

TREATY FOR ALL

By SUNEHRA AHMED

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TREATY FOR ALL

SUNEHRA AHMED

A TREATY calling for self-determination and better life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Victoria would result in better outcomes for all Victorians, according to Muthi Muthi and Wamba Wamba man Jason Kelly.

"If we can thrive rather than survive, then everyone else can also," Mr Kelly said.

With negotiations for a statewide Treaty to begin soon, Mr Kelly, a community elected representative from First People's Assembly of Victoria, has

been travelling across Victoria's North West to keep communities up to date on the Treaty process and progress, as well as ensure community members can have their say before issues are officially brought to the table.

Earlier access to pensions, ownership over mining and renewable projects in the region, and cultural healing centres were among the many issues First Nations community members discussed in relation to a statewide Treaty as they gathered at the Kerang Memorial Hall on Barapa Barapa Country last Friday.

Three community elected repre-

sentatives for the North West region, Jason Kelly, Jacinta Chaplin and Melissa Jones, led and facilitated discussions on the day.

"It's one of my jobs as a community elected representative to go and engage with people at an individual level and a collective level," Mr Kelly said.

"Sometimes that might mean having to go and visit an elder and sit at the kitchen table and have a cuppa. Sometimes it means I'm at a hall talking to a big group of people.

"It's how I aim to bring the voices of the communities to the table when starting Treaty negotiations with the

Victorian Government later this year."

The First People's Assembly of Victoria - the democratically elected body for Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people - has been on the journey for a statewide Treaty since 2016, and has been consulting with communities on their aspirations for a Treaty since 2019.

In September, the Assembly confirmed it will start Treaty negotiations with the Victorian Government by the end of the year - a first for the country and for Victoria being the only state in the country to agree to Treaty negotia-

tions.

Mr Kelly said community elders have expressed the importance of the community not being divided during their discussions in Kerang.

He added that elders from different communities want to see earlier access to pensions in response to the gap in life expectancy, as well as a redress scheme from the denial of land for Aboriginal Australians after their service to Australia in World War 1, with Red Cliffs having the largest number of soldier settlers in Victoria.

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Treaty will be for all of Victoria

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"There were about 10,000 square kilometres of Murray River frontage taken from those who could access the soldier settlement scheme," Mr Kelly said.

"The First Nations soldiers that went to war couldn't access the scheme when they came back so they had their land taken."

Young people expressed their interest in cultural hubs to strengthen and maintain their connection to their culture and country, as well as truth-telling in education.

Community members also prioritised health, education and job outcomes which Mr Kelly said should be available for all Victorians.

"The treaty is not about exclusive-



Member for North West at FPAV Jason Kelly said negotiations for a statewide treaty will begin before the year ends. Picture: SUNEHRA AHMED

ness or us being separate from everyone else," Mr Kelly said

"It's about how we can also harness support and take the rest of Victoria on the journey with us."

It's Mr Kelly's second term being an elected representative for North West Victoria in the Assembly.

Growing up in Balranald, New South Wales, Mr Kelly is the grandson of Mutthi Mutthi woman Alice Kelly who was instrumental in campaigning for a cross-cultural approach to the protection of the human remains known as Mungo Man and Mungo Lady in Lake Mungo.

Mr Kelly, played a key part in initiating the Yoorrook Justice Commission hopes to continue carrying the torch of his late grandmother with the upcoming Treaty negotiations.

"She was all for hard work around transformation, through relationship building and the preservation of Aboriginal culture and heritage while also sharing it with everyone," he said.

"I talk about transformation, not reconciliation, because reconciliation implies there was a relationship to begin with."

"A Treaty could be the starting of a relationship and deliver a transformation where - like equal opposites come together."

"As all Victorians, what's really vital here is the understanding of the connection of land and people and that's what we can teach."

Recently, Mr Kelly also put forward drafting a Peace Accord to be signed by King Charles.

"A lot of the things that happened to us in the past were under the crown," he said.

"Given that the State of Victoria has committed to a Treaty process while still being under the Crown, it's a tan-

gible outcome for the King to sign to a peace accord, acknowledging we're going into a Treaty.

"From a recent trip to Japan. I was able to speak to a survivor of Hiroshima and what I learned is we're not victims of violence, we're victims of bad people."

"And I don't see anyone in the current government in Victoria, or even the King as a bad person."

"It's important that Treaty delivers justice, and justice is not about someone having to win over someone else."

"Justice is about overcoming your struggles and adversity, but still being able to lift everyone else up, including the broader Victorian population and what can they learn from us when we have access."