

Media Statement

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Traditional Owners sidelined as Victoria reshapes public land management

A new agency tasked with promoting access to public land misses the opportunity to involve Traditional Owners in the management of their Country, and betrays the commitment of Statewide Treaty, says the statewide body advocating for Victorian Traditional Owner groups' rights and interests.

"Outdoor Recreation Victoria is all about getting people into the environment that our Ancestors have managed and cared for over a thousand generations, but its enabling legislation is silent on Traditional Owners' rights and interests, and that's a real shame," said Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations CEO Kaley Nicholson.

"It's a set shot on goal straight into the post: what would have been a straightforward and zero-cost way of returning Traditional Owners to our ancestral role of managing Country and its use. But we're once again seeing a piece of legislation designed without our input, without our consultation, and without regard for our role as land managers."

The bill creating the new organisation – which merges the fishing and game management authorities – passed parliament today, following successful Nationals amendments in July to centre fishing and hunting special interests in the new agency's name and land access panel.

That panel will advise the newly created Fishing, Hunting and Outdoor Victoria on strategies to increase recreational access to the forests, valleys, ranges, wetlands, grassplains and coastal Country Traditional Owners have managed for tens of thousands of years, and helps give effect to legislation that excludes Traditional Owners from its foundational principles.

"Public land is Traditional Owners' land, but you wouldn't know it from this legislation," said Ms Nicholson.

"How can a government that signed a Treaty with our people six short months ago be creating agencies without considering our care for Country, our right to have a say on matters affecting our communities, and their public commitment to partnership with mob?"

The Federation wrote to the Victorian Government to attempt to amend the bill prior to debate – recommending insertion of a Principle of Connection to Country, to ensure Traditional Owners could be recognised for their special connection to Country and not relegated to a position of mere stakeholder.

Ms Nicholson said the lack of response was a discouragement, but not a deterrence.

"Traditional Owners have worked closely and collaboratively with the Victorian Government over many years, and there's no reason this can't continue, even if it takes a bit of effort to get our voices heard. We're once again reaching out to the Government, offering the expertise and unbroken experience of the people who have kept Country healthy, in balance, and able to be enjoyed by all Victorians today. We'd welcome the opportunity to sit down together and continue the trust and goodwill of this Treaty era."

– ENDS –

About the Federation

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is the Victorian statewide 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 – who recognised they could be stronger together in advancing shared interests in policy, economic opportunity and caring for Country.

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