



25 February 2021

ROYAL COMMISSION NEEDED TO REVEAL FULL TRUTH

The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria (the Assembly) has voted for a process to tell the true history of the State of Victoria, backed with the strength of a Royal Commission.

At the Assembly's first Chamber meeting of the year, Assembly Members considered and agreed to a proposed Terms of Reference for a full Truth-telling process that will recognise the injustices that have been ignored and hidden from the Australian consciousness and will change how the public views Australian history.

The design and shape of the proposed Terms of Reference were led by the voices of the Aboriginal community every step of the way, following community consultation.

The Assembly heard that Aboriginal people want the process to have the powers of a Royal Commission, including independence from government, public hearings, the authority to call witnesses under oath and to compel evidence while also making recommendations for the future.

As well as having strong powers, the process will need to be culturally sensitive to First Peoples trauma and ways of sharing stories.

The Assembly also heard that Aboriginal people want the process to lead to real change and action and clearly identify the links between historical wrongs and ongoing disadvantage, injustice, and intergenerational trauma.

The community made it clear that the process must also recognise the resilience and strength of the Aboriginal community, establish a public record of wrongs since colonisation and build the foundations for a new relationship with the wider community.

In designing the proposed Terms of Reference, the Assembly worked closely with local and international experts, and looked to international Truth-telling processes in South Africa, Canada and New Zealand.

There is a growing appetite to hear the truth among the wider community, that builds on generations of activism and advocacy from the Aboriginal community and leads to justice and healing.

Increasingly, Australians acknowledge the limits of how our history has been told and the ongoing reality for First Peoples, whether discussing the appropriateness of January 26, injustices highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement and within Australia's sports culture, or the ongoing destruction of cultural heritage.

It is important that the hunger for knowledge by the public and the willingness of Aboriginal people to tell their stories, despite the pain it will cause, be given the best possible setting for the truth to emerge.

Quote attributable to Co-Chair Auntie Geraldine Atkinson

"Only through a full and honest process can we reset relationships between Aboriginal people and the wider community, based on honesty and a knowledge of actual events, not just one part of the story."

Quote attributable to Co-Chair Marcus Stewart

"For too long there's been a deliberate covering up of the long-held trauma of past events or policies and how they continue to affect and resonate with the lived experiences of Aboriginal people today."