

When Elders speak, we listen.

ISSUE TWO

THE Elders' VOICE.



FIRST PEOPLES'
ASSEMBLY OF
VICTORIA



TREATY
FOR VICTORIA

The stage is set

Treaty negotiations to begin
as early as 2023 — p.4



We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pay our deepest respect to them, their culture and their Elders past and present.

About Elders' Voice

The voices of our Elders must be heard and respected. They need to guide our journey towards Treaties in Victoria.

That is why the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is establishing an Elders' Voice – a council of Elders to give wisdom and guidance as we journey towards Treaty.

The Elders' Voice will be a body made up of Elders in Victoria who will play a crucial role in informing the work of the Assembly.

Respected Elders and Assembly Members Aunty Charmaine Clarke and Uncle Andrew Gardiner have been appointed as the interim Elders' Voice Co-Chairs. They are yarning with Elders across Victoria to help design the Elders' Voice.

If you're an Elder, we want to hear from you! Get in touch via email at eldersvoice@firstpeoplesvic.org or leave a message on **1800 TREATY** (1800 873 289). Sitting fees will be paid for your time and input.



On the road again

Elders' Voice Coordinator Drew Berick reflects on the past few months of yarns and gatherings

It has been great being back on the road and engaging with Elders across the state.

After the lockdowns earlier this year we have really appreciated being able to reconnect with Elders face to face, and at many of our yarns we have seen Elders being able to engage with each other.

This has been rewarding to see our communities getting together again.

We have held several Elders' gatherings including Warrnambool, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham and more.

These have been informative discussions where we have been able to talk about the importance of Elders in the pathway to Treaty and more generally. There has also been a number of one-on-one discussions that have been held with Elders, in person and over the phone. We want to thank all of the Elders that have participated so far; those Elders have been incredibly generous with their time.

We are very appreciative to spend time and learn from you. Thank you.

There are still a number of yarns that we will be holding across the state. Keep an eye out on our website, Facebook, emails and any



flyers at your local Cooperatives, Health Services and other Community organisations – and don't forget there is always the opportunity to have a one-on-one yarn with us over the phone and have your voice heard! You can reach us on the Elders Voice Hotline: **1800 TREATY** (1800 873 289).

Give us a call and we can schedule you in for a yarn!

Our thoughts are also with all of the flood victims across northern Victoria. We hope that those affected will be able to recover quickly and that all those families are safe and well.

Nyakiynarr ☺



FIRST PEOPLES'
ASSEMBLY OF
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The stage is set

Treaty negotiations to begin as early as 2023

Treaty 'umpire' to be created

In August 2022, the Victorian Parliament passed historic legislation to create the Treaty Authority. This independent 'umpire' will be grounded in our culture, lore and law, and will facilitate negotiations.

Assembly Co-Chair Marcus Stewart talks Treaty Authority:

The Treaty Authority will be the independent umpire to oversee Treaty negotiations between First Peoples and the Government. It will help to resolve disputes that arise with the Government, but also between First Peoples.

Currently when our Nation groups have disagreements – about overlapping claims to ancestral lands, for example, the western system is geared towards an adversarial and costly showdown in



the courts. Whereas the Treaty Authority will create a culturally safe place to bring mob together to solve things our way, to draw on the wisdom of the oldest living culture in the world.

The Treaty Authority will sit entirely outside of the usual government bureaucracy. It will be independently appointed and led by First Peoples.

This is what decolonisation looks like.

Treaty ground rules in place

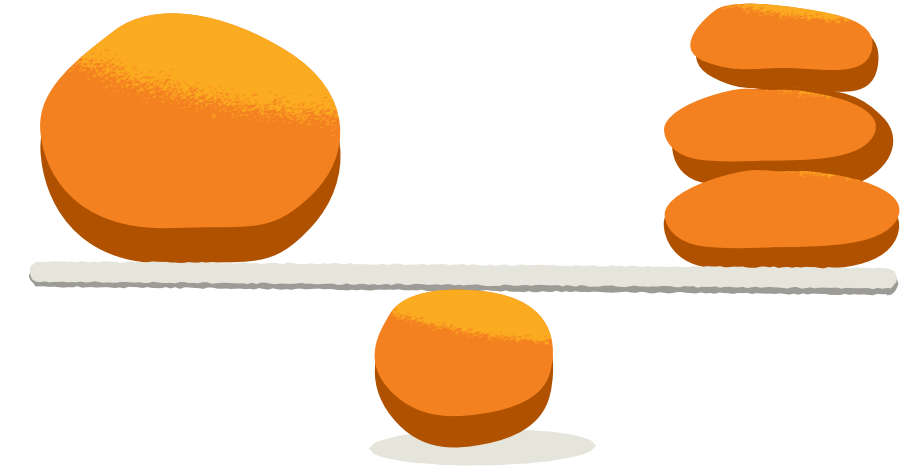
The Assembly celebrated another historic milestone in October 2022 when we reached a landmark agreement with the Victorian Government on the Treaty Negotiation Framework. The Framework is essentially the rulebook for Treaty negotiations. It explains the standards that Traditional Owners will need to meet to

enter Treaty negotiations and outlines how disputes will be handled. Importantly, it is underpinned by the principle of self-determination – that means our mob, doing business our way.

Assembly Co-Chair Aunty Geri talks Treaty Authority:

This agreement puts the power back into Aboriginal hands. It will see Government take a back seat as we decide how we want to get Treaty done, and what we want it to deliver.

The Treaty Negotiation Framework sets out the principles that will guide Treaty-making in Victoria. It recognises our Lore, law and cultural authority, and provides Traditional Owner groups with the ability to choose their own pathways and timelines for negotiating Treaties that reflect their priorities, needs and aspirations.



It explains the criteria and standards that groups need to meet if they want to enter Treaty negotiations and how they can be supported – with resourcing from the Self-Determination Fund and guidance from the Treaty Authority – to enter negotiations on more equal footing with the Government.

It will also see the Assembly, following our next election, negotiate a state-wide Treaty that will deliver bold structural change, improving the lives of our people and ensuring we always have a strong voice and decision-making power.

Think of how long our people have been calling for this, and here we are. Treaty finally within reach.

Treaty Fund to help level the playing field

The Assembly has created a Self-Determination Fund that will help Traditional Owners prepare for Treaty negotiations. Beyond that, the Fund will also generate wealth and economic independence for current and future generations of First Peoples.

In November 2022, Respected Aboriginal leader and former Treaty Advancement Commissioner, Gunditjmara woman Jill Gallagher, made the foundational donation of \$100 to kickstart the fund and five trusted experts have been appointed to manage the establishment phase. 🌟



Next steps

What's coming up

State-wide election



We've got a big year ahead in 2023! The Assembly is hosting a state-wide election. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Victoria will head to the polls to elect the next Members who will

sit on our Assembly and negotiate a state-wide Treaty with the Victorian Government.

Who do you want to represent you? What do you want Treaty to deliver? These are all questions we're asking Community to think about. If you're mob, the number one thing you can do to get involved is to enrol with the Assembly. Once enrolled, you can vote in the election, to pick who will represent you in the next phase of the Treaty journey. The more people who enrol, the stronger our voices will be.

Or maybe you know someone who should stand for nomination as a candidate. Traditional Owners of Victoria, aged 18 years and over are eligible to nominate. We need bold voices on the Assembly, delivering on the aspirations of our people. Keep an eye out on our website and social media channels for when voting and nominations open.

Enrol online or by post. Find out more information on our website: firstpeoplesvic.org/enrol.

You can also send us an email at engagement@firstpeoplesvic.org or call 1800 TREATY (1800 873 289) and we can assist you.

And don't forget – our electoral roll belongs to us, to First Peoples, and is not connected to the government voting system in any way.

Creating the Elders' Voice



The Interim Elders' Voice Co-Chairs are collating the ideas, input and contributions from Elders across Victoria to prepare a final report for the Assembly.

There's still opportunity for Elders to have their voices heard and have input into the overall shape and structure of the Elders' Voice.

State-wide gatherings will be held in coming months in order to inform Elders of findings through the report that will be presented. Elders have told us that they want to have larger regional engagements so that they can participate in their area.

Our goal is to have the report ready by July 2023.

We need you, our Elders, to inform us about your aspirations for the Elders' Voice. The Elders' Voice is an integral part of the First Peoples' Assembly. Come along to a yarn that is happening in your area and have your say.

When Elders speak, we listen. ©



Uncle Andrew on respect

Interim Elders' Voice Co-Chair Uncle Andrew Gardiner talks Eldership and what it means to be respected and respectful.

Elders have had a profound impact on me. It adds to the value of the work we are doing to engage them within the Treaty aspects and for their communities.

When we have yarns, there is a lot of respect that goes around the room. There is this profound respect when meeting with them. We are trying to put Elders back up on the pedestal, where they belong.

The opportunity to uplift Elders is a great responsibility but it has been really rewarding. I feel appreciative of the opportunity to engage with Elders and uplift them to get them interested to participate.

It is important to learn how the Elders can participate and encourage that participation to better their future generations to ensure that Treaty works for them.

Elders are wanting to know more and how they want to be involved.

We are acknowledging that we want their participation but need to know that it is right for them.

Our Elders' Voice meetings are structured and we have got the details that we need

to get, but it has also been a great opportunity for those Elders to come together and have yarns.

There are many issues that Elders want to raise and discuss, it is important that we listen to these concerns and Elders are appreciative that we have created an environment for them to have these conversations.

If you're an Elder and you're yet to get involved in the Elders' Voice, please come along and please participate.

Take up your role in the community, the role of leadership and cultural authority.

Because we need you when developing Treaties. We need to hear your aspirations.

RESPECT FOR ALL ELDERS

Through many yarns, I have learned a lot about what and how different people view an Elder.

There are varying differences of opinion of what an Elder is to different people and communities.

This is an important question that we ask, and we respect all of their opinions. All of it has been a learning experience, even if we have heard it before. ☺





What I've learned from yarning

Interim Elders' Voice Co-Chair Aunty Charmaine reflects on the past year of yarning with Elders on Country across Victoria.

I love driving through country on my way to an Elders' Voice yarn, seeing the landscape change and acknowledging whose country I am travelling on. Sitting down with Elders for our yarns feels more and more authentic as I hear many stories of their lives, lessons and joys.

Our yarns do get enthusiastic, chatting and humorous, political and passionate.

Many Elders have seen the yarns as an important process and platform for Elders to contribute their

extensive knowledge and life experiences, in an environment that is respectful and cultural.

And the Elders' Voice yarns are just the start of creating a platform for our Elders to speak, be heard and contribute to change in our state.

Working with Elders through the Elders' Voice has taught me so much about the importance of those voices. They come with many diverse experiences and have faced many challenges as well.

I learned how to really listen

not just with my ears but my heart. They have made me realise that even as an older Aboriginal person, there is still much you can do and contribute to society and your community. I also saw in many of the Elders a wisdom and gentleness that comes from truly knowing yourself. Although we as Aboriginal people have suffered many setbacks and obstacles the Elders taught me that patience and persistence is as virtuous in our fight for justice.

They have taught me what leadership is: it's not being louder than anyone else or having all the answers. It's being there for others, showing up each day and standing proud in who you are.

Elders have solutions for many of the issues affecting our communities and it matters to them deeply. Especially issues affecting our younger generations.

The focus on the Elders and their voices is clearly needed.

Uncle Andrew and I are here to listen, learn and pull together your voices to build the first ever Elders' Voice for Treaty in Australia.

It will be your platform, your voice to State and to Treaty. It is bringing back our cultural ways of doing our business, through respecting and honouring the wisdom and knowledge of our Elders.

So please, get involved and have a yarn with us. You can yarn in a community setting or just come and learn about the Elders' Voice and yarn one on one with us later. Your voices and experiences are very important, and we want to honour them, however we can. ☺

Elders' Spotlight

Meet Aunty Fay Carter

My name is Aunty Fay Carter, I am a proud Dja Dja Wurrung and Yorta Yorta woman.

I moved to Melbourne with my husband and kids from Echuca in 1972.

When I moved to Melbourne, I started work as a field officer at the Aborigines Advancement League. We did welfare work all over Victoria with Aboriginal families needing assistance.

When I was working at the league there were five Elders, including Aunty Iris Lovett-Gardiner. They were doing history programs at the old Koorie college. There were a few Elders that had passed away and it got them talking about starting our own Aboriginal place to care for our Elders. Aunty Iris, who was the driving force behind a caring place for our Elders had asked me if I would like to start working with her to help establish something for our Elders.

From the Koorie college we moved to a house in Northcote as our base, we worked for a couple of years planning for a place for our Elders and seeking support from the government.

We eventually found some land along Merri Creek in East Brunswick. This is where we set up the Aboriginal Community Elders Services (ACES). ACES was initially set up as a 15-bed hostel and 10-bed nursing home to care for our Elders.

With the help of the other Elders, I managed ACES for 17 years.



Tell us a bit about your background ?

I was born on Yorta Yorta country, my Mother was living at Cummeragunja mission. In those days the old Aunties brought the children into the world, but if there was any medical problems they had to be taken into hospital to have their children. I found out later that I was born on the verandah at the Echuca hospital because they didn't let the Aboriginal people into the wards. My mother took me and showed that spot when I was older. I always tell people, because it is important for them to know about the injustices of our people in those days.

My mother didn't seem to have any problems with that, our people never seemed to make any fuss about those things. But I remember how upset I was when my mother told me.

I was four years old when there was the Cummeragunja walk off. From there many families and my family moved to the 'flats' near Mooroopna. The old men were very clever,

they made our houses with kerosine tins for the roof and chimneys. All the kids collected papers and magazines, we made clag with flour and water and pasted those on the walls, it was good for insulation. The houses would be furnished with things collected from the tip at Daish's paddock. Most people would call them humpies, but they were strong homes that we lived in.

I remember walking to school and all the non-Aboriginal kids were waiting on the fence and they would be singing, "Here come the dirty blacks from the flats". From that day I always made sure to keep my house clean.

I remember when I was young going into the shops with the old people. We were made to wait at the back until all of the non-Aboriginal people had been served. When they were served they would then serve us. The old people taught us not to make a fuss about anything, just except things as they were. We don't expect those things these days. Our old people were very patient and very caring, I feel privileged to have been raised by those old people and I have carried that with me all my life.

What does being an Elder mean to you?

Being an Elder is a special title. But you have to earn it, it isn't something that you decide yourself. It is what you've earned by what you've done in your life.

The word respect is not used enough, when growing up the Elders would use it a lot. "Where is your respect" they'd say if you were misbehaving.

You earn the respect as well as the title of an Elder. It comes about with what you do in your community and within your family and that's

where the word respect comes from. But I don't think young people are doing that enough these days.

There should be more programs established that bring Elders and young people together. It is not just in your family, it is in your community as a whole. If you have those programs that brings Elders and young people together and Elders can share those stories it can help those young people to learn about what respect is all about.

Growing up on the flats it wasn't just your family looking after you, it was the whole community. Those Elders in the community would bring you to task if your behavior isn't what it should be.

What can Elders bring to the Treaty process?

I think that Elders can bring their life experiences to the treaty process. I think treaty could be more solid with involvement of Elders, more solid with the decisions being made around Treaty with Elders' input.

I think there isn't enough of our history in the school curriculum, Treaty could pick up that issue – not parts of it but our whole history. If it is in the schools, the education and learning it could prevent the time that Aboriginal people spend now making people aware of our history. This is something that I as an Elder am passionate about.

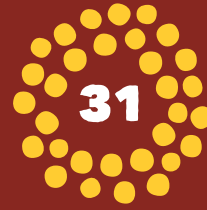
I think that the establishment of the Elders' Voice is such an integral part of the treaty process in Victoria. There are so many Elders with different skills that can be part of the Elders' Voice. The cultural knowledge that Elders can bring is important for our community. ☺

A voice for our Mob

Who are the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria?



The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria (the Assembly) is the democratically elected voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Victorian Treaty process.



There are 31 Members who sit on the Assembly, all Traditional Owners of Country in Victoria. There are two types of seats – seats for representatives of formally recognised Traditional Owner groups and seats for Traditional Owners elected by their Communities.

Find out more: firstpeoplesvic.org



WHY I LOVE MY ELDERS

“I love my Nan because she makes me happy. I like it when she plays games with me.”

HEKITA

Yorta Yorta, Mutthi Mutthi



“I love my Nan and Pop. They make me really good dinners. I love to go shopping with them. They tell me good stories.”

BENJAMIN

Wemba Wemba, Nari Nari, Yitti Yitti



“I love my Nan because she makes me happy. She takes me shopping and to the park. She gives me food and water.”

AALIYAH

Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung



“I love my Nan and Pop because they give me lollies. They take me shopping. They read me a book when I go to bed.”

CHLOE

Yorta Yorta, Walpiri, Gunditjmarra, Wiradjuri



TREATY NEEDS AN

Elders' VOICE.



**Are you an Elder?
We want to hear
from you!**

We're yarning with Elders across the state.
We're asking questions like:

- How do you define an Elder?
- What do Elders mean to you?
- Who should sit on the Elders' Voice?

HELP US BUILD THE ELDERS' VOICE

Call the Elders' Voice Hotline,
email us, or find an in-person Elders'
Voice Gathering happening near you:

- 1800 TREATY (1800 873 289)
- eldersvoice@firstpeoplesvic.org
- firstpeoplesvic.org/elders-voice

All Elders are paid a fee for their time
and contribution.

