

**First Peoples'  
Assembly of  
Victoria**

## **SUMMARY**

# **Report on 2019 consultations with Elders on an Elders' Voice in the Assembly.**

*Summary of PricewaterhouseCoopers Indigenous Consulting (PIC)'s Report on their 2019 consultations with Victorian Elders.*

The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is working to establish an Elders' Voice to strengthen the cultural governance of the Assembly's work. As a starting point, the Assembly is looking to consultations conducted by the Victorian Treaty Advancement Commission. From here, the Assembly will continue targeted engagement with Elders as it develops the design of the Voice. This work will take place over the second half of 2020.

In 2019 the Commission engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers Indigenous Consulting (PIC) to run a series of consultations with Elders' groups across the state on the design of the Elders' Voice.

The Report on these consultations, Model for an Elders' Voice to the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, shares the views and preferences of over 201 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders from a series of 19 workshops held around Victoria between May and August 2019. This Report is believed to be the most extensive consultation process undertaken with Elders in Victoria's recent history.

The Report provides important insights into the principles participating Elders valued for an Elders' Voice. The model developed in the Report presents one approach to shaping the principles Elders' shared. This summary paper seeks to highlight the principles Elders shared, to support the Elders' Voice Committee to continue shaping the model for Elders' Voice and to support the returning of knowledges back to Elders.

This summary paper discusses the principles of the Report through the role, membership, structure and support for Elders' Voice. Based on these principles, the Report suggested a possible model of the Voice which is briefly outlined.

Through centring the principles of an Elders' Voice, this summary paper seeks to further empower the Assembly to support the formation of an Elders' Voice which is by Elders for Elders.

**[The full report can be accessed at firstpeoplesvic.org](https://www.firstpeoplesvic.org)**





# Design principles of an Elders' Voice from the Report

## Role

Participating Elders highlighted the importance of the role of Elders in the Treaty Process. Elders felt that a voice should be a powerful, guiding role which respects, recognises and reflects the importance and unique roles Elders play in Aboriginal society. To encompass these principles, Elders recommended that the main role of an Elders' Voice should be to provide advice and cultural oversight to the work of the First Peoples' Assembly.

Suggested roles included:

- Providing advice and cultural oversight to the Assembly and the Treaty process
- Supporting respectful interactions that are grounded in Aboriginal ways of doing Business
- Engaging with the Treaty process and Assembly business through:
  - Discussing matters referred to by the Assembly
  - Requesting and providing written reports and advice to the Assembly on Treaty business and any other matter as determined by the Elders
  - Ability to request attendance at any Assembly meeting to provide cultural oversight
  - Inviting Assembly members to attend meetings of the Elders' Voice when requested

## Membership

Elders discussed the importance of having a workable size for membership of Elders' Voice. Between 10-15 members was considered ideal. The Elders highlighted the importance of gender equality and membership supporting Mens' and Womens' Business through the Voice.

While Elders agreed that self-identification as an Elder is critical for membership eligibility of Elders' Voice, many Elders also felt that a definition of Eldership and a process to confirm Eldership should be developed once the Elders' Voice is established. Elders felt that a process to confirm Eldership should be led by Elders and respectful and involve discussions with impacted families.

Most Elders felt that Elder members should be Traditional Owners in Victoria, although there should also be a way that did not exclude Elders from the Stolen Generations who are unable to connect with their histories.

There were diverse views about the process of choosing Elders as members of the Voice. Some Elders felt that election should be a peer-based honouring system, where Elders nominate other Elders for the Voice according to the concept of respect.

Elders highlighted the importance of making sure that participation in Elders' Voice was not a burden on Elders.

Suggested membership outline:

- Between 10 – 15 members
  - Importance of gender equality and supporting Mens' and Womens' Business
- Eligibility
  - Self-identification as an Elder
  - Elders should be Victorian Traditional Owners
  - Ability to attend and participate in meetings throughout the year
  - Ensure that participation in Elders' Voice is not a burden on Elders
- Selection process
  - Honouring system of nominating through respect

## Structure

Most Elders felt that the role of the Voice is to provide advice to the Assembly, not to veto decisions by elected Members. The Elders agreed that the Assembly must demonstrate that it has properly considered the advice of Elders.

Structure outline:

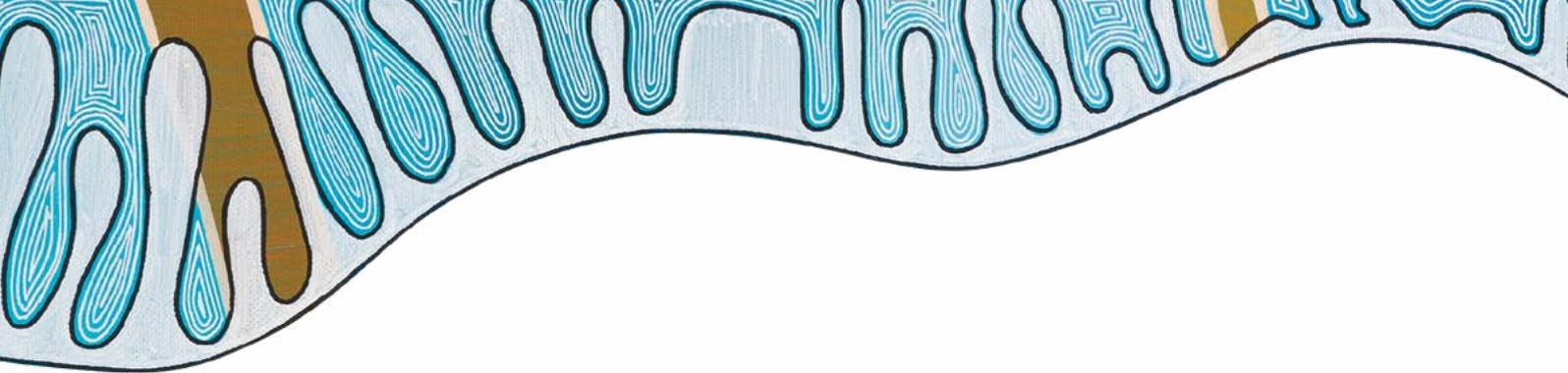
- The Elders' Voice role is to provide advice to the Assembly, not to veto decisions of elected Members
- Assembly must demonstrate that it has properly considered the advice of Elders' Voice
- Structure should support Mens' and Womens' Business, such as having a man and a woman co-chair
- Direct contact with Co-chairs and Board of First Peoples' Assembly as requested by Elders for out-of-session or other matters requiring urgent attention
- Meeting Frequency
  - in line with meetings of the Assembly
  - may also meet at Elders' Voice request to consider urgent matters

## Support

Elders agreed that Elder members should be supported for participating in Elders' Voice, including sitting fees and reimbursing travel and accommodation costs.

Support outline:

- Elders paid for their time in undertaking all Elders' Voice functions
- Elders reimbursed for any costs associated with participating in the Elders voice, including travel and accommodation costs
- Capacity for carer to attend meetings if required
- Other facilities such as childcare and healthcare as needed
- Flexible meetings times outside of drop off and pickup school hours



# Potential model for an Elders' Voice based on the Report

The Report highlighted that Elders who participated in consultations did not reach agreement about all elements of an Elders' Voice. The Report brought together participating Elders' views into a potential model that reflects the principles identified. The Report notes that Elders maintained diverse views on key matters, and the individual elements of the potential model did not always reflect most Elders' views.

One of the key elements in the Report's model is the suggestion for electing members of Elders' Voice. Some Elders suggested that Traditional Owner Elder members of the Elders' Voice are chosen at a state-wide gathering of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders.

The outline of the Report's model below is based on the principles already discussed, and centres the new information relating to the suggested model. For the Assembly, the Report's model provides one approach to shaping the principles Elders expressed and may not mirror the final model recommended by the Assembly.

## **Report's suggested Role**

- To provide advice and cultural oversight to the Assembly and the Treaty process

## **Report's suggested Membership**

- 10 – 15 Traditional Owner Elders (self-identified) and provide a gender balance
- Some Elders who participated in the consultations suggested:
  - a state-wide gathering of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders choose Traditional Owner Elder members based on an honouring system of nominating through respect
  - that it was inappropriate for Assembly members to select members of the Elders' Voice
  - that the selection process should not use the Assembly regions.
  - the state-wide gathering should be annual to also support Cultural Business

## **Report's suggested Structure**

- There should be female and male Elder co-chairs as selected by the Elders' Voice members
- Matters to be determined by consensus where possible, while also supporting diversity of Elders' views

# Next Steps

This summary paper seeks to return the knowledge shared in the Report back to Community. Sharing the principles outlined with Elders will provide greater insight into how to shape an Elders' Voice for the Assembly.

## July Workshops

The Elders' Voice Committee of the Assembly will hold two workshops during July to advance the Elders' Voice process. Developments from these workshops will then be considered at the August Assembly Chamber before returning to Elders in the community for further advice and consultation.

Based on the outcomes of these consultations the Committee may then be ready to present a potential model(s) for Elders' Voice to the November Assembly Chamber for consideration. Once approved, the Elders' Voice can then be established.

**[The full report can be accessed at firstpeoplesvic.org](http://www.firstpeoplesvic.org)**  
or by contacting the Assembly at the details below.

If you have questions about the report, or want to contribute to the development of the Elders' Voice, contact your local Assembly member:

1800 TREATY (87 32 89)  
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