

Joint Statement

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Friday, 4 July 2025

JOINT STATEMENT ON TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

Victoria's path to Treaty has taken another step forward – towards a better and fairer state for all Victorians.

Later this year, the Victorian Government expects to introduce the Statewide Treaty Bill to Parliament.

Negotiations on Victoria's Statewide Treaty Bill are focusing on how to evolve the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria into an ongoing representative body to provide advice to Government and make decisions over matters that affect First Peoples.

For the last five years, the First People's Assembly has been the independent, democratically elected body representing First Peoples in the Treaty Process.

Victoria's Statewide Treaty Bill is proposed to give the Assembly decision-making powers to make sure First Peoples' communities can design and deliver practical solutions for their communities.

The State and the Assembly are negotiating on how to provide for the Assembly to:

- Form the independent accountability mechanism that is required by the National Agreement to Close the Gap and provide concrete solutions and recommendations to improve outcomes for First Peoples
- Make decisions and rules about specific matters that directly impact First Peoples, such as the confirmation of Aboriginality.
- Run an Aboriginal Community Infrastructure Program, the Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll and important events like NAIDOC week.
- Making certain statutory appointments for designated First Peoples' seats on government boards and entities, such as First Peoples appointments to the Heritage Council of Victoria.
- Celebrate over 60,000 years of First Peoples' culture, including by bringing it into the ceremonial life of Victoria.
- Lead ongoing truth-telling, healing and reconciliation across Victorian towns and regions, including capturing stories and retaining an archive of this information to support education of the broader public about our shared history.
- Make representations and provide advice to the Government, including being able to ask questions of Ministers and creating a duty for Ministers and departments to consult with the Assembly on laws and policies that are specifically directed to First Peoples.
- Build on First Peoples' knowledge and leadership to strengthen self-determination in the Treaty-era.

Treaty is a pathway to acknowledging the past and making real, practical change to achieve better outcomes for First Peoples in Victoria and close the gap.

The Productivity Commission found governments haven't fully understood the scale of change needed to meet their Closing the Gap commitments. It urged shared decision-making with First Peoples – and praised Victoria's Treaty process as a leading example.

The proposed body will sit within our existing parliamentary and democratic structures. It will not have veto power on policy or legislation – a power that does not exist under Victoria’s parliamentary system.

Under Victoria’s Statewide Treaty Bill, the proposal is that the First Peoples’ Assembly would be a statutory corporation.

Treaty could also build on the strong community accountability demonstrated by the First Peoples’ Assembly and legislate its ongoing public reporting, election processes, participatory governance and cultural oversight from Elders.

The proposed ongoing body would be subject to oversight bodies including IBAC, VAGO and Ombudsman.

The Victorian Government and the First Peoples’ Assembly recognise the delivery and tabling of the Yoorrook Justice Commission’s final interim report, *Yoorrook for Transformation* and final report, *Truth be Told*.

The work of the Commission will have a significant impact on Victoria, helping all Victorians to understand our history by bringing to light the truth of First Peoples since the beginning of colonisation.

These developments in negotiations are the latest on an almost decade-long path that Victoria has been on towards achieving Australia’s first Treaty.

In Treaty negotiations, the Victorian Government is represented by senior Department of Premier and Cabinet executives, and appointed Member Negotiators represent the First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria.

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