



**First Speech by Andrew Gardiner
Inaugural Meeting of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria**

10 December 2019

Thank you, Aunty Eleanor. I would like to acknowledge the welcome to country by the two esteemed Elders from the Woi Wurrung and the Bunurong and pay respects to all Elders and mentors past, present and emerging and to those present here today. I also acknowledge today's ceremony conducted by our people, including my grandson, for engaging us into this chamber and to the Will Shake Spears dancers for their significant dance. I acknowledge the treaty advancement commissioner and the interim committee for all their hard work in getting us here, and particularly all members of the First Peoples' Assembly, colleagues here today, and their guests.

We gather here on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung homelands, the lands of my ancestors, united in our common cause. It must be noted that we never ceded our country. We seek a way forward on unfinished business that exists between the state of Victoria and the communities we each represent, the sovereign First Peoples of country and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in Victoria. We are simultaneously tasked with honouring history and legacy to those that preceded us, meeting the expectations of those who elected us and imagining and giving effect to aspirations for those to come. Only by grounding our work in culture and law will we be able to deliver on the obligations of our past, present and future generations.

While the nation struggled with the invitation within the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the Victorian state government took a step forward by advancing the treaty process and enacted the Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018. We call on the state to continue to be courageous. We call on the state to be generous, to resource our communities according to their needs so that we can make truly informed decisions and restorative changes. We call on the state to allow our process to take shape at a pace that is comfortable for our people, especially for our Elders and their voice. We must prove a system that is workable for us to progress to a better and transformative future. This opportunity is what we make it, and as the clock is ticking, I say humbly that I am pleased and honoured to walk with you on this journey. Thank you.

