

First Nations National Statement Team
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
via email FirstNationsImplementation@aff.gov.au

12 December 2025

SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL STATEMENT ON FIRST NATIONS IN AGRICULTURE

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations (the Federation) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the National Statement on First Nations in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the National Statement).

The Federation is the Victorian state-wide Traditional Owner body, advocating for and building consensus on Traditional Owners' collective social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives. We work towards policy and regulatory settings that remove barriers to Traditional Owner groups exercising their rights, including contributing research and policy insights on rights-based economic development, with a particular, but non-exclusive, focus on Victoria.

Summary of our submission

The Federation supports the existence and principles of the National Statement. It is accepted that First Nations never ceded sovereignty, and governments therefore have a positive duty to restore the collectively held rights of Traditional Owners. This is as applicable to agriculture as it is to any other area. We are concerned, however, that a Statement as contemplated by the National Statement on First Nations in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Discussion Paper (Discussion Paper), will homogenise and ignore the unique Victorian context, preventing the very inclusion it seeks to embed.

For the National Statement to deliver on its commitment to First Nations' self-determination, it must – as Traditional Owners do – centre Country. Victorian Traditional Owners have created a translation framework, the Cultural Landscapes Strategy, which can assist with the development of a National Statement that meets its ambition. The Cultural Landscapes Strategy articulates an Aboriginal worldview of healthy Country, with resources managed for abundance, and an adaptive approach to maintaining the health of the biocultural system,¹ while Country and Traditional Owner knowledges guide land management decisions.

The National Statement must do more than 'be a statement'. It must drive policy and commitment from governments to remove barriers in the way of First Nations' self-

¹ The term 'biocultural' speaks to how people's knowledge and practices shape their world and vice versa.

determination, and advance the perspectives, experience, and collective rights and interests of Traditional Owners.

The Federation's submission is underscored by the principles of the Cultural Landscapes Strategy, and structured in two parts:

1. Overarching principles and policy framework expectations
2. Response to specific topics within the National Statement discussion paper

Summary of our recommendations

The Federation recommends the National Statement must fundamentally:

- Ensure Traditional Owners' collective rights are embedded in all land management decision-making.
- Integrate a Traditional Owner worldview and knowledge with Western science to inform policy and practice.
- Support and resource Traditional Owner Corporations to partner with policy-makers and provide specialised subject-matter expertise and strong cultural governance.
- Be responsive to the different impacts that continue to shape land management and production today in Victoria.

And specifically in response to the Discussion Paper the National Statement must, in summary:

- Implement the national elements of the Victorian Traditional Owner Economic Development Roadmap.
- Support the growth of Traditional Owner Corporations as key actors in the agricultural economy, including through culturally informed learning, training, mentoring and employment opportunities.
- Enhance land purchase schemes in Victoria, incorporating private partnerships, and provide for multi-tenure Indigenous Protected Areas.
- Create innovation hubs to develop new models that incorporate Traditional Owner values into agricultural production, and resource Traditional Owner groups' businesses.
- Introduce Federal legislation to implement UNDRIP and provide greater legal protection for Indigenous cultural and intellectual property.
- Resource and support the implementation of TONFABS and its Cultural Protocol.
- Support development of a Traditional Owner Corporation Development Commission.
- Support banks and other financial institutions to work more closely with the ILSC to provide appropriate financing to Traditional Owners' agribusiness interests.
- Commit to a higher level of partnership with First Nations communities, at both a Nation-to-Nation, Treaty-like level and in shared decision-making spaces.

Part 1: Overarching principles and policy framework expectations

For the National Statement to drive greater economic inclusion of First Nations in the fisheries, forestry and agriculture sectors, it – and any future policy reform – must be framed and informed by the following principles. The points raised below also reinforce the Federation’s responses to the specific topic-based components of the Discussion Paper.

1. Uplifting Traditional Owner groups’ collective rights and interests

Traditional Owners have led the management of Country over tens of thousands of years, in an unbroken continuation to today. This leadership includes implementing practices to improve soil, monitoring waterway health, harvesting and trading produce, conducting preventative burns, and living in complex, respectful relationship with Country and all its resources – as members of a balanced, sustainable ecosystem. Yet contemporary policy-making continues to see Traditional Owner groups as mere stakeholders to consult on governments’ land management decisions, rather than as rights-holders or decision-makers. Arguably, the continuation of policy-making in this way continues to ignore the collectively held rights and interests of Indigenous peoples as internationally recognised in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The Federation’s expectation is that the National Statement must take the clear position that it is the exercise of rights that must be achieved, not simply their recognition of or ‘inclusion’.

The Federation believes the Discussion Paper misses an opportunity in calling only for First Nations’² economic *inclusion*. The National Statement is an opportunity to right this misorientation, by recognising and respecting the collective rights of Traditional Owners through centring their expertise as this continent’s first farmers, and by addressing the injustices of land dispossession.

Recommendation

- Respect and embed the collective rights of Traditional Owners in all land management decision-making.

² The term First Nations in this submission is not used as a synonym for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; it refers specifically to the Nations that existed on this continent prior to colonisation, and is a suitable synonym for Traditional Owner groups.

2. Shaping policy and practice with Traditional Owners' expertise

The Discussion Paper does not demonstrate an understanding of the importance of caring for Country or of a Traditional Owner worldview: a notion of Country that encompasses all-inclusiveness, interconnectedness and interdependence. The National Statement appears to be seeking feedback on ways in which Traditional Owners 'fit' within the Western view of agriculture, fisheries and forestry, rather than seeking system reform built on Traditional Owner expertise and knowledge. The National Statement is an opportunity to respectfully integrate Western science with traditional knowledge and worldview, but this integration requires adequate resourcing. Truly facilitating the participation of Traditional Owners, their knowledge and practice into agriculture, requires access to land, skills, markets, resources and connection to culture. Industries such as native foods, botanicals and fisheries provide an opportunity for initial investment that offer connection to culture and economic return for Traditional Owners. Integrating frameworks and working closely with Traditional Owners provides the opportunity to shape policy and industry practice.

Partnerships between Traditional Owner Corporations,³ government departments and the private sector to manage Country through the integration of the two frameworks must be invested in, with Traditional Owners having genuine decision-making power in such partnership arrangements.

Recommendations

- Integrate a Traditional Owner worldview and knowledge with Western science to inform policy and practice.
- Support and resource Traditional Owner Corporations to partner with and provide specialised subject-matter expertise and strong cultural governance, in land management policy and program design.

3. Victoria's unique context

Land tenure in Victoria is not like other parts of Australia. Through the history of colonisation, land dispossession and Western farming practices have left Victoria with a particularly high percentage of freehold land, resulting in the legal extinguishment of native title. This has constrained the ability of Victorian Traditional Owners to connect with and manage Country.

³ Victoria has legally recognised Traditional Owner groups across nearly 80 per cent of the state. Traditional Owner Corporations hold these recognised collective rights – they are inclusive and representative membership structures with cultural authority to speak collectively for their community and Country. The term 'Traditional Owner Corporation' in this submission refers to the representative organisations of the groups that have been formally recognised as Traditional Owners of Country in Victoria under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (Vic), or *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic).

This limited land tenure reaches into the management of other natural resources, such as rights to water, where a lack of land tenure complicates an already complex system even further, excluding Traditional Owners from other resources.

Victoria has a mosaic of different levels of legal recognition of Traditional Owners' rights over land. The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic) (AHA), *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* (Vic) (TOSA), and *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) (NTA) provide formal recognition of legal rights to varying degrees, while 22 per cent of the state has no formal recognition of Traditional Owners' rights.⁴ Traditional Owner groups continue to pursue recognition of their rights under the AHA, TOSA and NTA, while preparing for forthcoming Traditional Owner Treaties.

Six Traditional Owner groups have land rights recognised under the NTA or TOSA. However, the high percentage of freehold title in Victoria has resulted in only limited control over ancestral lands. The land that is within the Indigenous estate is largely subject to management regimes, including national parks, state reserves or with cultural heritage constraints. This results in very limited opportunities for Victorian Traditional Owners to use their estate for commercial purposes. Victoria's available and productive agricultural land is also smaller in area than other parts of Australia.

Despite these challenges, Victorian Traditional Owners have demonstrated resilience and commitment to activating their recognised rights and capitalising on opportunities in agriculture,⁵⁶ forestry⁷ and fisheries.⁸⁹ Traditional Owner priorities and objectives in these sectors are articulated in Country Plans and sector-specific plans at the national and state levels. Further, Traditional Owner Treaties have the potential as a vehicle for overcoming some of the barriers to greater Traditional Owner participation and opportunities in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors.

Recommendation

- The National Statement must be responsive to the different impacts that continue to shape land management and production in Victoria and south-eastern Australia today, where colonisation was experienced differently from much of northern Australia.

⁴ Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, Registered Aboriginal Parties:

<https://www.aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/victoria-registered-aboriginal-parties>

⁵ See, for example, Dalki Garringa native nursery, owned and operated by Barengi Gadjin Land Council.

⁶ See, for example, the Djakitjuk Djanga bushfoods enterprise grant program: <https://fvtoc.com.au/sections/native-foods-and-botanicals-business-grants/>

⁷ See, for example, DJAARA's forest gardening strategy, Galk Galk Dhelkunya: https://gg-wordpress-offload.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/djadjawurrung.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Galk-Galk-Dhelkunya_Forest-Gardening-2022-2034.pdf

⁸ See, for example, DJAARA's native yabby-farming trials:

https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/1144603/DEECA_Case-Study_11_Yabbies_29092025.pdf

⁹ See, for example, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation's native oyster-farming trials:

<https://gunaikurnai.org/our-economy/oysters/>

Part 2: Specific responses to individual components of the National Statement discussion paper

1. Grow a First Nations agricultural economy, don't just 'include' Aboriginal farmers

- 2) How can government and industry support greater inclusion of First Nations leadership, perspectives, and workers across agriculture, fisheries and forestry?
- 3) What types of mentoring, training, or knowledge-sharing programs would best support First Nations people's capacity for long-term employment in agriculture, fisheries and forestry?

The concept of 'including' Traditional Owners in Western concepts and practices of agriculture, forestry and fisheries should not be the goal of the National Statement. It should instead focus on supporting Traditional Owners to establish and grow an agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector that is led by Traditional Owners and underpinned by their rights and cultural values.

The Victorian Traditional Owner Economic Development Roadmap (Roadmap)¹⁰ provides a clear blueprint for how governments, policy-makers and industry can address barriers constraining the Traditional Owner-led economy, which would naturally lead to increased Traditional Owner leadership and knowledge-sharing across that entire economy, including agriculture. The untapped potential of this economy is discussed at heading four on page 10.

Government and industry can additionally support this economy by addressing the structural barriers that restrict Traditional Owner groups from implementing their self-determined goals – including, for example, a lack of capital and over-reliance on short-term program funding. The forthcoming Traditional Owner Workforce Development Framework describe these and other structural barriers comprehensively, and provide a range of actions governments and private sector partners could take to support Traditional Owner groups to build their capacity.

Increased capacity for Traditional Owner groups could additionally come from stronger involvement in scientific research settings, better links to markets for trade, innovation, and exporting, and support for Indigenous cultural protocols that enable bushfoods research and commercialisation to happen on Traditional Owners' terms. Traditional Owner groups' leadership is also highly relevant in the design and implementation of mentoring, training and knowledge-sharing programs. Again, the focus should not be to 'include' Traditional Owners in a Western cultural paradigm, but to support to capability and capacity of Traditional Owner groups to develop and deliver mentorship, training and knowledge-sharing programs informed by their specific knowledge and culture.

¹⁰ Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations and SGS Economics and Planning, (2025) Victorian Traditional Owner Economic Development Roadmap: <https://fvtoc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Roadmap-draft-for-website-compressed.pdf>

The Traditional Owner Workforce Development Framework will contain recommendations that the National Statement should consider in the context of developing a First Nations agricultural economy. Implementing these recommendations could strengthen the existing agricultural work of Traditional Owner groups, and create new, culturally aligned opportunities, for long-term employment and economic activity for First Nations.

Recommendations

- Implement the national elements of the Victorian Traditional Owner Economic Development Roadmap.
- Support the growth of Traditional Owner Corporations as key actors in the agricultural economy, including by:
 - Developing a learning and skills framework that identifies the key knowledge and competencies required to work effectively in a Traditional Owner Corporation.
 - Creating and increasing culturally informed and accessible vocational, tertiary and adult education programs for Traditional Owners to develop relevant skills and experience.
 - Developing employment incubator programs that include paid in-house mentorship and trainee programs.
 - Providing Traditional Owner Corporation employees access to state government departments' internal training.
 - Developing and expanding secondment, exchange and mentor programs between Traditional Owner organisations, governments, and the private sector.

2. Unlock more land for the Indigenous estate

- 4) How could existing legislative structures or policy frameworks be strengthened to better enable First Nations peoples to use the Indigenous Estate for agricultural production? Could partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders help to overcome structural barriers to the commercial use of land and sea?

The Indigenous estate in Victoria is small and piecemeal. For the unique Victorian context, the focus must be on *establishing* the Indigenous estate, alongside meaningful policy-making about its productive use.

The extent of freehold title in Victoria and limitations on the exercise of native title and other land rights mean Victorian Traditional Owners continue to face high and compounding barriers to accessing, owning and managing their ancestral lands, particularly for commercial purposes. Native title has been recognised over only small pockets of land in Victoria, and additional legal recognition¹¹ is largely located over national parks. The Indigenous Land and

¹¹ Victoria has an alternative scheme to native title, which acknowledges that colonisation prevented many Traditional Owner groups' continuing cultural practice. A negotiated agreement made under the *Traditional Owner*

Sea Corporation has purchased only limited parcels of land for Traditional Owner groups. While the national Indigenous Protected Area scheme (IPA) is an excellent example of Aboriginal-led land management, inequity in resourcing and the limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach disproportionately excludes Victorian Traditional Owner groups from 100 million hectares¹² of Indigenous Estate. The few small IPAs that do exist in Victoria are almost exclusively used for non-commercial purposes.

Forthcoming reform to Victoria's public land laws may provide for greater First Nations' use and management of land, including for commercial agricultural purposes. The proposed Public Land Act will expand the range of management opportunities for Traditional Owner groups on the public land estate: cultural values will be included in management objectives for land management categories, and a new category of land tenure called a cultural reserve will be created to prioritise the management of these values in some areas. While significant, in both land area and in transfer of some limited management rights, these reforms will not provide opportunities for industrial agricultural activities. It may, however, enable 'forest gardening' activities beyond cultural use of forest resources and 'wild harvest'.

Recommendations

- Enhance land purchase schemes in Victoria, incorporating partnerships with organisations such as Trust for Nature, Bush Heritage, and Odonata.
- Create innovation hubs to develop new models that incorporate Traditional Owner values with agricultural production (for example, Tiverton, Black Duck Foods).
- Eliminate the inequity in the IPA scheme by providing for multi-tenure IPAs and a significant buy-back, hand-back scheme to return private land to the IPA estate.
- Resource a national land handback scheme to return land to Traditional Owner groups (as part of, or instead of, Nation-to-Nation Treaties).

3. Scale Traditional Owner groups' cultural protocols and businesses and to protect ICIP and promote knowledge-sharing

- 5) What could government and industry do to support the ethical use and protection of ICIP around bushfoods or land management practices? Are there existing frameworks or practices that could support this?
- 6) What mechanisms or practices can support the respectful and culturally informed sharing of Indigenous Knowledges to strengthen partnerships in agribusiness and promote inclusive, two-way learning?

Settlement Act 2010 (Vic) is intended to confer similar rights to a native title determination, without the requirement to prove continuous cultural connection, or to litigate native title. Land grants made under this scheme are unfortunately weak and largely symbolic: any public land recognised in an agreement as 'Aboriginal title' instantly confers rights to occupy, use, control and manage that land to the state of Victoria, not the Traditional Owner group.

¹² Commonwealth Government Department of Climate Change, Environment and Water, Indigenous Protected Areas: <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/land/indigenous-protected-areas>

Victorian Traditional Owners have developed a strategic framework and cultural guidelines for the ethical commercial use of native plants and botanicals, which should be used nationally to protect Indigenous cultural and intellectual property (ICIP) and provide avenues to appropriately share Indigenous knowledge.

The Traditional Owner Native Foods and Botanicals Strategy (TONFABS) is intended as a foundational document – outlining the economic, cultural and social benefits that will flow to community and industry if Traditional Owners are restored to their rightful, pre-colonial place leading the emerging bushfoods industry – and for that reason can be built upon by policymakers nationally to protect ICIP across the country. Grounded in the principles of UNDRIP, it is an example of how the internally recognised rights of Indigenous peoples can be formally protected in the absence of domestic legislation giving effect to UNDRIP.

Existing legal protections for ICIP are limited and under-examined. Until legislative reform catches up, the TONFABS Cultural Protocol provides avenues for ‘filling in’ gaps in the law, suggesting templates for benefit-sharing agreements, research partnerships, and clear protocols in use and licensing. In Victoria, the Cultural Protocol has successfully formed the basis of a research partnership into the therapeutic benefits of acacia and mushrooms. Informed by TONFABS, Agriculture Victoria has entered into access and benefit-sharing agreements with Traditional Owner groups, to ensure research into therapeutic genomes in native plants is consistent with cultural protocols. While this partnership is welcome, it highlights the need for robust regulation and protection of ICIP, including through Federal legislation: the Federation advocated the ‘fake art’ legislation be expanded to legally protect ICIP in native plants.¹³ Federal legislative reform, including implementing UNDRIP into domestic legislation,¹⁴ could go some way to protecting ICIP, particularly in commercial settings. This is an emerging area of reform requiring further attention.

Supporting the development of agricultural enterprises for Traditional Owner Corporations is the easiest way to protect ICIP as bushfoods industries commercialise: Traditional Owner Corporations by their very nature have cultural authority to conduct their business ethically and appropriately; and have a vested interest in the protection and proper use of the ICIP rights they hold on behalf of their communities.

Strong safeguards and parameters for information-sharing – including the TONFABS Cultural Protocol – will in turn support respectful and culturally informed sharing of Indigenous knowledges across cultures.

Recommendations

- Introduce Federal legislation to implement UNDRIP and provide greater legal protection for ICIP.
- Resource and support the national implementation of TONFABS and its Cultural Protocol.

¹³ Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations (2024), Submission to the consultation on proposed fake art and ICIP legislation: <https://fvtoc.com.au/documents/submission-to-the-consultation-on-proposed-fake-art-and-broader-indigenous-cultural-and-intellectual-property-legislation/>

¹⁴ Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations (2022), Submission to the consultation on implementing UNDRIP in Australia: <https://fvtoc.com.au/documents/2022-united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples-in-australia-submission/>

- Prioritise resourcing and supporting Traditional Owner groups' businesses, as an effective way to safeguard ICIP through commercial agribusiness activity.

4. The First Nations' economy represents billions in untapped commercial potential

- 7) What practical steps can be taken to remove structural barriers to agri-finance? Could existing First Nations financial institutions be more effectively leveraged to support Indigenous agribusiness growth and participation in the sector?

Aboriginal-owned businesses are forecast to reach \$50 billion in revenue within a decade,¹⁵ and businesses trading in collectively held rights – including rights in ICIP, land, and resources – represent a critical component¹⁶ of this untapped wealth. These businesses, however, face significant structural barriers to accessing land, capital, finance, and markets. The Federation has commissioned economic research into the investment required to unlock the potential of the First Nations' economy in Victoria,¹⁷ finding a \$300 million investment over 40 years would generate \$1 billion in productivity and real benefits for the wider Victorian economy. The Roadmap outlines the 11 steps required to address the systemic barriers that lock First Nations out of the economy – including restricted land rights, barriers to accessing inputs for production, and heavy compliance requirements that undermine cultural authority – which can, and should, be translated into the national context.

Specifically, the following recommendations may be useful for the National Statement in supporting First Nations' involvement in agribusiness:

- Couple land rights with water rights, by undertaking a comprehensive land-use assessment analysis, and developing protocols for culturally informed decision-making about resource acquisition.
- Create proprietary rights in land, freshwater and sea Country, and the resources that are contained in those landscapes, and support Traditional Owner groups to increase their capability to leverage economic access in these rights (including through access to finance and intellectual property protection).
- Create procedural rights for Traditional Owners in planning and development assessment and approval processes, including creating triggers for compensation.
- Recognise, value and protect ICIP rights and data governance, by co-designing with First

¹⁵ ANZ (2025), Australia's \$50 billion opportunity – Fuelling the growth engine of the First Nations Economy report: https://www.anz.com.au/content/dam/anzcomau/mediacentre/images/mediareleases/2025/ANZ_Unlocking%20opportunity%20report%202025_web.pdf

¹⁶ Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations and Deloitte Access Economics (2024), State of play of the Victorian Aboriginal Economy: <https://fvtoc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Project-1-Analysis-of-the-state-of-play-of-the-Victorian-Aboriginal-economy.pdf>

¹⁷ The Federation makes an important conceptual distinction between the 'Aboriginal economy' – businesses owned by Aboriginal individuals or partners – and the 'First Nations' economy', which commercialises rights held collectively, by a Traditional Owner Corporation on behalf of its community.

Nations processes for registering cultural and intellectual property, and funding initiatives that support cultural revitalisation and Indigenous data sovereignty and governance.

Resource the capability and capacity of Traditional Owner Corporations, to ensure excellence in cultural governance and sustainability in operations.

The Roadmap is unapologetically ambitious, and its full implementation would require wholesale reform to policy and legislation. A subsequent report¹⁸ outlines the institutional arrangements required for the Roadmap's implementation. Its proposed Traditional Owner Corporation Development Commission – a registered Aboriginal corporation established to support the First Nations economy – offers a model the National Statement could leverage to more effectively support Indigenous agri-business growth, participation in, and leadership of the sector.

Existing financial institutions must be cognisant of First Nations' financial and risk management contexts in any policy-making for agribusiness financing. Banks and other financial institutions must understand the corporate structures of and limitations on Traditional Owner organisations, and adopt different approaches to ensure First Nations are not excluded from the financing that could accelerate agribusiness endeavours. Traditional Owner Corporations in Victoria are often smaller organisations with sophisticated cultural governance structures lenders need to understand. These corporations are limited in their capacity to hold risk, and are often restricted from scaling up activities. Banks can manage these factors by proactively assisting Traditional Owner Corporations to manage risk, and working alongside intermediaries including the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation to flow finance to Traditional Owner groups in ways that work with existing governance and decision-making systems.

Recommendations

- Implement the above-mentioned national elements of the Victorian Traditional Owner Economic Development Roadmap.
- Support the First Nations economy through the development of a Traditional Owner Corporation Development Commission.
- Support banks and other financial institutions to work more closely with the ILSC to provide culturally relevant and contextually appropriate financing to Traditional Owners' agribusiness interests.

¹⁸ Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations and Australian Venture Consultants, (2025) Victorian Traditional Owner Economic Development Roadmap Institutional Framework: <https://fvtoc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/FVTOC-TO-ED-RM-Inst-Arr-Final.pdf>

5. Resource First Nations' research and development

- 8) What mechanisms could support greater First Nations leadership and participation in RD&E, and what risks or challenges should be considered?
- 9) What practices can enable culturally informed data sharing between research institutions to strengthen two-way learning and drive inclusive change in RD&E?

As mentioned above, protecting ICIP, linking Traditional Owner groups to markets and institutions, and resourcing Traditional Owner Corporations to grow and develop are key ways to encourage First Nations' involvement in research, development, and information-sharing. Further, if First Nations were resourced and supported to create their own research institutions, the reliance on fitting Indigenous knowledges into Western paradigms would lessen.

6. Shared decision-making and genuine partnership will improve government coordination, accountability and transparency

- 10) How can coordinated sharing of information about government, industry and community-led programs be improved across the agriculture sector? Which methods or models exist that could be improved or adopted?
- 11) Have gaps in information about government-funded programs or policies impacted opportunities for First Nations agribusinesses to form partnerships with other stakeholders?

Victoria offers the unique framework of Treaty to improve partnership, coordination, accountability and transparency between First Nations communities and governments. The body that will be created by Statewide Treaty, Gellung Warl ('tip of the spear' in Gunaikurnai language) integrates the state's existing representative, truth-telling and accountability functions – bringing together First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, oversight over the findings of Yoorrook Justice Commission, and the oversight function currently held by Victoria's Closing the Gap Partnership Forum (of which the Federation is a member and Koorie Caucus co-chair). Far from increasing inefficiencies, this Aboriginal oversight of Victorian Government activities will reduce silos, promote transparency, and ensure commitments made to Aboriginal communities are fulfilled.

Beyond the work of Treaty there are other examples of partnership and coordination being implemented in Victoria. Following the development of the Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy, which was led by Traditional Owners and supported and endorsed by the Victorian Government, the Cultural Fire Leadership Group (CFLG) was established to provide direction and advice to the Government on the implementation actions of the Strategy. The CFLG meets quarterly and provides the opportunity for Traditional Owner-only conversations

regarding key aspects of cultural fire, including policy and legislative reform, funding, training and resourcing, before meeting with senior officials within the Victorian Government to discuss actions. Importantly, the CFLG is supported by a funded secretariat, which sits independently of Government, and provides Traditional Owners with policy analysis and support to engage and drive actions.

The national response to the proposed Voice to Parliament was a disappointing setback for the Country, but the Federation asks the Federal Government to remain strong and courageous in its commitment to effecting meaningful change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Victoria provides examples of genuine partnership, shared decision-making, and Aboriginal community control that can be implemented nationally to deliver on the ambition of self-determination as articulated in the National Statement discussion paper. The Federal Government must consider these examples.

Recommendation

- Commit to a higher level of partnership with First Nations communities, at both a Nation-to-Nation, Treaty-like level and in shared decision-making places like Victoria's Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum and Cultural Fire Leadership Group.

Conclusion

The National Statement must lead to action. It must drive policy and a commitment from governments to act to remove the barriers that stand in the way of First Nations' self-determination, and advance their perspectives, experience, and collectively held rights and interests. More than an opportunity to 'include' First Nations in existing agricultural frameworks, the Statement is a chance to uplift the unceded rights Traditional Owners have in their Country and its resources.

We would welcome the opportunity to speak more to this thinking and thank the Commission for the opportunity to contribute. or further discussion about this submission, please contact kaley.nicholson@fvtoc.com.au.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kaley Nicholson', with a stylized, flowing script.

Kaley Nicholson
Chief Executive Officer
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