

Quarterly report



July – September 2026

Organisational update

Welcome to the Federation's new quarterly report, which summarises the organisation's key activities and milestones.

Cultural fire characterised this reporting period – we completed a draft of our second policy paper deliverable for the Cultural Fire Leadership Group, which included extensive in-person and online feedback and workshopping with Traditional Owner Corporations.

We welcomed the good news of a new funded project in Traditional Owner Game Management, which has commenced, and the publication of the Workforce Development Framework – representing 14 months of direct engagement with Traditional Owner Corporations on the barriers they face to developing workforces.

We attended the Closing the Gap Partnership Forum that endorsed Victoria's Implementation Plan – representing 18 months of community-led consulted work to identify priority actions for Victoria's work to improve Indigenous life outcomes – and chaired a transition workshop for the next stage of the Forum's Koorie Caucus, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo.

The quarter presented several speaking opportunities: we appeared at the First

Nations Clean Energy Conference, AFAC26 emergency recovery conference, a regional economic partnership forum in Ovens-Murray, a native title panel for Municipal Association of Victoria, hosted our own CEO Forum, and attended DEECA's Water is Life Oversight Forum.

Read on for more Federation milestones and updates, and [subscribe to our monthly email newsletter](#) for more frequent dispatches.

Quarterly highlights

- Publication of the Workforce Development Framework.
- Retendering for the Traditional Owner Corporation Caucus secretariat contract.
- Commencement of a new funded project to review the implementation of the Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy and convene a co-governance forum.
- Contributed submissions on critical minerals, water rights, racism, Indigenous intellectual property and data centres.



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Snapshot: Cultural fire policy-making

The Federation was appointed as secretariat to the Cultural Fire Leadership Group (CFLG) in 2025. We provide policy and administrative support to the CFLG, including convening its regular meetings, and preparing substantive policy papers on its instruction.

This reporting period included a closed CFLG session for Traditional Owner Corporations, and extensive feedback and development on the Policy and Legislative Barrier to Cultural Fire paper: a forward-thinking piece of analysis that captures the barriers preventing the full expression of cultural fire practice,

and recommending systemic reforms over the short-, medium- and long-term.

“There is no single legislative provision or section of policy that restricts cultural fire. Instead, it is the systemic bias towards fuel-reduction burning that is the key barrier.”

Policy and Legislative Barrier to Cultural Fire paper



Gabby (left) and Lisa (right) following a feedback workshop with Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation on the content of the Policy and Legislative Barriers to Cultural Fire paper.





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Focus: Racism inquiry

The Federation sought Traditional Owner Corporations' views on whether we should make a contribution on the sector's behalf to the parliamentary inquiry into racial harm against First Nations communities.

When the answer was yes, we used the CEO Forum to seek feedback and input on a proposed structure. Our written submission led to the Federation's selection as one of just 12 Victorian-based witnesses called to give testimony over two months of hearings; our Board Director Matt Shanks spoke in August on our behalf.

Key points

- We contributed a submission and testimony on the racist harm caused to Traditional Owners' representative organisations.
- We took aim at the systems that under-resource and over-scrutinise Traditional Owner Corporations, making 18 recommendations for reform across six key themes.
- We look forward to seeing the inquiry's final report.

Over an hour of questioning from parliamentarians across the political spectrum, Matt spoke to the barriers facing Traditional Owner Corporations, and the work of the Federation in policy-making and advocacy to try to improve the systems that too often under-resource and over-scrutinise Traditional Owner Corporations.

"It's not just individual people who experience racism, but the structures we set up to protect Country and culture. An attack on Traditional Owners' representative organisations is an attack on Traditional Owners' sovereignty."

Matt Shanks, Federation Board Director

Our submission has subsequently been cited in a forthcoming book chapter, after its author saw the Federation's social media content supporting summarising our policy thinking. We look forward to seeing the chapter, and the inquiry's final report and recommendations, when both are released.



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Snapshot: Advocacy

The Federation is focused on the upcoming Victorian state election and what a change in government could mean for the Aboriginal affairs policy landscape. We have held several high-level meetings with stakeholders in industry and the public sector, developed an Election Priorities platform to inform our public-facing communications, and are developing a proposed program of work for a strategic consultant to create a 12-month awareness-raising campaign promoting the role and value of Traditional Owner Corporations.

We continued to contribute policy insights to influence public thinking. Over the reporting period, we made submissions to the:

- Inquiry into WIPO Treaty on Indigenous intellectual property
- Inquiry into the factors shaping social license and economic development outcomes in critical minerals
- Inquiry into artificial intelligence and data centres
- Review of the Water Act 2007 (Cth)
- Proposed Dyurrite Cultural Landscape Management Plan



"Involving Traditional Owners in clean energy isn't just the right thing to do – it's the most efficient and effective way forward", said Federation CEO Kaley Nicholson at the First Nations Clean Energy Symposium.



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Focus: Workforce Development Framework

Traditional Owners working on and for Country is about more than filling job vacancies: it's about using meaningful work to meet obligations to care for Country and strengthen language and culture. The Workforce Development Framework charts a practical path for Traditional Owner Corporations to grow the size, skills and long-term sustainability of their workforces – and keep culture strong in the process.

The Traditional Owner Workforce Development Framework was published in July 2026 by the Federation, funded

by the Victorian Government's Department of Premier and Cabinet. It articulates what's needed for strong, skilled, and sustaining Traditional Owner workforces on-Country; can help Traditional Owner Corporations grow the size, skills and long-term sustainability of their workforces; and ultimately contribute to strengthening culture.

The Federation is working with Traditional Owner Corporations to identify priority recommendations from the Framework for implementation, and will advocate for its full implementation.



Strong Traditional Owner Corporations means strong culture.

A year of work uncovers how Traditional Owner Corporations can create and grow strong workforces on-Country.

The Workforce Development Framework is available [online](https://www.fvtoc.com.au). To request a printed copy, please contact info@fvtoc.com.au



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Governance

The Federation Board of Directors met in August to consider a range of governance, strategic, financial and operational matters.

Board

Cassandra Lewis was confirmed as Chair for the year.

Much of the meeting focused on reports and recommendations from the Board's subcommittees, reflecting the Federation's commitment to strong governance and effective oversight.

Strategy

The Governance Alignment Subcommittee presented its plan for reviewing the Federation's governance arrangements. The Board approved the plan and acknowledged the importance and timeliness of this work as the Federation continues to expand its strategic influence and leadership on matters affecting all Traditional Owners.

Operations

In her CEO Report, Kaley Nicholson outlined several priorities to support the Federation's long-term sustainability. These included advancing key areas of work, identifying new income

opportunities, and strengthening organisational focus through clearer priorities and operational planning using the Balanced Scorecard framework.

Finance

The Finance, Audit and Risk Management Subcommittee reported on its ongoing program of policy review, compliance monitoring, risk management, and financial oversight.

The Board considered the committee's recommendations and approved several updated financial management and probity policies, along with the Federation's 2026–27 budget. The Board also accepted the finance report, noting the Federation's solid position in respect of meeting its current liabilities.

Opportunities

- Federation Enterprises is seeking [Board Directors](#) for two-year appointments, with meeting sitting fees paid.
- The Federation's Governance Alignment Sub-committee is inviting quotes for the Federation's [governance review](#), due 18 September.

