife Act and its response after 4pm on Friday – three years and 10 months after the panel delivered its report, containing 40 recommendations to modernise and strengthen Victoria's wildlife protection laws, with seven focused specifically on Traditional Owners' self-determination.

The Government accepted 'in-principle' those seven recommendations – delaying implementation to an unspecified date, for further consultation with Aboriginal communities and contemplation of Treaty and Yoorrook Justice Commission's findings, which Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations interim CEO Kaley Nicholson called inadequate and an excuse.

"The Government's known for nearly four years what this panel would recommend but sat on its hands. We know good policy takes time, but another indeterminate delay is just disrespectful. It's not good enough. Why hasn't the Government been talking to us about wildlife since 2021? Stop using Treaty as an excuse to kick reform down the road, and pick up the phone – talk to us."

The Federation contributed a [submission](#) to the expert panel's 2021 inquiry – calling for a fundamental shift in the approach to wildlife management, which would centre Traditional Owners' obligations and roles in caring for Country, consider wildlife within Traditional Owners' holistic worldview, and expand rights in connection to Country, to ensure culture remains strong.

The Federation strongly welcomes the expert panel's report, which identifies the integrated worldview of Traditional Owners as a necessary approach to wildlife protection, and recommended a refocus to the Act and other relevant legislation to provide a more holistic approach to 'conserving fauna and Country'.

"The independent panel consulted widely and rigorously with Traditional Owner communities and its recommendations reflect the breadth and generosity of knowledge provided," said Ms Nicholson.

"The panel's work is a great example of how to engage with Traditional Owner and Aboriginal communities in the right way, and it isn't a coincidence that this came from a panel with an Aboriginal member. The Federation calls on the Victorian Government to follow its panel's example, and start yarning with us immediately about exactly how and when we're going to put these seven recommendations into practice."

The Federation believes reforming the Wildlife Act would make an important contribution to Traditional Owner self-determination, by providing for Traditional Owners' perspectives, access and decision-making for Country's fauna resources. The organisation would welcome the opportunity to facilitate the Government's engagement with Traditional Owner communities to implement the seven supported recommendations for self-determination and progress integration of the [Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy](#).

"Five years ago, Traditional Owners handed the Victorian Government a framework for managing Country holistically, which could ensure abundance, forever," said Ms Nicholson.

"As native species face the real and devastating threat of extinction, it's never been more important to focus on what we can do: respecting the ways Traditional Owners have sustainably managed Country for thousands of generations, not erasing or ignoring this knowledge, and moving forward together – and swiftly – to care for Country in the proper way."

– 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.

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