

Media Statement

12 June 2026

New environmental regulator must respect Traditional Owners, inaugural CEO appointment a positive step

The statewide body for Victorian Traditional Owners has welcomed the appointment of former DEECA secretary John Bradley as the inaugural CEO of the new national environment regulator.

“John Bradley was at the helm when Victoria’s environment department started prioritising partnership with Traditional Owners, so it’s encouraging for us to see his appointment as the new national Environmental Protection Agency’s founding CEO – it’s the start the EPA needs, and the leadership Victoria provides,” said Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations CEO Kaley Nicholson.

“Too often, we’ve seen the planning and environmental protection sectors exclude Traditional Owners’ interests, as if they’re in conflict with or ancillary to broader land management matters. But we’re the ones who have managed and cared for Country for tens of thousands of years, and whose Ancestors have shaped and protected the environment all Australians enjoy today.”

The new environmental regulator will simultaneously enforce federal laws protecting the environment from harm while hastening development approval processes, which the Federation is concerned could pose a risk to Traditional Owners’ voice and interests – a risk mitigated by the kind of partnership shown by Mr Bradley’s Victorian environment departments over the past decade.

In 2018, the Federation pushed for and successfully established a collaborative body for Traditional Owners and the then-Victorian Government Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, which ensured direct engagement, accountability to government commitments to Aboriginal self-determination, and an ongoing opportunity to promote Traditional Owners’ collective interests. Today, that collaborative body is the Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum; the Federation provides its Traditional Owner caucus with policy and administrative support.

And in 2020, DELPW launched its strategy for Aboriginal self-determination, Pupangarli Marnmarnepu (Owning Our Future), which supports a redistribution of power away from the state and towards Traditional Owners, whose relationship with Country is centred.

Ms Nicholson said Traditional Owners had the capability and willingness to see commitments like these be embedded in the new EPA.

“Traditional Owners are meeting our cultural obligations to make sure Country is healthy, and working in partnership nation-wide with governments and industry to make decisions for and manage Country. John Bradley’s leadership of the EPA is a good opportunity to make sure this continues and expands.”

– 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.

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