

FEBRUARY 2021



**First Peoples'
Assembly of
Victoria**

Assembly Chamber Communique

This document is a summary of the meeting of the First Peoples' Assembly Chamber held on Thursday 25 February 2021.

Due to COVID-19 and the associated restrictions, Assembly Members met via video link. The meeting was chaired by Co-Chair Marcus Stewart.

Latji Latji Elder Aunty Janine Wilson acknowledged the various Aboriginal lands that Members were meeting on and paid respect to Elders past present and emerging. As is customary, the Chair held a minutes silence was held for any Sorry Business in our Communities.

Truth-telling process

The Assembly Chamber called 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.



Director and Member Remuneration Policy amendments

The Assembly Chamber voted on proposals to further strengthen support for Members through increased stipends so they can dedicate more time and resources for working with their Communities. This proposal will reinforce the accountability of Members to the to the Assembly and their community.

Restructure of Committees

The Chamber ratified a decision to streamline the structure of the workstream committees to improve their overall operation and increase opportunities for Member participation. The workstream committees are at the core of the Assembly's work and follow the objectives as set out in the Act.

Workshop on Treaty Negotiation Framework and UNDRIP

The afternoon session of the Assembly Chamber was dedicated to a workshop for Members to discuss the Treaty Negotiation Framework. The Assembly Chamber was delighted to host two representatives from the Sámi Parliament and hear about their experiences in the transfer of power and resources from the state to the Sámi Parliament.

The Chamber then considered options to strengthen and embed Aboriginal self-governance in Victoria, including the establishment of an Aboriginal decision-making body, reserved seats in the Victorian Parliament and an Aboriginal Voice to Parliament. The Chamber provided advice and direction for upcoming community consultations on options for statewide reform. The Assembly Chamber also discussed the essential linkages to UNDRIP.

Having decided to pursue a mixed model of Statewide and local treaties, the Assembly focused this discussion on options for statewide reform. It was noted that local rights and national building will be considered at an upcoming Chamber session.

The next meeting of the Assembly Chamber is scheduled for 1 April.

