

STATEWIDE TREATY DECLARATION

FIRST PEOPLES' ASSEMBLY OF VICTORIA

We are the sovereign First Peoples of these lands, skies, stars and waters — the oldest continuing cultures on Earth. We speak from this place now known as Victoria — where the stars still follow the old paths, and the winds carry names older than memory. Our sovereignty was never ceded, it lives in ceremony and song, in story and law, and in every generation that refused to disappear.

From the first footstep on this land to the long fight to carry forward our Lore, law, rights and responsibilities, our story walks with us — in the footprints of Mungo, in the ash and shell middens of Moyjil.

It lives in the snowmelt of the high country, the red dirt of the Mallee, and in the dappling light along the banks of the Dungala. It moves through the You Yangs and shifts beneath the stars — guiding ceremony and time itself. Little by little, it sculpts the stone ridges of Gariwerd, shaped by wind and memory; the slow breath of the Birrarung; the black stones of Budj Bim, still warm with fire; the salt air of our rugged southern shores, and the serene lagoons of the east, where Ancestors move still with wind and water.

These places are not just remembered — they remember us. The rivers, stories, moieties, totems and songlines run beneath state lines, carrying our languages, ceremonies, Lores and laws. They bind us to one another, and to the long memory of Country.

So today after all that was taken, Treaty begins here — not as a gesture, but the rightful claim of our peoples. This is Gellung Warl: a Gunaikurnai word for the tip of the spear — shaped by Ancestors, bound by Treaty, guided by Lore and law, carried by Community.

We come to this new world — the time of Treaty — after generations of being told to be silent. To call it loss. Misfortune. Tragedy. As if our attempted erasure were natural. And when the worst had passed, we were told to get over it, as if no one was to blame. But we have always known the truth, and we name what happened for what it was: genocide. Planned, concealed — but undeniable.

We say genocide because no other word will do, and we don't say it lightly — it is the word that matches the wound. It is what happened when our nations were hunted, poisoned, herded, stolen from, silenced. When governments forged laws that stole our children, split our families and attempted to erase our culture. When we weren't counted as human. When the nation was silent as to our existence. When systems and colonial laws were constructed to hasten our demise — and they called it "care," and gave us "protectors". During it all we did not flinch, and now we do not look away. Yoorrook affirmed it, and through our commitment to the ongoing telling of the truth, through Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna we will always know.

What we do now begins not in ceremony alone, but in quiet knowing — we are tending to a fire that has warmed our families for generations and that many said would burn out. It flickers still; therefore, this is not a new beginning, but a rekindling — of Lore still warm beneath the ash. A chapter written in honesty, guided by justice, carried forward by Ancestors and the children who will speak our names.

This Treaty is a living tree — marked, like the scar trees that line our Country. From their hollows, our future first breathed; from their shade, we learned and gathered. They are living witnesses — wounded yet giving, scarred yet bearing life. From those same wounds, new growth emerges: justice, care, education, and the return of what was lost. Their roots are our values, its trunk the commitments we shape together, its branches the promise of what will come. And it will need tending, by all of us, to stand tall and bloom beyond our lifetime — through this and future treaties.

This Treaty is not a document to be filed and forgotten. It is the living expression of who we are — decisions made by us, not about us; truth taught, not buried; accountability held through Nginma Ngainga Wara. It strengthens our self-governance and representation, built in Lore, culture, and the will of our people. It asks the State to change as we have had to change — to listen, to reckon, to grow — and brings recognition,

respect and healing. It continues what our old people have always done: make law, make peace, make future — laying the groundwork for what comes next, in kinship, care and ceremony.

This Treaty honours culture not as ornament, but as law — holding joy in language reborn, in children dancing where silence once was, and in futures shaped by collective responsibility. It points the way to generational change — in health, justice and economic prosperity — where First Peoples' knowledge and authority stand at the centre of how we govern and care for Country and each other.

This Treaty means a future where children grow up proud of who they are, walking confidently in two worlds, knowing their language and history — where their rights are honoured. It is a future where Victoria is defined not by what it has taken, but by its deep respect of First Peoples — and by how we thrive, together.

This Treaty honours the legacies, resistance and activism of all First Peoples across this continent. We share this moment of pride as First Peoples of Victoria. It and all that follows, belongs to Traditional Owners of this land, to community-controlled organisations and to all First Peoples who call this land home. We have walked this journey together through shared wisdom, resilience and enduring commitment. We continue together, carried by shared strength, shared hope, and shared future.

This Declaration is an invitation for our people to come together — those who stayed and those forced from Country; the Elders who carried the embers, and the children who now carry the flame.

