

Media Statement

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AI guidelines miss billion-dollar opportunity for regional investment and First Nations partnership

New national expectations for data centres released today miss a key opportunity for regional economic development and equitable partnership with Aboriginal communities, says the Victorian statewide body advocating for Traditional Owner groups' rights and interests.

Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations CEO Kaley Nicholson said the Federal Government's silence on any need for partnership between AI infrastructure developers and Traditional Owner groups – whose Country would support and face damage from future data infrastructure – was an investment failure.

“This could have been a zero-cost show of support for First Nations communities, whose Country will be churned up by these resource-hungry data centres, and who are so often overlooked by the investors that aren't motivated to work in partnership with mob,” she said.

“We released [modelling](#) last year that shows investing in Traditional Owner Corporations is a \$1 billion investment in Australia's efficiency, international competitiveness, and prosperity for Aboriginal communities – why didn't the Federal Government back in this regional investment?”

“This government's told us all about its commitment to First Nations communities, but bringing AI infrastructure proponents to the table to invest in us evidently isn't important.

Making agreements with Traditional Owners is standard business in much of Australian mining for anyone seeking commercial profits from using Country. Why should data centres be any different?”

Australia has the world's second-largest pipeline of data construction centres in the world, after the United States. Meeting the Federal Government's five new expectations – relating to the national interest, energy transition, water use, local workforce and research capacity – would fast-track upcoming projects' regulatory assessments.

Ms Nicholson said if the Federal Government were serious about capturing the benefits of AI for Australian public's benefit, it would expect at a minimum partnership with Traditional Owners to form part of the new social licence expectations.

“If the Federal Government genuinely wants to share in the benefits of AI the right way, it should be talking to us and Traditional Owner Corporations about how business should happen properly on their Country. Ignoring that is not just a missed opportunity, it's an investment failure.”

– 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 – inclusive and representative family group-governed organisations with cultural authority to speak for Country and community – who recognised they could be stronger together in advancing shared interests in policy, economic opportunity and caring for Country.

Media enquiries – Sophie Raynor, 0434 578 933 or sophie.raynor@fvtoc.com.au