



**First Speech by Dylan Clarke
Inaugural Meeting of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria**

10 December 2019

Thank you, Aunty Eleanor. My name is Dylan Clarke, and I stand before you as the representative of the Barengi Gadjin Land Council, a prescribed body corporate representing the rights and interests of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples. I would like to acknowledge all Victorian traditional owners and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across this nation and pay my respects to your families, your ancestors and your connections to your country.

I would also like to acknowledge my guest, Aunty Jennifer Beer, née Kennedy. In 2005 we achieved the first positive native title determination in Victoria. It is fitting that only Jennifer and I are here representing our families and the two successful applicants on that native title determination: Aunty Kaylene Clarke and Uncle Jack Kennedy.

Next year marks 15 years of native title for our group, and over the years we have seen native title and other formal recognition structures divide our community, cause more trauma—systems that do not recognise our own cultural governance and values. We need agreements that are aimed at improving the social determinants that have plagued our people for many years. The research and studies have all been done. It is time for agencies to start implementing and being held accountable across multiple sectors like education, justice, health and others. We need agreements that prioritise the reparations for the Stolen Generations to acknowledge the continued intergenerational trauma and dispossession of their identity and connection to families and country.

The apology by Kevin Rudd was only one small step in a stairwell of healing. Traditional owners should have more rights to protect their cultural heritage and cultural sites. Rivers and waterways have gone dry from being redirected or blocked from natural flows dating back to settlement, causing a dramatic impact on today's landscape across Victoria. Traditional owners deserve water rights over their lands, waters and seas through any and all processes to improve this country. Our cultural knowledge of this landscape is imperative to the regeneration of a rich and sustainable environment. I believe we can achieve some great things through new agreements and new legislation and look forward to walking with the Assembly into a fair and just negotiation with the Victorian state government. Thank you for your time.

