

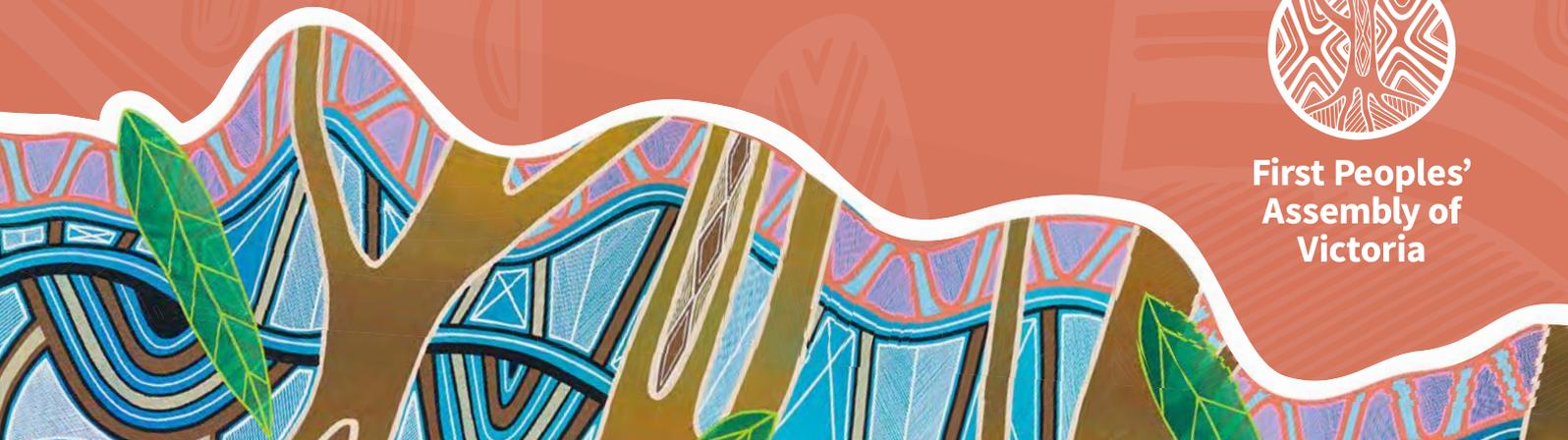


First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria

Annual Report 2021



First Peoples'
Assembly of
Victoria



First and foremost



Our commitment to Community

The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria belongs to First Peoples. It was made by First Peoples, for First Peoples and we, the elected seat holders in the Assembly, have one job – to represent the whole of our community in Victoria as we journey together towards Treaty.

The Assembly acknowledges the wisdom and resilience of our Elders have brought us to this point. Together we now stand proud in our culture, strong in spirit and ready to create a path to a fair and more equal future where our people have the freedom and power to make our own decisions about our lives and communities.

The path ahead might not be a straight one, but these are the commitments we make to each other and to Community on the journey:

Welcome.

Our strength is drawn from our community's diversity. We aim to make sure everyone is welcome and everyone is heard.

Respect.

We will always treat each other with respect and we'll call out disrespect when we see it.

Listen.

Like our culture, our community's ideas are rich and diverse, we'll always be up for a yarn. We need your ideas, feedback and guidance.

Self-determination isn't just our destination, it's our heartbeat. It's what keeps us moving on our journey to truth, justice and a better tomorrow.

We're confident that the negotiation framework for Treaty we are developing with your guidance will ensure Traditional Owners and First Peoples across the state can assert our rights and enter negotiations on equal footing.

The Treaty Negotiation Framework will be the rule book by which treaties will be negotiated. The Framework will set the agenda for Treaty-making to provide the strongest possible foundation to secure the aspirations of Traditional Owners and First Peoples across Victoria.

As the spirit of our ancestors lives in all of us, let the wisdom, the spirit and the generosity in which Bundjil taught us, influence the decisions made on place. Do this by understanding your ways of knowing, your ways of doing, and your ways of being on place.

So, importantly, our conversations are about what the community wants to secure from the Treaty process. We'll continue to work hand in hand with Community to identify the tangible reforms that will improve the lives of our people.

**Sovereignty was never ceded.
Together we will make Treaty a reality.**





Contents



Truth, respect, equality and a better tomorrow	5
A message from the Co-Chairs	
The journey toward Treaty	6
About the Assembly	
When Elders speak, we listen	8
Establishing a permanent Elders' Voice	
Working with Community to determine our future	10
How we work	
The foundations and framework for Treaty negotiations	16
Overview	
Truth and Treaties go hand in hand	20
Creating the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission	
All voices heard	24
Additional Pathways to Reserved Seats	
The journey so far	26
Timeline	
Meet the Members	30
Appendices	64
Acknowledgements	74
An invitation to walk with us	76
Next steps on the shared journey to Treaty in Victoria	



Truth, respect, equality and a better tomorrow



A message from the Co-Chairs

Wa Wa Gee (Taungurung)

Hello.

We're so pleased to be presenting our second annual report about the work of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria.

The very formation of the First Peoples' Assembly is in and of itself a hopeful and bold act of self-determination. It's living proof that sovereignty was never ceded. This is and always will be Aboriginal land.

We know that having the freedom and power to make decisions about our own lives and communities is how we can create a better future for our children. That's why self-determination and empowerment are the driving forces behind everything we do on the journey to Treaty.

Treaty is so many things. It is about exposing past injustices. It is our chance to challenge the power imbalances that have held many in our community back for too long. And it is our chance to work together and agree on meaningful structural reform to make Victoria a fairer and better place for everyone.

We hope this report will give you an understanding of the diversity and wisdom of the Assembly's representatives and their deep ties to Community and Country.

Our aim is also to demonstrate the progress the Assembly team has made in engaging people across the state to make sure every step of the journey to Treaty is shaped by Community. We're committed to ensuring everyone is heard.

Strong foundations have been laid and now it's time to start laying down the building blocks for what Treaty looks like. Our representatives will be busy yarning with Community, in the city and towns, on Country, over the phone, in Zoom meetings.

Although the finer details of Community's needs and desires are yet to be articulated, some things are certain. Treaty won't be symbolic. We want meaningful structural reform that will improve the lives of our people and we won't rest until we have it.

The path to Treaty might be a long one, but it's also a wide path and there's room for everyone to walk with us.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. Both of us are looking forward to the opportunities that the Treaty process will provide for all Victorians to learn more about, and share in, the richness and knowledge of our culture.

Gowola Nagarra (Bangerang)

Kind regards

Aunty Geraldine Atkinson and Marcus Stewart
Co-Chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria.

The journey toward Treaty

The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is the independent and democratically-elected body to represent Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria.

We believe it's time to negotiate Treaties between our people and the Government of Victoria and we're establishing the foundations and framework to enable that. With Community's guidance, the Assembly has decided that the agenda for Treaty-making must include both a State-wide Treaty for state-wide matters and local treaties for individual Traditional Owner Groups.

This is an historic opportunity to right past injustices and put our community on an equal footing with the State. But at its heart, Treaty is about securing structural change at the state-wide and local level to improve the lives of our people – to make sure we have the freedom and power to make the decisions about our lives and communities so our people can thrive on their own lands. Lands that were never ceded.

Any person aged 16 years or older, who is a Traditional Owner of Country in Victoria, or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, who has lived in Victoria for three of the past five years, can enrol to have a say in Assembly elections and help choose the path down which we tread.

There have been few moments since invasion when our peoples have had the opportunity to come together, unite and press their case. We must seize this opportunity and enrol to vote – if you are eligible and haven't yet enrolled, complete the form on our website and walk with us on the journey to Treaty.

Beyond involvement in Assembly elections, we need our people to participate in the Treaty process. You can do this by attending our engagement events and online sessions, participate in our surveys and encourage your friends and family to do the same. The more people who give their input, the greater ownership we all have over this process, and the louder and stronger our voices will be.

The Assembly uses a model that is both democratic and takes into account our cultural practices and needs – a mixture of reserved seating for formally-recognised Traditional Owner groups and open seats. We're also establishing a permanent Elders' Voice so the wisdom and resilience of our Elders can guide us on the journey to Treaty.

The Assembly's 31 Members were elected in 2019 and they, along with our team of community-based staff, have been engaging with people and communities across our nations to gather ideas and details of what people need and want the Treaty process to deliver.

A message that came through loud and clear was that truth-telling will be an important step towards healing, justice and Treaty.

You can't build a house on rotten foundations, so we're pleased to have negotiated with the Victorian Government the establishment of the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission. (Read more on page 20.) The Commission is a powerful and independent body tasked with creating a formal record of the many injustices inflicted on our people. Reckoning with the past is an important first step in the journey to creating a better future. Our Tyerri Yoo-rrook report outlines Community's requirements, requests and hopes for the truth-telling process. Without truth, we can't negotiate Treaty.

Strong foundations are being laid for Treaties. The Assembly is focused on making sure that the Treaty Negotiation Framework we establish will empower Aboriginal people to exercise the right to self-determination, as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at both the state-wide and local levels to deliver better outcomes for our people.

At the same time, we're working out ways to ensure that Traditional Owners and First Peoples will be able to enter negotiations on an equal footing with the state. Along with conversations about the important role that the Treaty Authority will play as the independent umpire to make sure that negotiations are open, fair and equitable. See the details about these elements on page 16.

As part of our constant feedback loop, we're now fleshing out these concepts in more detail with communities across the state.

Yarning with Community about the needs, ideas and concerns about the Treaty process and the desired results it will deliver, is an exciting and energising phase of this journey and we're looking forward to the year ahead.

About the Assembly



The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is the first body of its kind in Australia.



Established in December 2019, the Assembly is currently made up of up to 32 members – all proud Traditional Owners of Country in Victoria.



These Aboriginal leaders were chosen by their communities to represent community views.



Twenty-one representatives were determined by a statewide Aboriginal community vote held between September and October 2019, and 10 representatives were appointed to reserved seats by formally recognised Traditional Owner groups. Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation have not appointed a representative to date.



The Assembly is the voice for Traditional Owners of Country in Victoria and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria in the Treaty process with the State.

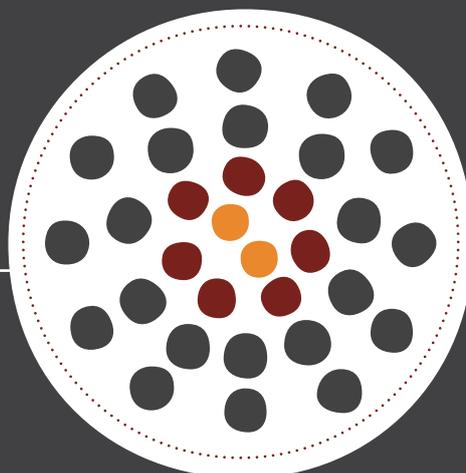
How is the Assembly structured?

Executive

- Nine directors elected by the Assembly members
- Led by Co-Chairs elected by all representatives
- Implements decisions of the Assembly and leads the agenda

Elders' Voice

- Form is to be determined
- Provides cultural strength and advice to the Assembly



Assembly Chamber

(Currently up to 32 members)

- Meets quarterly to make all key Assembly decisions on the Treaty process.
- Members responsible for regularly engaging with their communities before each meeting.

General seats

(21 seats)

Elected by statewide vote in 2019. Traditional Owners of Country in Victoria, or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria have the opportunity to vote every three years.

Reserved seats

(currently up to 11 seats)

One representative appointed by each formally recognised Traditional Owner group.

When Elders speak, we listen



Establishing a permanent Elders' Voice

It's because of the wisdom and resilience of our Elders that we are here today, ready to continue their struggles and take the next steps together. The voices of our Elders must be heard and respected. They need to guide our journey towards Treaties in Victoria.

The Elders' Voice will be a permanent body made up of Elders in Victoria who will play a crucial role in informing the work of the Assembly. It is being created because our community members informed us it is an essential part of the Treaty process, and so the formation of the Elders' Voice was written into the Assembly's Constitution. Elders' Voice committee members recognised that the Elders' Voice will ensure our work is grounded in cultural integrity, Aboriginal decision-making and traditional knowledge systems.

The Elders' Voice Committee considered the report by PricewaterhouseCoopers Indigenous Consulting who ran a series of consultations initially 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.

Elders' Voice, Elders' Choice

The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria has set up an 'Interim Elders' Voice', which will establish the foundations for our permanent Elders' Voice. The Interim Elders' Voice is made up of two Co-Chairs, with a gender balance, each from different regions of Victoria.

Aunty Charmaine Clarke is a Gunditjmara Elder and Uncle Andrew Gardiner is a Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Elder. As Co-Chairs of the Interim Elders' Voice, they are planning to travel the state as soon as it is safe to do so, to meet with Elders on Country and listen to their feedback about how a permanent Elders' Voice should be structured. In the meantime, they've been hosting online events and yarning one-on-one with Elders over the phone.

"The strength of Aboriginal Elders, and their long fight for justice, has brought us to this point in our State's history. We are grateful to receive our Elders' direction on our historic path towards Treaty, and we will listen to the collective wisdom and knowledge they share to inform our journey."

– Aunty Charmaine

These consultations are open to all Elders to participate in and are to provide input for the design, structure and roles and responsibilities of our permanent Elders' Voice.

The interim model is designed to be flexible and will allow for further development by Elders themselves. The aim is to allow for diversity of opinions and ensure there is broad involvement in the design of the permanent model.

The Elders' Voice will be underpinned by four cultural pillars, embedded in self-determination, respect, connectedness, knowledge base and lore of the land. After engaging with and listening to Elders, the Co-Chairs will deliver a report to the Assembly Chamber who will establish the permanent Elders' Voice, based on this input from our Elders.

While the Interim Elders' Voice Co-Chairs will conduct consultations with Elders in a timely manner, it is important that our Elders are not rushed through this process. Their wisdom and guidance will form an integral part of the journey to Treaty and must be thoroughly considered from the beginning.

"Our permanent Elders' Voice is something our community has been calling for since the beginning of the Treaty process. It has always been a priority of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria... I am proud to stand alongside Aunty Charmaine and help drive this important discussion."

– Uncle Andrew.

We know that our Elders prefer face-to-face yarns over online meetings and so our Co-Chairs will aim to conduct as many of these as possible, in a COVID-safe way.

If you're an Elder and want to yarn with one of the Co-Chairs, call 1800 TREATY to book in a time.

Prior to the creation of the Interim Elders' Voice, Tracey Evans, in her role as Chair of the Elders' Voice Committee, along with members of the committee, was instrumental in driving the work of the Elders' Voice until the appointment of Aunty Charmaine and Uncle Andrew as the interim Co-Chairs.

Working with Community to determine our future



How we work

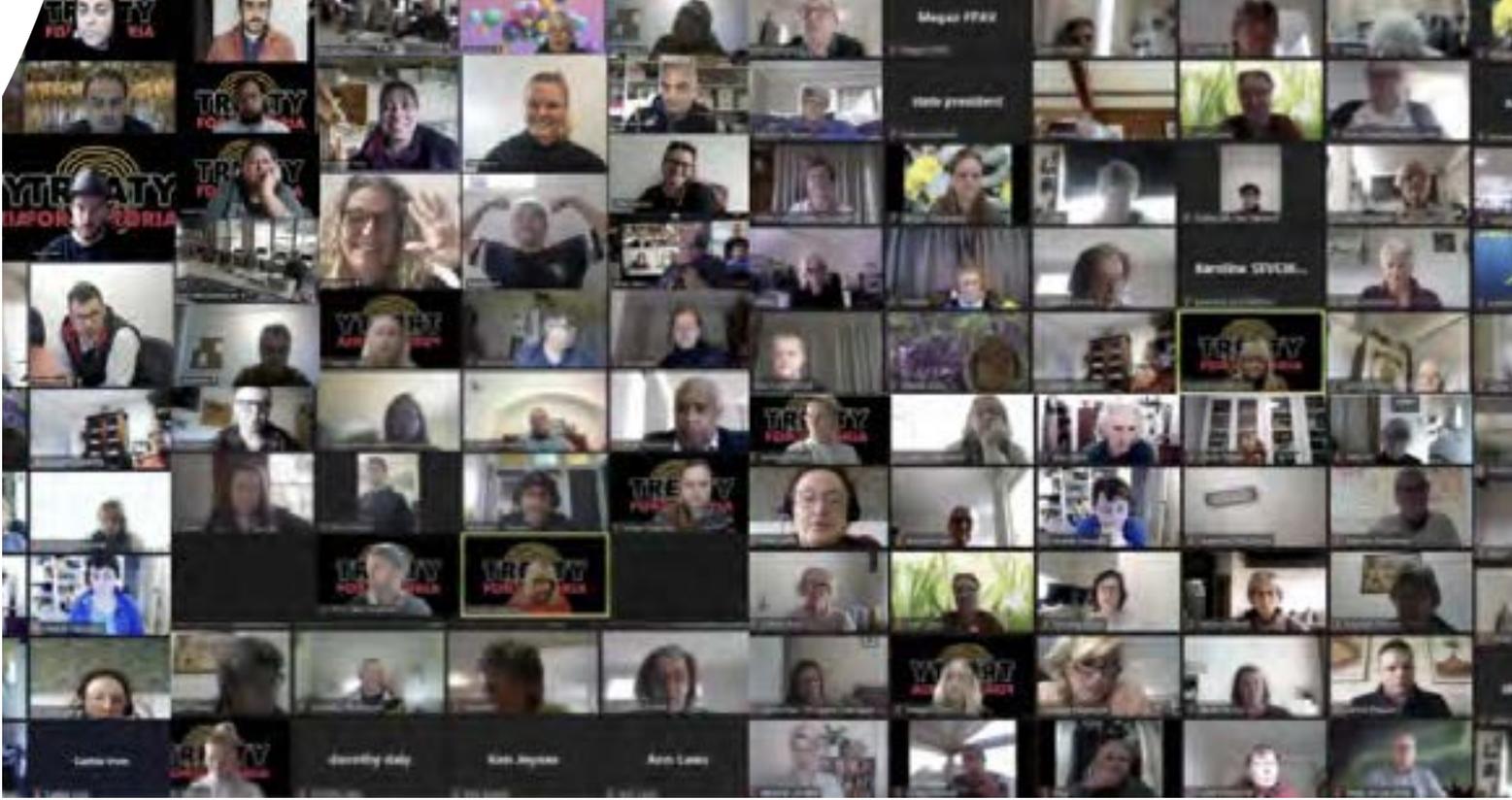
First Peoples' self-determination is our fundamental guiding principle in all that we do.

We know our lives are better when we have the freedom and power to make the decisions that affect our communities and Country. Our people have the knowledge, we have the solutions - we just need the chance to implement them.

The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria was established to represent Traditional Owners and First Peoples living in Victoria. Our electoral roll is exactly that – ours.

It was created by First Peoples, for First Peoples and is completely independent of any government processes.

The 31 Assembly Members have been chosen by Community to represent our hopes and objectives and drive the conversations with communities about how best to establish an agreement about the Treaty elements.



“This is our chance for meaningful structural reforms. Treaty is about truth, respect, equality and making Victoria a fairer place for everyone..”

- AUNTY GERALDINE ATKINSON
FIRST PEOPLES' ASSEMBLY CO-CHAIR



First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria: Annual Report 2021



Chamber meetings with all Assembly Members are held four times a year and Assembly Committees advance various areas of work between meetings with support from Assembly staff. The Committees – The Treaty, Yurpa and Truth-telling committees - are made up of Assembly Members and drive policy development, guided by the input from communities in the following areas:

- The Treaty elements under the Treaty Act
- Strengthening cultural governance
- Advancing truth-telling to accompany Treaty.

Yurpa is a Dja Dja Wurrung word meaning to put forth or to bring into being. The Yurpa Committee was formerly known as the Assembly Business Committee.

Troy McDonald and Ngarra Murray are Co-Conveners (Chairs) of the Treaty Committee, Tracey Evans and Trent Nelson are Co-Conveners of the Yurpa Committee and Co-Conveners of the Truth-telling Committee are yet to be appointed.

The Assembly is considering whether to rename its other committees in language in the future.

With the establishment of the Yoo-rook Justice Commission a formal Assembly Truth-telling Committee may not be required into the future.

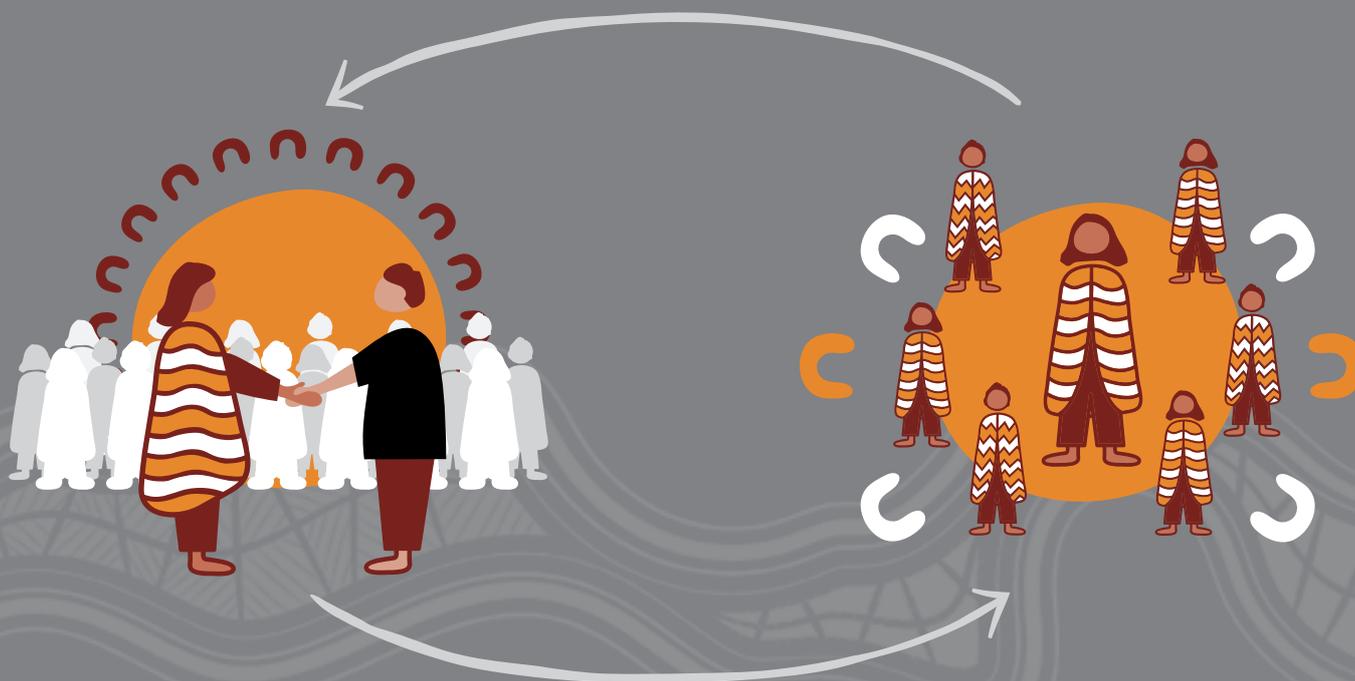
The Assembly will rely on the forging of a strong working relationship with the Commission to enable Treaty and Truth to walk hand in hand.

The Committees are where a significant portion of the Assembly's work is done. The Committees have met a total of 32 times in the past year. At Committee meetings, which range from two hours to all day meetings following much prereading and preparation, Members can have in-depth discussions about Treaty-related matters and Assembly business. They promote participation and informed decision-making after consideration of Community feedback and international best practice. Committees make recommendations to Chamber for debate and/or ratification.

Members have been engaging diligently with communities to gain their insights and feedback on elements of a Treaty under the Treaty Act. Members adopt and bring this feedback and Community's perspectives to committees and Chamber meetings to ensure that the Treaty process is informed and driven by Community.

Parallel to the discussions and decisions of the Committees and Chamber, Assembly Members and Assembly staff oversee a community engagement program to ensure a steady two-way stream of updates and feedback is maintained through various conversations, consultations, community meetings, surveys, and online events.

An ongoing conversation with Community





The discussions at these various events and the findings from consultations and member participation drives the Assembly's core work to establish the Treaty Negotiation Framework, Treaty Authority and Self-Determination Fund.

The views of Community were central to Members making key decisions to date, such as to pursue both a State-wide Treaty and Traditional Owner Treaties. Ongoing community consultation is now undertaken by Members and the Assembly to determine the more specific aspects of what a State-wide Treaty and Traditional Owner Treaties should look like.

When public health settings have allowed, our Members and engagement staff have met with Community explaining the Treaty process and hearing their aspirations, priorities and contributions.

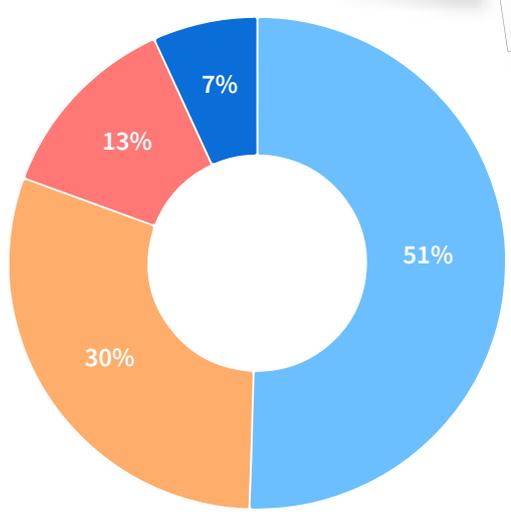
Extensive online opportunities have also been arranged for the Aboriginal Community to hear about the Assembly's work and to engage directly with Members by asking the questions they need answered or to make the points they want heard. (See Appendix C for full list of engagements – page 68)

The full Assembly has also met five times (See Appendix B – page 66) during the 12-month reporting period for its regular Chambers with history being made as Aboriginal people make key decisions about their future. Appendix B sets out the key decisions and outcomes of Chamber.

Appendix C sets out the details of the Assembly's events and activities conducted for the Treaty process.



STRONG VOICE
 Recognising Aboriginal sovereignty is the focus of Gunditjara Elder Charmaine Clarke as she steps onto the First Peoples' Assembly.
 STORY: Inside



ONLINE:	698
PRINT:	94
TV:	174
RADIO:	416
TOTAL:	1,382



The Assembly featured in approximately **1,300 media articles** with a potential audience reach of **75 million people**

- Approximately 150 events and community engagements sessions**
- Assembly met as a Chamber 5 times over 8 days**
- 32 Committee meetings**

Live Events on Facebook

(Youth Yarning Treaty, Elders' Voice, Truth-telling, Yoo-rook Justice Commission, Treaty Negotiation Framework, August Chamber, December Chamber, June Chamber)

Total events: 8
Total views: 25,419
Total reach: 64,648
Total engagements: 10,993

Cross channel total

Followers: 15,780
Impressions: 1,876,133
Engagements: 119,180 approx

The foundations and framework for Treaty negotiations

An overview of where we're at

Some things are too important to rush. Treaty is this generation's chance to reset the relationship between the State and First Peoples in Victoria so it can be one based on equality and respect.

Treaty will empower Traditional Owners and First Peoples living in Victoria with the ability to make the decisions that affect our lives, our land and our community.

Each step on our shared journey to Treaty in Victoria is a considered and careful one.

The Assembly's focus has been laying the groundwork to ensure Traditional Owners and First Peoples can come to the table ready and able to engage on an equal footing within a clear and fair framework.

Getting to the negotiation table

Although there's a clear and strong commitment to Treaty on both sides of the table, it's inevitable that there will be disagreements on the journey and we need to have a clear pathway for working through our differences. So in the historic moment when we kicked off the formal negotiations with the Victorian Government on the Treaty process, the first thing on the agenda was a provisional dispute resolution mechanism.

This dispute resolution process, supported by negotiation conduct protocols, was formally signed on 8 February 2020. It might sound like a dry technical detail, but it marked a historic moment – the very first step on the Government's journey of relinquishing some of its power to make space for Traditional Owners and ensure we can meet and continue to negotiate with the Government on an equal footing.

Treaty Negotiation Framework

We need to set out and agree on the ground rules for negotiating a State-wide Treaty and Traditional Owner Treaties, including what can be in a Treaty and who may negotiate a Treaty.

These are the key topics that our community engagement conversations and Assembly discussions are mainly focused on now.

We know our Community wants both a State-wide Treaty to cover state-wide topics that affect First Peoples as a collective, as well as Traditional Owner Treaties negotiated by individual Traditional Owner groups to strengthen self-determination at a local level. Treaties will protect gains already secured by Traditional Owners in Victoria.

A State-wide Treaty might see a representative body with the power to pass laws, make decisions and allocate resources on the issues that impact our lives. We could hold the pen and the purse strings on the cultural, social and economic issues that matter to us.

Each Traditional Owner group in Victoria has inherent rights, and their own unique country, language, culture, stories and history. Operating alongside a State-wide Treaty, Traditional Owner Treaties will allow individual groups the flexibility to progress their own specific aspirations and priorities at the local level. Traditional Owner Treaties will also enable Traditional Owner groups to approach the negotiation process at their own pace. Some groups may be ready to begin negotiating immediately, while other groups may need time to organise their communities and prepare for negotiations.

We've agreed on important principles about truth-telling, self-governing, equal footing, centring our culture, ensuring the wisdom of our Elders guides us, drawing authority from our lore – the conversation now turns to fleshing out the details.





Nothing is off the table.

The outcome of conversations with Community so far suggests that the State-wide Treaty could include:

- Decision-making powers such as the ability to pass and administer laws that impact our lives
- The ability to provide advice, guidance and oversight of the Victorian Parliament and public sector
- The creation of reserved seats in the Victorian Parliament that the Aboriginal community could elect Aboriginal people to represent
- The establishment of a permanent representative body, such as the Assembly, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria.

An independent Treaty Authority

We need to establish a Treaty Authority that both our community and the Government can have faith and trust in. The Treaty Authority would be the independent umpire to facilitate the negotiations; helping to resolve any disputes that arise and making sure the negotiations are consistent with the Treaty Negotiation Framework.

The Assembly has given careful consideration to key aspects relating to the Treaty Authority's establishment, including:

- What should the legal structure, membership and possible role of the Treaty Authority be
- How the Treaty Authority will act with cultural integrity
- What other functions or ways of operating would best support Traditional Owners in negotiations with the State.

These important questions will be fleshed out in more detail through community consultations and the ongoing work of the Assembly as the negotiations with the State on the Treaty Negotiation Framework progress.



A Self-Determination Fund

The Self-Determination Fund will be an Aboriginal controlled and managed financial resource that will support and build economic strength for Traditional Owners and First Peoples in Victoria, both through the Treaty process and in the future.

Building on key lessons about the challenges and limitations of negotiating under current frameworks, such as the Aboriginal Heritage Act and Traditional Owner Settlement Act, the Assembly has been progressing discussions on how the Self-Determination Fund can most effectively support Traditional Owners to have ‘equal footing’ with the State in Treaty negotiations. This requires taking a broad and holistic approach to determine what “Treaty readiness” means, as well as ensuring the flexibility to support individual Traditional Owner groups based on their specific needs and circumstances in order to do the work that is necessary to determine their Treaty aspirations and priorities.

In addition to focusing on equal footing for the Treaty process, we will also be working with Community to determine what role the Self-Determination Fund should play in providing a financial resource to empower Traditional Owners and First Peoples in Victoria to build future capacity, wealth, and prosperity. These conversations have important links with the Treaty Negotiation Framework and the decision-making powers that will be the subject of Treaty negotiations.



Truth and Treaties go hand in hand



Creating the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission

To know where we're going, we must know where we've come from.

On the pathway to Treaty, Community identified early on that there can be no Treaty without truth-telling. First Peoples have been calling for a truth-telling process for generations, because how do we move forward with a shared future if we haven't acknowledged and healed the wounds of the past?

Treaties must acknowledge past injustices and, importantly, they must be grounded in culture. For that to happen, our communities must be given opportunities to speak their truth and tell their stories. Truth-telling will provide the evidence of why Treaty is necessary.

Since the brutal colonisation of this land, generations of First Peoples have carried the traumas of our ancestors – forced removal, massacre, slavery, suppression of culture, the loss of land and language.

Successive Government policies and discriminatory practices continue to harm and re-traumatise First Peoples to this day. For non-Aboriginal Victorians, the brutal history of this state is rarely acknowledged in mainstream dialogues. This does a disservice to all Victorians.

To not acknowledge the past prevents us all from moving forward. Our people should not have to carry these heavy truths alone. By sharing our history and our truths, they become everyone's history and everyone's truths.

In June 2020, the Assembly agreed that truth-telling must be a fundamental part of Treaty-making and called on the State to establish a formal truth-telling process.

The Yoo-rrook Justice Commission was formally established in May 2021 in response to this call. Yoo-rrook is a Wemba Wemba/Wamba Wamba word meaning 'truth'. The Commission is the first truth-telling body in Australia and is independent of both Government and the Assembly.

The mandate and structure of the Commission were designed by the Assembly and the Government, based on discussions with Aboriginal communities across Victoria. After an open and transparent nomination process, five Justice Commissioners were appointed, four of which are First Peoples.

Seed of truth: Listening and ensuring cultural safety

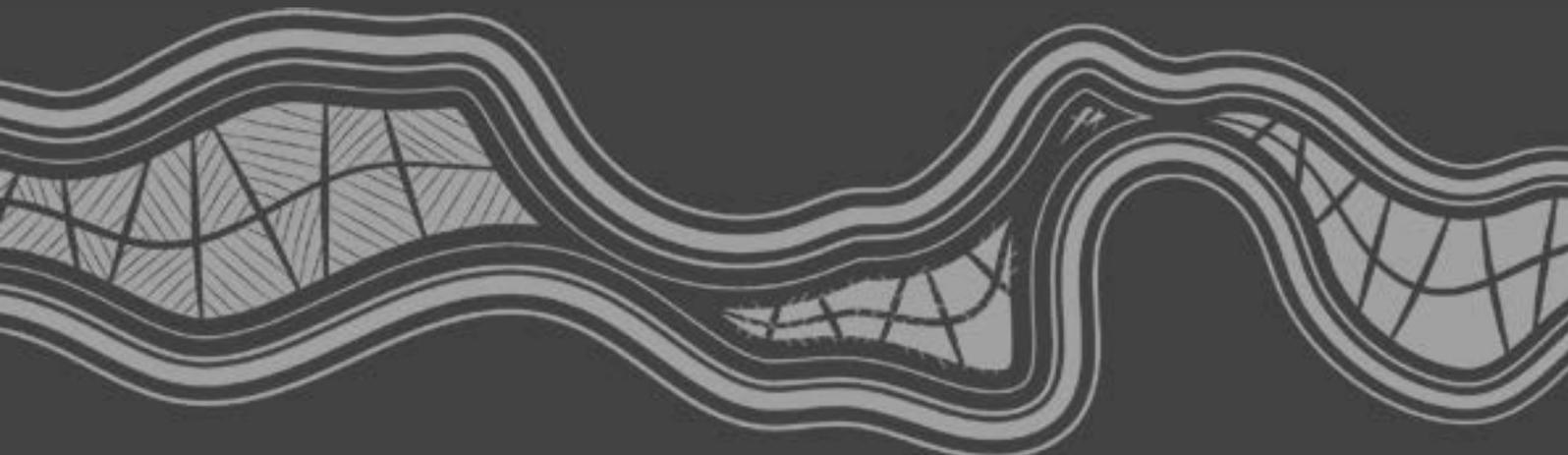
From September 2020 to May 2021, the Assembly conducted meetings and gathered feedback from Aboriginal communities, organisations and individuals across the state, including Elders and Traditional Owners, about how a truth-telling process should be conducted. In June, we compiled this extensive feedback into a report: "Tyerri Yoo-rrook" (Seed of Truth).

The feedback was clear: the truth-telling process must be different from past royal commissions; it must be done in a culturally-safe way that avoids further trauma; it must hold government to account; it must let First Peoples be heard on our own terms; and it must lead to fundamental change.



“Our Land, our language, our lore and our lives have been denied for too long. In order to move forward these must be recognised and respected. This is Yoo-rrook.”

– **AUNTY STEPHANIE CHARLES**
(WEMBA WEMBA ELDER)







The pathway forward

In September 2021, the Assembly handed over the Tyerri Yoo-rrook report to the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission. With it, we hand over the burden of responsibility to the Commission, on behalf of Community. The handover was both symbolic and literal.

A momentous task lies ahead for the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission. Our communities have carried the traumas of their ancestors alone for too long. They have entrusted the Commission to bear witness to their truths and to hear and record their stories with respect and sensitivity.

They expect the Commission's work to lead to meaningful change to our institutions, our laws and our shared understanding of our past.

The Yoo-rrook Justice Commission is continuing to establish its processes and structure. Among its key functions will be to establish an official record of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples in Victoria using First Peoples' stories. It will also make detailed recommendations about practical actions and reforms needed. Treaties can then ensure that change happens.

Through truth-telling, the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission is embarking on a historic journey. All Victorians are invited to participate in the process and learn from the injustices of the past so we can forge a better future together through our shared journey to Treaty.

All voices heard



Additional Pathways to Reserved Seats

Treaty is about ensuring Community has the freedom and power to determine its own future – and that begins now. The Assembly has the right to control its own membership in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its own constitution.

The Assembly's structure features a combination of 'open seats' – in which anyone who is a Traditional Owner in Victoria can be elected to, and 'reserved seats' – which formally recognised Traditional Owner Groups select a representative for.

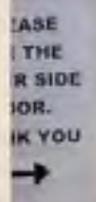
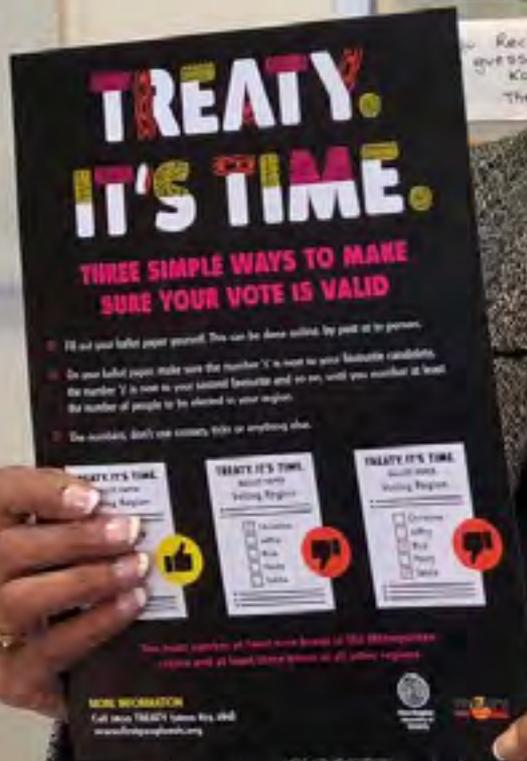
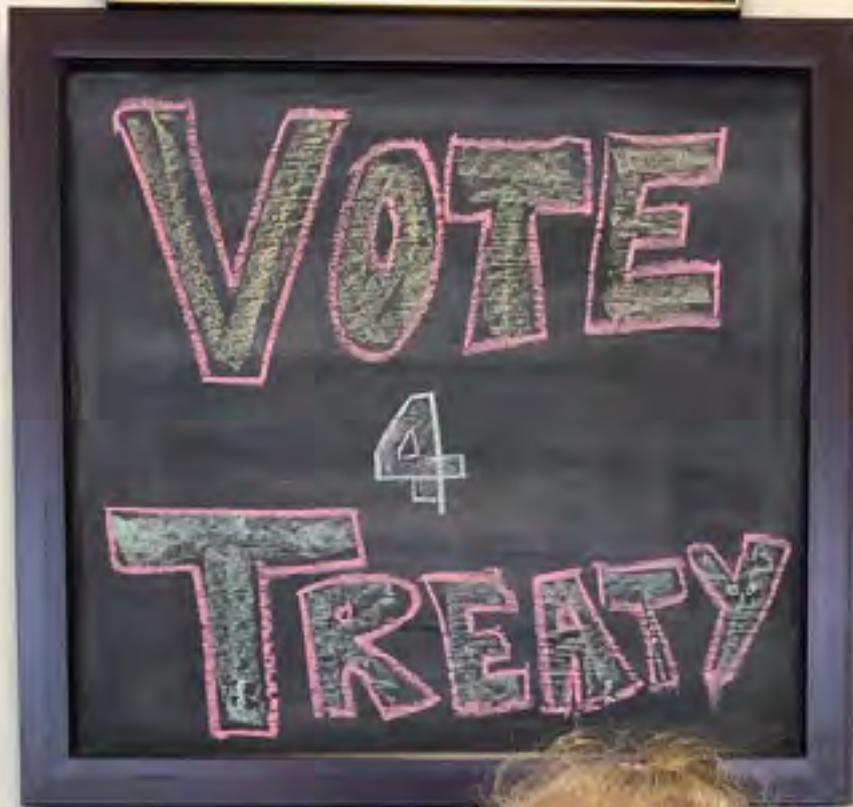
At its Chamber meeting in June 2020, the Assembly decided to explore pathways to additional reserved seats for Traditional Owner Groups that have not completed the Government's protracted process for gaining formal state recognition under legislation.

Following consultations with Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal people living in Victoria, at the April Chamber meeting, Members held a lengthy discussion about the possibilities before assigning the Assembly's Yurpa Committee to develop a model. In January 2021, a model was released for further community consultation and refinement. At the Chamber meeting in October 2021, Members voted to create its own process through which Traditional Owners – of Country that is not currently represented by a formally recognised Traditional Owner Group – will be able to apply to Chamber for the creation of additional reserved seats.

The Assembly has agreed upon criteria – such as size of the group, governance structure, and connection to Country – for additional reserved seats, but is still working to develop the details for the application process.

The path to Treaty might be long and winding, but it needs to be wide enough for all of us.





Our journey so far



We are strong, proud and resilient peoples with the oldest continuous connection to land and culture in the world. Invasion, colonisation and racism have not defeated us. We continue to give life and energy to our rich and ancient cultures and, despite the challenges, are willing to share our wisdom and love for Country.

From the earliest days of the European invasion of our nations, our ancestors and Elders have led the fight for our rights.

Despite the loss of life, land and language - despite the attempted erasure of our culture – our sovereignty was never ceded and the struggle never relinquished.

At the Assembly, as we work hard to create a better future for our people, we're acutely aware that all that we do is following, and building on, the courageous struggles of those who came before us.

We're building on the legacy of their activism. We're standing on their shoulders.

Our people endured and survived massacres, disease, segregation, slavery, incarceration, the theft of their children and their lands. If it weren't for the strength of our ancestors, we would not be here today, ready to right those wrongs and take back control of our future."

The impacts of the trauma inflicted on us by colonisation are carried on in our people today. Intergenerational trauma brings childhood mortality, educational deficits, unemployment, poverty and reduced life expectancy.

This fuels, and is fuelled by, institutional racism that permeates all levels of our society. However, those disadvantages are not the only threads to our story.

Those disadvantages do not define us. It is our resilience, our strength and our capability which are the main chapters in our story – one that we are far from finished writing.

We've shown that when given the chance to manage our own affairs - to make our own decisions about our lives and our communities - we thrive.

Whether it's the provision of health services, education or managing the bush, the culture of our ancestors – our living culture – runs strongly through our veins and the benefits of our self-determination to the whole community soon become obvious.

Treaty is our chance to start dismantling systemic racism, to put on the table everything we want, and to come together with respect to find ways to make Victoria a fairer place for everyone.

The timeline opposite sets out the journey so far and the Assembly's key achievements and progress towards establishing the framework for Treaty.

Timeline

May 2016

Aboriginal people called for Treaty in a state-wide self-determination forum in Melbourne. The State agreed to explore Treaty in Victoria.

July 2016

The Aboriginal Treaty Working Group was set up to consult with Community on the design for an Aboriginal representative body to progress the Treaty process.

July 2016 – December 2017

Extensive consultation, including convening an Aboriginal Community Assembly of 31 community members selected through an open process. The Community Assembly made detailed recommendations to the Treaty Working Group on the design of the Aboriginal representative body.

December 2017

The Office of the Victorian Treaty Advancement Commission was established. Following an open recruitment process Jill Gallagher AO was appointed to the Office of the Victorian Treaty Advancement Commission and commenced in the role in January 2018.

March 2018

The Aboriginal Treaty Working Group presented its final report on the design of the Aboriginal representative body – the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria.

July 2020

State agreed to work towards establishing a truth and justice process.

June 2020

The Assembly decided to explore pathways to additional reserved seats at the Assembly; decided to have both a State-wide Treaty and Traditional Owner Treaties; and The Assembly called on State to work towards establishing a truth and justice process.

March 2020

State announced it will establish a Stolen Generations Redress Scheme.

December 2019

Assembly was established and held its inaugural meeting at Parliament House. Assembly calls on the State to establish a Stolen Generations Redress Scheme.

September – October 2019

Elections for the Assembly were held by the Victorian Treaty Advancement Commission

June 2018

The Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 was passed. It commenced in August 2018.

March 2018 - September 2019

The Victorian Treaty Advancement Commission held ongoing consultations with the community

December 2020

Assembly decided in-principle that the Self-Determination Fund will be established as a trust; and everything is on the table for Treaty negotiations.

January 2021

Interim dispute resolution, the first Treaty element required under the Act was finalised with the State. Protocols that set standards for behaviour in negotiations were also agreed.

March 2021

Assembly and State announced agreement to establish Australia's first truth and justice commission - the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission. An open expression of interest for Commissioners was launched.

May 2021

Yoo-rrook Justice Commissioners announced and Letters Patent released, formally establishing the Commission. Established Interim Elders' Voice for 3 months to finalise design of permanent Elders' Voice.

Current priorities

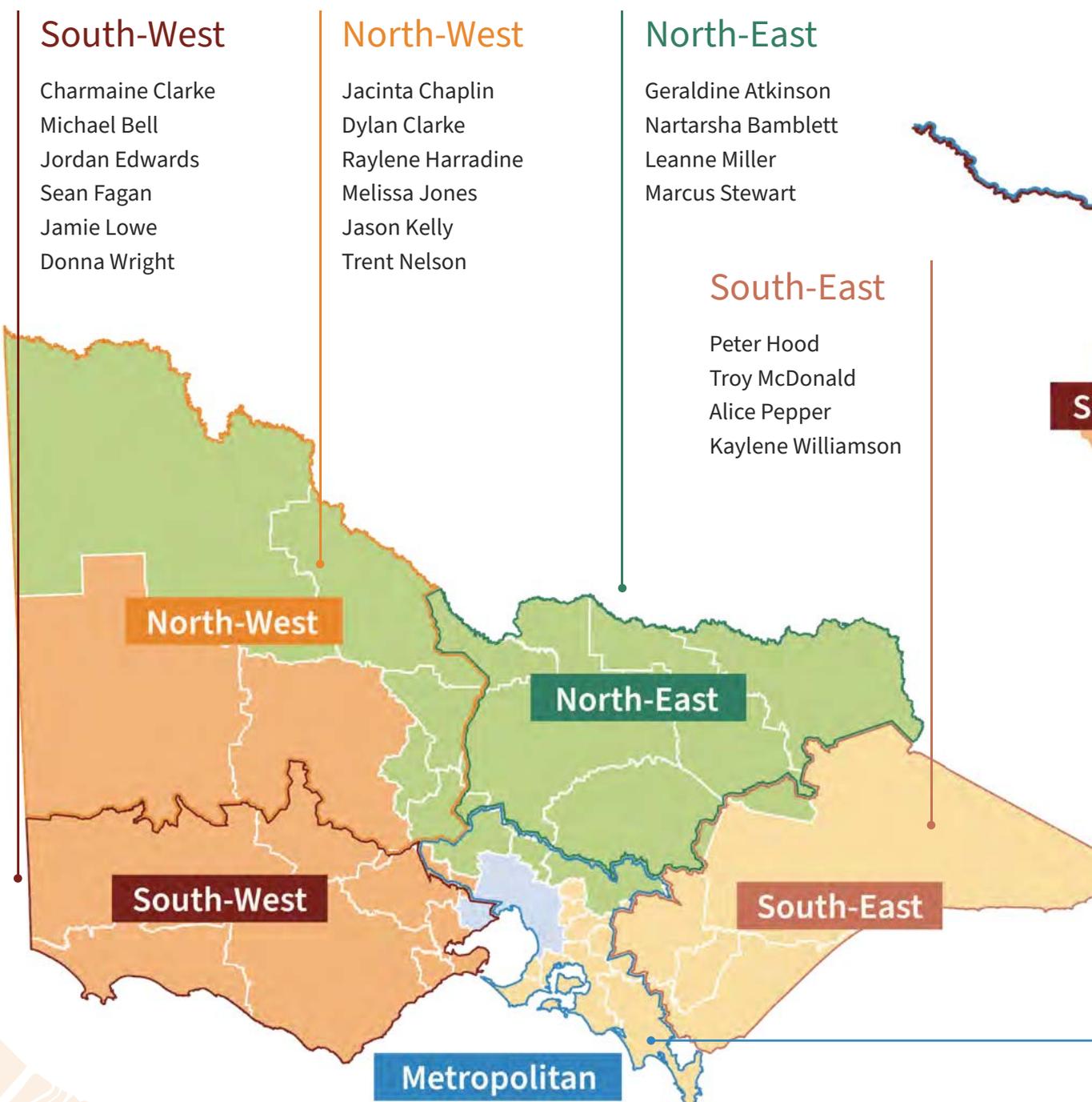
- a) Claiming self-determination and political power through a State-wide Treaty and Traditional Owner Treaties
- b) Strengthening cultural authority and guidance through the Elders' Voice and additional reserved seats

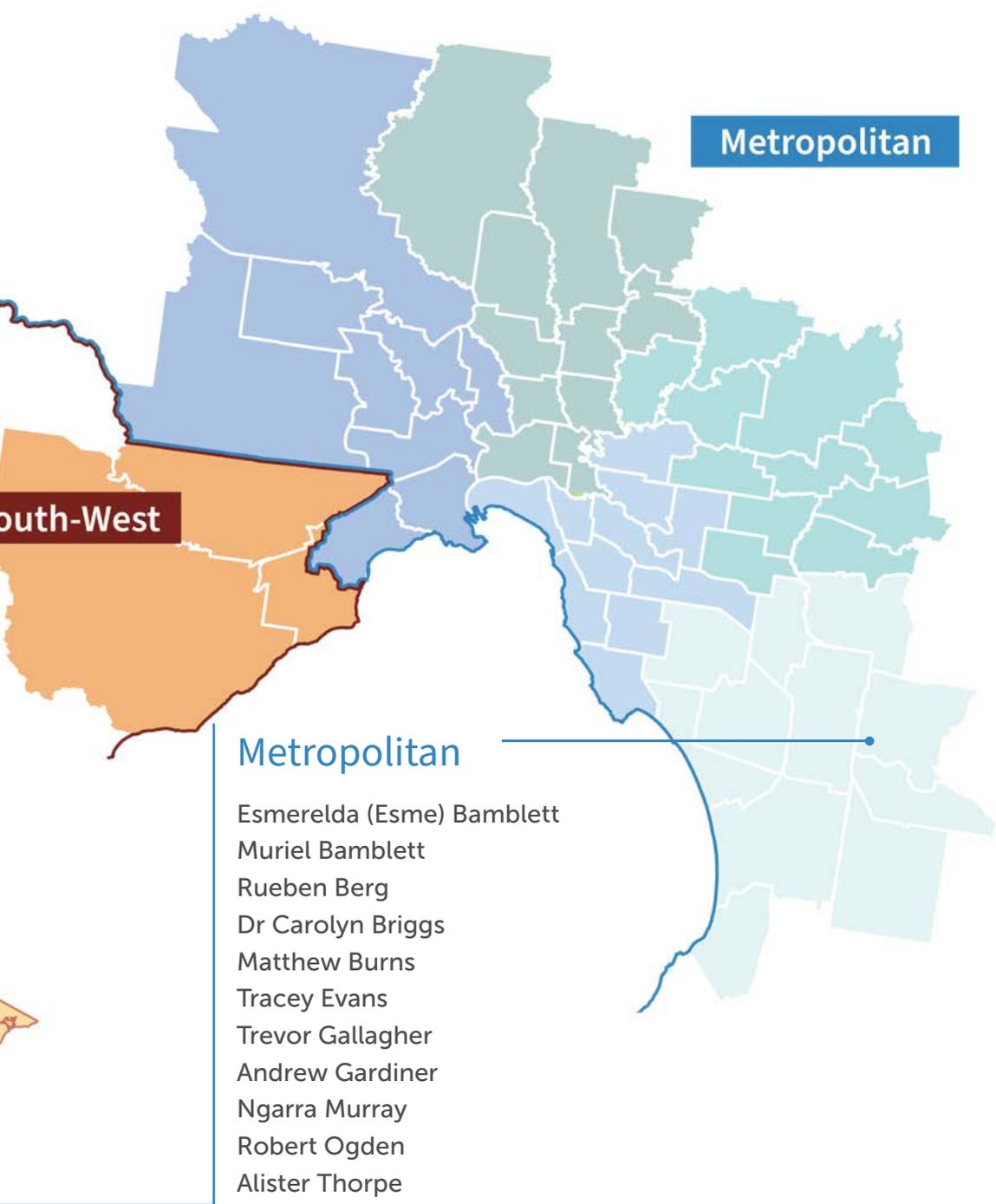
First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria



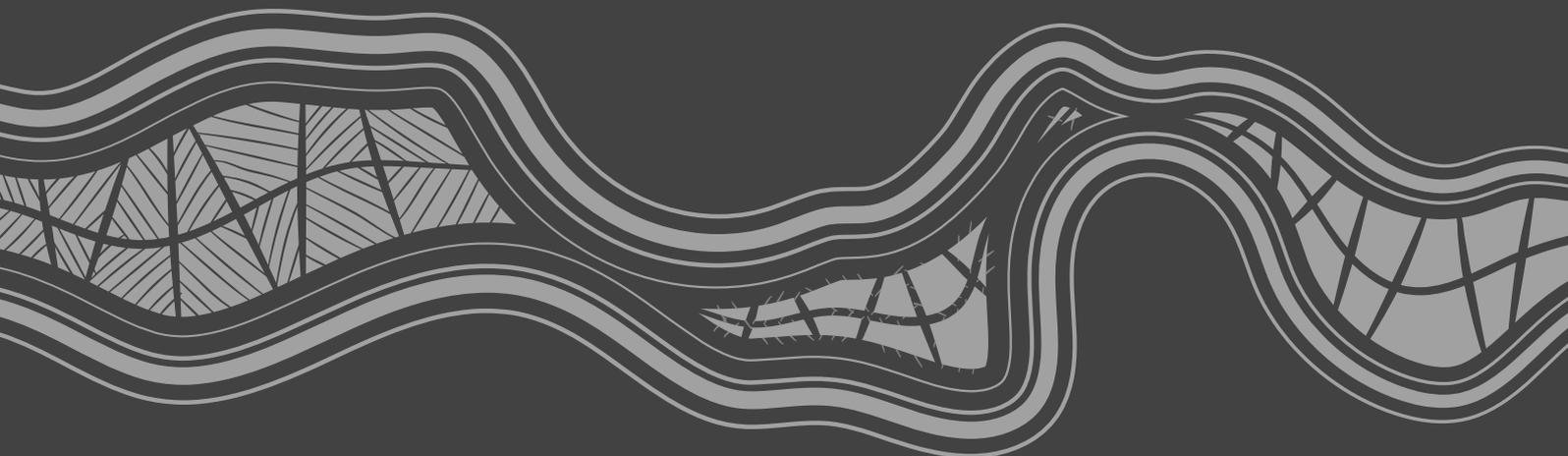
Regional Members

The following pages provide an introduction to the 31 Assembly Members. Full profiles of each Member are available on the Assembly webpage at: firstpeoplesvic.org/about/the-assembly/





Meet the Members



Alister Thorpe

Member for the
Metropolitan region



“I acknowledge all our past strong Aboriginal leaders whose commitment provided this generation with this opportunity.”

Metropolitan region Member Alister Thorpe is aware of the legacy of his ancestors.

“My role in the Assembly is a continuation of their work,” he suggests. “The opportunity for our nations to shape the way treaties are negotiated is an important step. I want to make sure we do it right recognising the rights of all our nations.”

Mr Thorpe is also aware of the importance of the Assembly’s work.

“Our people have endlessly struggled for our rights,” he says. “We have been political activists and protesters.

“The First Peoples’ Assembly is the culmination of years of tireless campaigning for sovereignty, self-determination, and recognition.”

It is reasons like those that Mr Thorpe nominated to stand in the Assembly election.

“I wanted to contribute to a framework that gives all First Nations the opportunity to negotiate a Treaty on their own terms,” he says. “Treaties must sustain our identity, protect cultural heritage, strengthen connection to country, and fulfill the aspirations of our nations.”

Your people and Country

Gunai man through my father, Yorta Yorta and Wurundjeri/Woi Wurrung through my Mother and Gunditjmarra through my Grandmother.

The magnificent waterscapes are my favourite places on Country. The beautiful beaches and powerful ocean on Gunai and Gunditjmarra land. The great Dhungala and Birrarung rivers on Yorta Yorta and Wurundjeri country.

Mr Thorpe says the Assembly has achieved much in its first term so far, but emphasises there’s still a lot of work ahead.

“We have made some significant decisions, including the development of the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission truth-telling process, Stolen Generations reparations, and the development of a model to admit additional Traditional Owner groups to the Assembly,” he explains.

To the broader community, he has a simple message, and it is a positive one.

“We must create a pathway to full representation. An equal voice. A stronger collective voice,” he says.

“The outcomes of Treaties will flow out beyond the Aboriginal community and benefit everyone in the broader community. Treaties will provide opportunities for all of us to reimagine our future.”

Andrew Gardiner

Reserved seat holder representing Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation in the Metropolitan region



For Uncle Andrew Gardiner, the Treaty process must ensure nobody is left behind.

“At the end of the day, we’ve all worked through things to get a positive platform, but it’s our responsibility to get that moving and to communicate all these things to communities and get that feedback and start pushing that forward as well,” he explains. “We can’t do that on our own and it’s a collective thing and we shouldn’t be leaving anybody behind and one of the strong conversations during the first 12 months was that not all Traditional Owners were represented and they should be included so how do we go about doing that?”

“How do we engage and ensure those representatives can be facilitated? I think there’s a process there now we’re undertaking to try and get that in.” He’s referring to the Assembly’s consideration of alternative pathways to recognition that Traditional Owner groups not already represented on the Assembly might be able to take to be recognised with a seat.

It’s just one of the tasks the Assembly has been working on to ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria can be part of the Treaty process.

Uncle Andrew, who, along with Aunty Charmaine Clarke, is also Co-Chair of the Interim Elders’ Voice, says the Assembly is now in a period of consolidation and achievement.

“We need to make sure the Framework is all in place so that it can be signed off before the next election hopefully,” he suggests.

He says the government has invited Aboriginal people in Victoria to use their voice to say what they want and need in Treaty and the Community must respond.

Your people and Country

Wurundjeri Clans of the Woi-Wurrung people.

Our traditional lands are from the Werribee River in the west to the Great Dividing Range in the north to Mount Baw Baw in the east and down to Mordialloc Creek in the south, so pretty much metropolitan Melbourne and greater. We span six different clan groups, of which there’s only one descendant line left and so it’s important to continue to expand our reach, our population and our community

“The Government has already said they’re prepared to listen so we need to tell them,” he says. “Let them know exactly where our position is and how we can best negotiate a positive outcome for everybody.”

“Peace, unity, come up with ideas, participate. Give us the tools, the information to drive what’s necessary to create Treaty that we can all negotiate for. If we don’t have anything and we don’t have anything in place, we don’t have any ideas. We’re not going to be able to negotiate anything, we’re going to be on the back foot. We need to be on the front foot.”

Aunty Charmaine Clarke

Member for the
South-West region



South-West Member Charmaine Clarke's first Assembly Chamber was on April 1 this year

Aunty Charmaine replaced Sissy Austin as one of the South-West region's elected representatives after Ms Austin's resignation. Ms Austin's place as a Member on the inaugural Assembly is written into history and her contribution will always be remembered.

Aunty Charmaine is a proud Gunditjmara woman with strong ties to her region. She was elected after a recount of votes in the 2019 election.

A member of the Stolen Generations, she grew up in Ballarat orphanages along with her five siblings.

At the age of 18, with help from the Ballarat Aboriginal community she became the first Aboriginal Site Officer for the South-West.

She went about the work of recording and protecting cultural heritage sites, mentored by many Elders throughout the state and is now a lecturer at Federation University in the Graduate Certificate in Community Services, teaching Aboriginal students from around Victoria, and also contributes to our understanding of Aboriginal Family Violence as a researcher in the South-West.

“My biggest influence, however, is my mother (Eliza Saunders), who I spent many hours walking Country with and listening to her speak of our history, our culture and our responsibilities,” Aunty Charmaine says.

Your people and Country

Gunditjmara Nation, Peek Whurrong and Cart Gundit Clans

The great stony rises of the South-West, which meet the Great Southern Ocean and the beautiful inland rivers and the World Heritage-listed Budj Bim cultural landscape.

As a young woman I had the opportunity to walk on my country and record our cultural sites. It was for me a home coming that was years overdue. I was taken from my people as a child and raised off my country in a world that was not kind. So my Country is special to me as she is my heart, my healing and my pride. I love the smell of the sea and bush and I tear up with pride when I see the stony rises. She reminds me of my Mother, My Father, my Grandparents and my siblings and others who are no longer with us. My Country is identity and home.

“It was that responsibility I took with me when I called for a Treaty in my campaign for the Senate in 1998.

“I have worked for over 32 years in many areas, including State and Federal cultural heritage protection, environmental and social policy development, justice, mental health and family violence.”

As a Co-Chair of the Interim Elders' Voice with Uncle Andrew Gardiner, Aunty Charmaine has played a key role helping to develop the permanent Elders' Voice.

That work will help ensure the Assembly has the cultural guidance it will need to go forward with its important tasks.

“I am honoured to be an Assembly representative for the South-West and I look forward to continuing the work of building a strong Treaty framework, so that communities can be empowered to implement their own Treaty negotiations at the grass roots level.”

Aunty Esmerelda (Esme) Bamblett

Member for the Metropolitan region

For almost two centuries now, the Aboriginal people of the collective lands now known as Victoria have been treated as foreigners on their own Country, but Aunty Esme says Treaty can help redress that imbalance.

“I believe in Treaty because it goes somewhere towards returning to the rightful owners of Country the rights that have been denied us since colonisation,” Aunt says. “My ancestors would be so pleased that we finally have recognition of our rights as Traditional Owners and I want to do as much as I can to make the most of this opportunity.”

Aunty Esme says the work she and other Members are putting into the Treaty process now is more about the future than it is about the present.

“I want to look forward seven generations and know that I have contributed to a time when my descendants have rights that my ancestors were denied,” she explains. “This is a time when our culture can be given the recognition it deserves in this State.”

Although Aunty Esme acknowledges the Assembly’s first term has been challenging, given the COVID-19 lockdowns, she says the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission is proof the work is still being done.



Your people and Country

Moitheriban, Nira-Balluk, and Narrungdera

Bangerang, Taungurung and Wiradjuri (NSW)

My people are river people. The Murray River flows through the Bangerang country, as does the Goulburn River. Taungurung have the Goulburn, Ovens and Campaspe rivers. The Wiradjuri people have three rivers flowing through their country, the Wambool (Macquarie), the Calare (Lachlan) and the Murrumbidgee. The rivers are centrepieces in my Country because they have provided us with fresh water for life, amazing water animals for food and scenic views that give us peace, not to mention the many hours of swimming. I love the River Red Gums that flourish along the Murray River and in the Barmah forest. Cummeragunga Mission continues to be home for me, as my ancestors are buried in the cemetery there, as does the Sandhills in Narranderra.

“It has been a difficult year because of Covid 19 and the lockdowns, however these challenges have not interrupted our work as we have achieved much during this time,” she says.

“The Yoo-rrook Justice Commission is a great achievement that will assist the Assembly in our future negotiations with the State because it will build on the evidence of what has occurred historically to our people and reparation for the suffering of so many.”

In reflection, Aunty Esme again looks to the future.

“The Treaty will reinforce our status as Traditional Owners of our Country, it will give us a voice at the table and resources for us to assist our community members in need of support to reach their destiny,” she says. “We want to maintain our culture, strengthen the identity of our children, raise the profile of our culture, and ensure that we have a say over our countries.”

Jacinta Chaplin

Member for the
North-West region



For Jacinta Chaplin, the Treaty process is a moment in time that will define our future.

“The past defined where we are now. What we do next will define what we become,” she says.

Her message to non-Aboriginal people living in the state is to embrace the Treaty process and to seek out the truth of the lived experiences of the Aboriginal Community as well as the mainstream version of history.

“We are all living in this modern world together. Let’s not forget how we got here, show respect to the past and acknowledge each other’s history,” she says.

“So much has been taken out of our control, the damage has been done. Now we are responsible for what is passed on to the next leaders.

Ms Chaplin says she stood for the Assembly because she believes in its work of advancing the Treaty process, which will help protect Aboriginal culture.

“I believe in the aspiration of the Assembly and I am passionate about Community having voices,” she says.

“We can create unity amongst ourselves. We as a people are the only ones that can pass on our customs and practices and demand the government respect our ways as we are still here.”

Your people and Country:

Wadi Wadi / Wamba Wamba

My Grandfather’s country is Wamba Wamba/ Yorta Yorta and my Grandmother’s country is Wadi Wadi/Mutti Mutti. I live on my Grandmother’s country.

She says the Assembly has made positive progress in the short time since it was elected.

“I believe we have some solid structures in place and we will see the effects starting to roll out,” she explains. “I look forward to the Community working together.”

Ms Chaplin says the Treaty process is an opportunity to help protect the traditions and customs of Aboriginal people after a troubled existence since colonisation.

“This is our time to keep our culture strong and to lead the ways to continue our practices and to support the new leaders to care for Country and keep our traditions alive into the future.”

Jason Kelly

Member for the
North-West region



Jason Kelly says he was unsure of standing as a candidate for the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria until something made it clear to him that he should.

"Whilst I was privately considering the possibility of standing for Assembly it was my Wamba Wamba Elders who requested I do so," he says. "Being requested to do so by one's Elders is an honour in itself."

Mr Kelly says his work as an Assembly Member is always guided by his culture.

"My first day as an Assembly Member saw me standing in Lore and going to Corranderk, with the blessing of Wurundjeri Elders, to pay respects to Barrack's grave and all others who rest there," he says.

"It was more important for myself to do this rather than attend Assembly at the Victorian Parliament. Cultural protocols and Lore will always come first as we navigate through this process of establishing the Framework from which Treaty will be negotiated."

Mr Kelly is particularly pleased about the role he played in putting the motion that pre-empted the Assembly's successful lobbying of the Government for the creation of a Truth-Telling commission, an important step forward on the journey to Treaty.

"Truth-Telling is not a new demand from our people, but I am proud to be the person who campaigned and presented the resolution to the Assembly Chamber," he says.

Your people and Country:

Mutthi Mutthi / Wamba Wamba

South-West New South Wales crossing
over into North-West Victoria

Willandra Lakes World Heritage, Mungo, the home of Mungo Man and Mungo Lady, who prove to the world we are this planet's oldest continuous living culture. Although Mungo is known worldwide, all my Mutthi Mutthi/Wamba Wamba country is equally as important and special for us, as all our country is for the First Nations people of this continent.

Mr Kelly says the substance of Treaty has many aspects to it.

"For me, Treaty isn't about the document or even the word Treaty. It is about ensuring our Cultural and Economic Rights, our right to co-exist and ensuring Truth-Telling. My campaign slogan was Treaty MUST PAY THE RENT and I still believe that self-determination can only come from the pay the rent model," he explains.

He's looking forward to engaging with Elders and rural communities through public gatherings again.

"Treaty has given you an opportunity for peace and justice, you can help create a better future for us all."

Mr Kelly is also urging the Aboriginal Community to back themselves to find a path to a better place.

"You don't have to trust the process, trust the mob," he says. "Stand up together, stand in Lore to ensure Treaty delivers Justice. The power is with mob not Assembly."

Kaylene Williamson

Member for the
South-East region



Kaylene Williamson was looking for a way to give back to her family when she moved back on Country in 2019. She didn't realise it at the time, but that calling would insert her into one of the most significant historical developments in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations since these lands were colonised.

"I wanted to give back to my community, as an educated woman with government experience, I wanted to use these skills to help my Community," she explains.

"I moved back on Country at the same time Treaty nominations came out and I thought this timing was meant to be, this is how I can give back."

Her place as an inaugural Member of the Assembly will now be etched in history, but for Ms Williamson, her main motivation is being able to "share her community's voice".

That's been greatly tested during the Assembly's first term though, with COVID restrictions severely limiting all Members' ability to move among their communities.

"COVID has restricted my ability to communicate with my Community," Ms Williamson says. "It's also been a steep learning curve getting to learn what is a Treaty and what we could possibly make it into."

Your people and Country:

Gunai Kurnai

Brayakooloong

The way it makes me feel. It's my home, it's where my family live. It's a part of me.

"On a personal note though it has also been wonderful to spend so much time with my two little girls and watch them grow and learn during remote learning. Don't get me wrong, it was also very hard to hold a full-time job, work on Treaty, school my children and be a mum and a wife."

Although the Assembly shifted its consultations online during the COVID restrictions, Ms Williamson says there's a need for more work to be done out among the Community over the next 12 months.

And her message back to the Community is to urge them to stay positive.

"Stay strong, we don't always see change straight away, it can take time, but we will get there together," she says. "Reach out and ask me questions. I won't always have an answer, but I will have an ear to listen."

Ms Williamson sees this Treaty process leading to a brighter future for all if Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people can work together.

"We are all working towards a better Australia" she says. "If we come together, we will make great changes."

Leanne Miller

Member for the
North-East region



Leanne says her experience so far as an elected Member of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria has been like nothing else she's experienced.

"It has been a role that you curate as you go into your term of office, we had a lot of external environmental impacts featuring heavily on what would be peaks and troughs in the Assembly's work program with a challenging community engagement program in 2020 and 2021," she says.

With national and international experiences to draw on, Leanne stood for the Assembly because she believed she could make a contribution.

"My skill set and experiences include at state, national and international levels, from lobbying policy and research. Adding in key networks, are the perfect mix to support our community conversations to build a Treaty Negotiation Framework," Leanne explained.

In the remainder of the Assembly's first term, Leanne would like to see more of our communities having input or a say when the Assembly calls for Community views. This assists with design inputs of a Treaty Negotiation Framework.

Your people and Country:

Dhulanyagan Ulupna

Yorta Yorta

Wetlands, redgum forest, fishing, wildlife along our Dhungala (Murray) River.

"This enables Assembly members to be grounded as we increase awareness and support around what elements are involved in a Treaty Negotiation Framework and an understanding of what roles local Treaties can play within a framework," she explains.

"It would be helpful to have a level of engagement where constituents can see how their views are being responded to by the Assembly.

"If you cannot make some of the advertised Assembly yarns join the email list to be up to date. If you do not have time to put your thoughts down on some topics give the local engagement project officer a call who may be able to assist."

Leanne stood for election on the Assembly because she felt the Treaty Negotiation Framework process needed strong women's voices to help carry forward the vision of our ancestors. She also maintains that a collective effort is needed from all Victorians to ensure we build a positive future together.

Marcus Stewart

Assembly Co-Chair and reserved seat holder representing Taungurung Land and Waters Council in the North-East region



Co-Chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, Marcus Stewart, is inspired.

“With all the challenges we’ve faced since the election of the Assembly, including the devastating bushfires and a global pandemic, it is inspiring to see what we, our communities and nations have achieved so far,” he says.

Mr Stewart knew when he stood for the Assembly that there’d be challenges, and even more so when he accepted the Co-Chair’s role alongside Aunty Geraldine Atkinson. That was to be expected, but it’s unlikely anyone could have predicted the circumstances under which the Assembly’s first term would play out.

He says, however, the solidarity and commitment of the Assembly Members has made it possible to continue moving forward despite the challenges.

“It’s been tough, but extremely rewarding,” he says. “It’s an absolute honour and privilege to work with my other 30 elected leaders.

“I decided to stand for the Assembly to drive system and structural reform, to help improve the lives of our people and because I believe in democracy and the power in unity and we’re doing that.”

Your people and Country:

Nira illim bulluk man of the Taungurung Nation

Taungurung Country

Its amazing diversity, it really is quite special.

Given the significant risks associated with COVID-19, the Assembly moved all its work online, forced to abandon the traditional Aboriginal ways of meeting face-to-face.

“We experienced a few bumps in the road, but we were still able to achieve quite a lot given those circumstances,” he says.

Mr Stewart says the coming 12 months will be another big year for the Assembly and the Aboriginal people it represents.

“We have signed off on the dispute resolution process and now we can jump into the big-ticket items and start to explore with our mob what life could look like with Treaties,” he explains.

“We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity in front of us to improve the lives of our people, and we need Community to drive this change with us.”

The Co-Chair also welcomes support from the general public, saying the experience can be shared.

“Stand with us and walk with us on our journey towards Treaty.”

Ngarra Murray

Member for the
Metropolitan region



Ngarra Murray sees the Treaty process as an opportunity to reset relationships.

“Treaties are a foundation for renewed relationships and will facilitate a new era of interactions with First Nations Peoples and the State,” she predicts.

“We are disentangling a complex system. Systemic power imbalances, imposed structures, policies, laws and decisions that have been based on a colonial paternalistic approach.

“The power must be in the hands of our First Nations when it comes to any future negotiations. It is critical that any relationship we enter into is an ethical one, and is one under which the State matures in its understanding of power and privilege to truly honour any treaty.”

Ms Murray also says Traditional Owners must take ownership of the process.

“The Assembly has a powerful role to play in leading change and that change will come from mobilised grassroots and collective action within our nations and clans. We can no longer afford not to work together,” she says.

Your people and Country:

Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta,
Dja Dja Wurrung and Dhudhuroa

I have a long-established connection to my homelands through unbroken bloodlines. I honour that lineage and our family’s strong foundation through our connection to Country and ancestors - blood, spirit and place.

Country is home.

“We need more of our people to register to vote for the next Assembly election. It is the most powerful tool we have and we must use it. Any election is determined by the people who show up.”

As have all Members, Ms Murray says it has been difficult not being able to meet Community members in person due to COVID-19 restrictions, but that the Assembly’s work has been able to continue.

“It’s been challenging, but despite COVID-19, we have progressed our work and contributed, as a collective, to the fundamental steps towards a Treaty Negotiation Framework.”

Ms Murray says she stood for the Assembly to ensure people are fully informed on the Treaty process and understand the steps being taken towards Treaties for Victoria.

“We are working to establish the foundations necessary to support future treaty negotiations, but while negotiating and establishing these structures, it is crucial that the Assembly is properly mandated, accountable, and working with, and for, Traditional Owners and their communities.”

Raylene Harradine

Member for the
North-West region

“You get to a point in your life where you want to make a difference and I see myself being a part of the systemic change for Australia and for Victoria,” says Raylene Harradine about putting her hand up to stand for the First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria.

“With my level of experience working in health, education, justice, government, community and business, I know that my contribution and knowledge as an Aboriginal woman growing up in Community allows me to influence positive reforms, not just for my mob, but to government and younger generations coming through.”

Ms Harradine says every Member on the Assembly brings a different skillset to the journey, which has helped work to continue despite the COVID-19 pandemic interfering with face-to-face engagement between Members and their constituents.

“It has been challenging, but very rewarding, in terms of the work we are doing,” she explains.

“If I was to sum up the term so far, I’d say it has been challenging, a major learning curve, and it has also enriched me in so many ways, professionally and personally.”

Over the next 12 months, Ms Harradine says one of the major goals of the Assembly should be continued progress on the creation of the rule book by which Treaties will be negotiated.

Your people and Country:

Latje Latje, Wotjobaluk, Dja Dja Wurrung

The Dja Dja Wurrung Country follows the Loddon and Avoca Rivers in the Bendigo region, Latje Latje Country is the Murray River lands around Mildura and Wotjobaluk is around and north of Horsham. To summarise, some of the most beautiful country around.

For me, I have grown up on Country and am very fortunate to continue to live and work in parts of my homeland, which affords me the understanding of what the issues and positives are in our community. Country is about respecting and appreciating the landscape and diversity. I often ponder the days of my ancestors in relation to how they survived the harshness of this land and their cultural knowledge to care for Country, whilst only taking what they needed. I have had the honour of growing up on Country with my family, including my uncle and grandmother as key people in my life.

“I hope for the framework, that we have been tasked with, to be completed in the next 12 months. It would be fantastic to have more influence on not just the Victorian Government, but also on the Australian Government and it would be ideal to watch other jurisdictions go down the same path we are going down.”

Ms Harradine believes the current Treaty process is a real opportunity for progress that will leave lasting benefits for the generations that follow and wants the Community to give it a chance to succeed.

“Please be open to exploring opportunities for our future generations and be open to making changes for the advancement of our community,” she says.

Rueben Berg

Member for the
Metropolitan region



When COVID-19 arrived it forced everyone to reconsider their priorities and, if they could, to change the way they worked.

One of the Assembly's Members to quickly embrace the change was Rueben Berg, who, in addition to Assembly-organised events, took to social media to engage his constituents as best he could.

"It's been a whirlwind," he explains. "We have been able to make some important decisions, but there is still a lot of work to do.

"The main focus has been to achieve some significant progress on the Treaty Negotiation Framework in terms of understanding the Community's views, consolidating the Assembly's views, and starting negotiations with the State on their views."

"Get involved. We need to hear what your thoughts are on all Treaty-related matters."

The Framework, or the ground rules for negotiations will set out what a Treaty can include and who can negotiate it.

"We also need to yarn about the details that Community would like to see. What are the structural reforms that will improve the next generations' lives? Do we want dedicated seats in the Victorian Parliament that Aboriginal people vote for, do we want our own Parliament for our people? Maybe we want both. Nothing is off the table, so let's go for it."

Your people and Country:

Gunditjmara

Framlingham

Thangang Poonart (Hopkins Falls) is an amazing place.

Mr Berg says he's determined that the Treaty process will see real improvements for Aboriginal people and he wants his skills and experience to help make that happen.

"I wanted to bring my knowledge and understanding of how government works to make sure that our communities can get the best possible outcomes from the Treaty process," he explained.

For that to happen though, he says Victoria's Aboriginal community must also play its part.

"Get involved. We need to hear what your thoughts are on all Treaty-related matters. Discuss things with your own family and community and talk to your local Assembly representative," he says.

And of the broader general public?

"Think about what you want Treaty to achieve and talk to your state government representative to make sure they know you support Treaty."

Trevor Gallagher

Member for the
Metropolitan region



Just as the work of Trevor Gallagher's Gunditjmara ancestors at Budj Bim has stood the test of time, he wanted to stand for the Assembly to also play a key part in his people's history.

Over a period of at least six-and-a-half-thousand years, the Gunditjmara constructed channels, weirs and dams to manage water flows to trap, store and harvest kooyang or short-finned eels at Budj Bim, the World Heritage Site.

That foresight and hard work brought long-lasting benefits for the Gunditjmara and Mr Gallagher believes the Assembly's work can also bring positive change for generations to come.

“The Assembly has endured and the amount of work that has been completed has been nothing short of remarkable...”

“I decided to run as a candidate for the Treaty elections and was lucky enough to be elected by the people, which is a beautiful feeling, and I wanted to be part of history,” he recalls.

He hopes that during the remainder of the Assembly's first term, more progress will be achieved for Aboriginal people in Victoria through negotiations with the government over the Treaty Negotiation Framework – the ground rules for negotiating a state-wide Treaty that will cover state-wide issues, and will also enable Traditional Owners to negotiate local Treaties for their areas.

Your people and Country:

Gunditjmara

Budj Bim in the South-West
of the state

Of its unique geographical location with its volcanic rock, which the Gunditjmara manipulated to develop an eeling industry.

In the future, Mr Gallagher would like to see Aboriginal people experiencing the benefits of life-changing agreements, “whether it be something in education, with more scholarships offered to all kids in school, or something for the Stolen Generations – not much to ask”.

He says the Assembly has done an amazing job to achieve what it has so far, given the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The Assembly has endured and the amount of work that has been completed has been nothing short of remarkable,” Mr Gallagher states.

He has two other simple messages.

To the Aboriginal community he says, “Stay true to the Treaty cause” and to the non-Aboriginal community, “We need you and we are all in this together”.

Troy McDonald

Reserved seat holder representing Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation in the South-East region

Troy McDonald has been working across Victorian Aboriginal Affairs for 30 years, and now he's calling on all that vast experience as a board member for the Assembly.

Currently, and for the past two years, Mr McDonald has been Chairperson of the Gunai Kurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, a Traditional Owner nation with settlement over large parts of Gippsland. Among the organisation's roles have been improving environmental outcomes by participating in a co-design process to weave cultural burning into the state-wide fire mitigation strategy and working to secure a water entitlement from the state.

Then there is his past experience with the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning helping to shape Victoria's water reform policy agenda to recognise and manage Aboriginal values.

In 2012 he completed studies with Flinders University in public sector management and is currently completing an MBA with Federation University Australia.

Now, as GLAWAC's reserved seat holder, Mr McDonald is helping the Assembly establish the architecture for a Treaty between the First Nations people and the Victorian Government. Along with fellow Assembly Member Melissa Jones, he Co-Chaired the committee that did the groundwork to establish the Yoo-rook Justice Commission.

He's been around long enough to understand skepticism of the Treaty process from some in the Aboriginal Community, but urges them to have confidence that, where other initiatives might have failed, Treaty will bring positive reforms.

"The message I want to give to them is stick with us," he says. "This is ground-breaking, innovative, nation-building work and we're all very mindful about the presence the First Peoples' Assembly has across Victoria and across

Your people and Country:

Gunaikurnai. It's a nation of people that includes five clan groups.

There's lots of great, unique things about our Country. I could start from the hills out past (Mount) Baw Baw, across the Great Divide (Dividing Range). The interface with the alpine country there and right down to I guess the Ramsar Wetlands down on the Gippsland Lakes, which is probably one of my favourite areas. I also love visiting some of the temperate and sub-tropical forests beyond Traralgon there. So there's three different blends of environment and that's what I like about the country, the diversity and it changes so quickly once you're in it.

the nation, and I'm doing my best to represent my people in a strong, authentic way in terms of the Treaty conversations."

Mr McDonald says he's taken some great positives out of the Assembly's first term so far and is upbeat about what will be achieved over the next 12 months.

"I think we'd like to see us have a really good foundation and move into an authority and really start working on some of the key concepts on what a state-wide Treaty might look like," he explains.

"But also, make sure the environment's really fertile, where the Aboriginal Community is really quite confident to come and talk about what their aspirations are right now."

Aunty Geraldine Atkinson

Assembly Co-Chair and Member for the North-East region



“We need your support, this is something we can’t do by ourselves.”

That’s the message Assembly Co-Chair Aunty Geraldine Atkinson is sending to the wider Victorian community.

“Engage with the Aboriginal community, particularly in relation to the path to Treaty.”

Aunty Geraldine and Marcus Stewart were elected as the Assembly’s first Co-Chairs during its first Chamber in state parliament house in December 2019.

“I wanted to ensure that the next generation has the same outcomes and opportunities as the rest of the community,” she says. “These are big aspirations, but I know being involved in the Treaty process will help take big steps towards this dream.”

Aunty Geraldine believes Treaty will provide a pathway for Aboriginal people to secure the freedom and power to make the decisions that matter to community.

“This is our chance for meaningful structural reforms. Treaty is about truth, respect, equality and making Victoria a fairer place for everyone,” explains Aunty Geraldine. To that end, she says the Aboriginal Community must continue to help the Assembly push the Treaty process forward.

“Stay engaged with the work of the Assembly and the Treaty process,” she says. “We will meet the targets. It’s hard work, but it’s worth staying the course. Maintain the faith.”

Your people and Country:

Bangerang and Wiradjuri

Beautiful North-Eastern Victoria

It’s the beautiful Goulburn and Murray River. The powerful Barmah Forest. They’re all significant sites where my ancestors lived, thrived and survived and continue to do so.

The next 12 months, Aunty Geraldine says, will see significant progress on some of the Assembly’s key responsibilities.

“We’ll continue to build on the work that we have started, hopefully completing the things like the Treaty Authority and Treaty Negotiating Framework,” she says.

“We’ve faced challenges we never thought we’d face – like a global pandemic – but it’s also been really fruitful. We adjusted the way we do business and we have achieved so much.”

Aunty Geraldine is also enjoying the opportunities the journey to Treaty is providing to share Aboriginal culture with the wider community.

“Ours is the oldest culture in the world, it’s wonderful, and it’s something I want everyone to be able to share and celebrate with us.”

Uncle Michael Mookeye Bell

Member for the South-West region



Michael Mookeye Bell's Mother's Country is Gunditjmara Country in South-West Victoria.

The Gunditjmara were among the First People to be confronted by the invading settlers back in the 1830s and some of the hardest hit with some of Australia's worst massacres of the Frontier Wars taking place on their land.

They fought for their land and culture, and too often died defending it.

There's still cause to fight, but Uncle Mookeye is taking up the struggle for his people as a Member on the Assembly and by advancing the Treaty process.

"I support the establishment of the Treaty Process and connections to many communities across the South-West Region gave me the confidence to run for the Assembly," he says, adding that he's enjoyed serving on committees and appreciates the work of the other committees.

Uncle Mookeye encourages the Aboriginal Community to "have confidence in the Assembly" as "each Member of the Assembly is contributing their cultural understanding to the meeting and forums to ensure our work is Aboriginal-led".

"The work that has been completed provides a strong foundation towards a great understanding of the Treaty Negotiation Framework and Treaty Authority and I believe the Assembly is in a strong position to empower more of our communities to participate in the Treaty discussions and developments."

Uncle Mookeye says support from the wider community will also be crucial for the success of the Treaty process, but warns there'll be some adjustment needed by the broader public.

Your people and Country:

My mother is Laura Lovett/Bell and she is our connection to the Gunditjmara People. My father Ian Bell is a non-Aboriginal man from Heywood.

Our Country is the Gunditjmara Country in South-West Victoria

The Gunditjmara Country is significant, as the Country has provided for our communities for thousands of years. The Country has provided the resources to ensure our culture is continued.

"Victoria has never had a Treaty," he says. "The support of non-Aboriginal People is significant for the Treaty process, but also remember that we've never had a Treaty and so we have to bring the non-Aboriginal community along with us."

Nartarsha Bamblett

Member for the North-East region



There's a line from Nartarsha Bamblett's speech at the Assembly's first meeting in Parliament House in December 2019 that sums up her connection to her Country.

"I stand in a room with my feet bare on the floors that I feel no connection to, but deep within the grounds that lay beneath, I can feel the roots of who it is I am, connected deep within."

With cultural ties to communities in north, east and southern Victoria, and even Central Australia, Ms Bamblett has many roots connected to the land, but she also understands the fragility that Australia's colonial past has built into the system.

"I stand with my father supporting me, and I acknowledge the challenges of him, my mother and the future generations and the generations before me and the lines of where my father has come from, of Stolen Generation and the challenges that they face, the fears and uncertainty that we surround ourselves with today as Aboriginal people, men and women," she told the inaugural meeting.

She says the Treaty process is something that can help protect those connections for Aboriginal people in Victoria.

"I wanted to stand for the Assembly to make sure that future generations will have a better opportunity to be connected to their culture, that their links will be preserved and future generations will be proud of who they are and where they're from."

Your people and Country:

Yorta Yorta, Bangerang, GunnaiKurnai, Warlpiri and Wurundjeri

Goulburn-Murray region.

Caring for Country is a way of life, it brings healing to all when we care for it. Country is where I can find peace and connection to myself, my culture and my ancestors. Country is the birth place of creation, it's where I feel most at home.

"I come from a cycle of life known for power, unity, connection, healing and respect from many generations before me and I plan to continue these strengths while also changing the cycles of trauma that have impacted us along the way, for the better of the generations to come after me."

She says it was difficult being prevented from visiting family and friends due to COVID and having to move the Assembly's consultations online, but the reward was some real progress towards Treaty in a number of areas.

"The next 12 months, we'll see progress on the Framework, Treaty Authority and Self-Determination Fund," she says. "But one of the most important things for me is the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission that will bring a truth to non-Indigenous people they may not be ready for."

"I urge you to not only listen, but to walk together on the journey to healing."

Her message for Aboriginal people is to give the Treaty process time, but "to get involved with the opportunity and have your voice be heard".

Aunty Donna Wright

Reserved seat holder representing
Gunditj Mirring Traditional
Owners Aboriginal Corporation
in the South-West region

Aunty Donna Wright stood for election to the Assembly to represent her people, to support and ensure our Elders, Youth and communities' voices are heard and we are truly self-determining throughout the Treaty journey.

"Our fight for justice continues, it is our peoples, our Elders, our community, children and young peoples' right to not only fulfill their hopes and dreams for the future and have their say in the Treaty process in the South-West, but that every Gunditjmarra person also has the opportunity to co-design the Elders' Voice, a Truth-Telling process, Gunditjmarra representation and how Gunditjmarra people will negotiate a future Treaty with the State," Aunty Donna explains.

"It's important to empower Gunditjmarra people to determine the Treaty process in the South-West, and have the time to discuss their aspirations for our children and young peoples' future as a community and to realise and achieve our aspirations and vision for our people through a future Treaty.

"How our clans' family groups put forward their aspirations and what they want to see happen through a Treaty is an important yarn to have and is only part of our journey towards healing for our people."

Aunty Donna says when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, every Aboriginal community went into survival mode to ensure the protection of our Elders and communities, and that the safety and survival of our people were at the forefront of the Assembly's thinking and influenced our work at the Assembly.

"We had to ensure a COVID-safe Treaty process was created for our people," Aunty Donna says. "It was challenging and really difficult not being able to communicate with our Elders, communities and young people during a global pandemic," she explains.

But, like our people have been doing for thousands of years, Aunty Donna says the Assembly's Members focused on the cultural safety and empowerment of our people and managed some key achievements during its first term.

Your people and Country:

Kerrupmara Clan

Gunditjmarra Dhauwurd Wurrung

Lake Condah is my country, my Mother Eunice Wright's (née Foster) Country. Mum was born in South-West Victoria in Hamilton, and was raised on Lake Condah Mission where she lived a good life, a happy life with her family, before she was stolen at the age of nine years. Lake Condah is a sacred place where generations of my family and my people have lived since time immemorial, having not only resisted, but survived invasion. It's a place where the Frontier Wars were fought by my Ancestors to protect our people, our families and our Country. It is where the fighting continued for land rights - led by our resilient and powerful Elders and Matriarchs who fought hard for the return of Lake Condah back to our people - where our families connected and where we have been coming back to for generations. The fighting Gunditjmarra people are warriors, resilient, have never ceded our sovereignty, and will continue to assert our sovereign rights towards a Treaty for our people and our children's future.

"Self-determination, cultural governance and embedding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into the Assembly's work and organisational culture was and still is the most critical work the Members have undertaken, and the mandate for the way the Assembly operates as an Aboriginal organisation right now and into the future.

"Decolonising our constitution to bring about systemic and structural change is key to achieving this," she says.

Aunty Donna has other goals for 2021 too, including the Assembly operating autonomously and as an Aboriginal organisation that continues to implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in the Assembly's work.

"Our Sovereignty has never been ceded, we are resilient and continue to fight for justice for our people, our Elders, our children and young people. It is their future and they have every right to determine what is best for them and what they want to see in a Treaty," she concludes.

Dr Carolyn Briggs AM

Member for the Metropolitan region

Even for Dr Carolyn Briggs, an Elder with decades of professional experience and a PhD, the initial days of the Assembly have been full of learning and transformation.

“Almost a whole year getting used to technology and getting used to how you have to navigate. It’s a good tool for when people can’t be there. Everyone can still be at home and it brings us together,” she explains.

As she’s tended to do throughout her life, Dr Briggs wasn’t going to let that challenge stop the Assembly’s work from progressing.

“This is part of being in the Assembly and, now that we’ve unpacked ourselves and can attend these conferences and network and reconnect back with a lot of family units around here, the work will go on.”

Along with the Assembly’s core work, such as the Treaty Negotiation Framework, Treaty Authority and Self-Determination Fund, Dr Briggs would like it to realise another ambitious goal.

“My dream is for my legacy to be an Assembly building. It’ll be for theatre, it will be for international Indigenous Peoples around the world to come to, it will be somewhere the Elders will have their place, it’ll be central to Melbourne, it’ll be our own parliament,” she explains. “It will be distinctive, because it will bring together every element of stories that will be imbedded for our nations to come to a centre for world excellence from an Indigenous perspective.”

Dr Briggs is urging the whole Aboriginal community to get behind the Treaty process, saying the present will play a big part in our future.

Your people and Country:

Boonwurrung, Wamba Wemba, Barup Barup and Pairrebeenne/Trawlwoolway

The Yaluk-ut Weelam estate is part of the Boonwurrung Language Group from the mouth of the Werribee River down to Wilsons Promontory, my Great Grandmother Louisa Briggs’ Country. I also have my Grandmother’s Country. I’m Wamba Wemba, Barup Barup and Pairrebeenne/Trawlwoolway. The Briggs name is from my Grandfather John, who was Tasmanian. George Briggs married Woretermoetyenner, and her father Mannalargenna is my ancestor from the Trawlwoolway People, so I have strength and energy with me.

When I used to travel overseas, I was honoured to say I am from Melbourne. I have a special connection to this Country, especially in the way I engage and work with it, as well as across all traditional Countries. I supervise young Indigenous PhD students, having gained a PhD myself. I build and explore on all natural resources of Mother Earth, like our waterways for example, which are the lifeblood of the Boonwurrung and also flow into our great bay, Nairm.

So, what does it mean to me being on this Assembly? I believe it is important to be active in ensuring I pass this knowledge on through my role as an Elder. This knowledge should be transmitted directly to our youth for our future generations.

“We need you all to come on board, because in isolation we cannot do it. We don’t want to miss out on the opportunities. I believe that we can only achieve this as a collective and I know that it takes all of us to move forward.

“We have to invest in what we can do now and leave the legacy of a solid foundation for the future.”

She believes the general public supports the process, but everyone also needs to be brought along with developments.

“I think they’re there, but they don’t quite understand it. We want them to come along.

“Victorians must understand that they have opportunities to use our assets – our Country, our waterways and our trees – which allowed them to establish their single economic base, so the Treaty process is taking it from a single entity to more of a circular one.”

Jordan Edwards

Member for the
South-West region



When recalling COVID's impact on the Assembly's first term, Jordan Edwards doesn't mince his words.

"It's been pretty crap for everyone so it has been tough," he states matter-of-factly.

Mr Edwards says the nature of the Treaty work the Assembly is undertaking means there's always a new challenge coming along.

"It's definitely been a different process," he explains. "I'm still learning. There's been a lot of challenges internally and externally and hopefully we can nut them out, but definitely an achievement is getting the truth and justice commission, the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission, up and running. That's definitely a win, but there's a lot more challenges that we need to overcome."

Two matters, among many, he'd like to see significant progress made on in the near future, include alternative forms of recognition by the Assembly for Traditional Owners and the Treaty Negotiation Framework.

"Hopefully we'll get these reserve seats up in the next couple of meetings and hopefully we can get a framework out that our Community can look over and say yay or nay," he says. "Those are some of the things. There's a lot more though."

Mr Edwards is encouraging the Aboriginal Community to learn as much about Treaty as they can so they can participate in the process, which he says will help the Assembly make good decisions.

"Educate yourselves on the process, both sides of the process, so we can get a full understanding of where people are coming from and we're all on the same page," he explains.

Your people and Country:

A proud Kirraewurrung, Peekwurrung also known as Gunditjmara, Arrernte and Waddawurrung man.

I'm born and raised on my Waddawurrung country here in Geelong, this is my father's country. I also spend a lot of time down at Framlingham where my other mobs are from. This is also my father's side. My mother's country is up in Alice springs.

He also wants the non-Indigenous Community to immerse themselves in the process so they can appreciate how it will improve the state.

"Read up and study what this process is and what the outcomes could potentially be," he suggests.

"That way we can get the full scope on where it can go and where it can land.

"Educate yourselves. We're here. Ask as many questions as possible, but educate yourselves and look at other countries and see what they've done and see the best outcomes of what they've achieved."

Jamie Lowe

Reserved seat holder
representing Eastern Maar
Aboriginal Corporation in
the South-West region

Jamie Lowe feels the weight of the work he and his fellow Members of the Assembly are undertaking.

“It’s been exciting,” he says. “We’re the First Peoples’ Assembly and we’re doing something that’s a first within Australia so there’s a bit of weight to bear with that, but it’s an exciting process at the same time, so speaking to our people about it, they’re excited, but also cautious.”

Mr Lowe says Aboriginal people always approach negotiations with government with a level of skepticism, but he thinks the Assembly’s first term is laying a foundation for real progress in the future.

“We’re doing business with the government so we’re always cautious when we’re doing that, so it’s important to keep perspective there, but we’re looking forward to what the future can bring to our people.

“I think the next 12 months is going to be a critical time. I think we’ve got to reach some thresholds with some of the substantive pieces around the Treaty Negotiation Framework, the Elders’ Voice, other critical processes like truth-telling will begin as well.

“Then I guess, in our last 12 months, we’ll be setting the scene for the next Members of the Assembly so we need to lay a strong foundation for them and a strong foundation for our Community to negotiate Treaties into the future so I think the heavy lifting will happen over the next 12 months to set that up.”

Mr Lowe says he’s proud of the way Members have reacted to the challenges of the COVID-19 restrictions and their determination to continue the Assembly’s work.

“It’s been challenging, but it’s positive to see the mob step up and use the other platforms to talk to their people and consult and have yarns,” Mr Lowe says.

Your people and Country:

Djab Wurrung, Gunditjmara

South-West Victoria. Around the coastline or Gariwerd (The Grampians). The Great Ocean Road, Warrnambool.

It’s God’s country or Bunjil’s country. It’s very sacred. Not only to our people, but in the landscape of the nation. I grew up around there and being able to visit sites that you know that your ancestors have been around there for 100,000 years it’s an extremely humbling feeling.

Mr Lowe wants the Aboriginal community to know that the Assembly is listening to them when undertaking its work.

“We’re hearing you, we’re listening to you and we’ve taken on this task and know the magnitude of it so we get it,” he says.

And to the non-Aboriginal community, he says be open to learning something you didn’t know before.

“Hopefully you can engage in the truth-telling process, which is going to be critical to understanding the history of this place. The good and the bad stories, because there’s both and I think it’s a critical foundation piece for knowing the inherent rights of our First Nations people.”

Dylan Clarke

Reserved seat holder representing
Barengi Gadjin Land Council
Aboriginal Corporation in
the North-West region



Dylan Clarke has great faith in Aboriginal people to make Treaty work.

“We have survived and thrived in all kinds of environments and continue to fight for our rights and our place in society,” he explains.

Mr Clarke says to make the most of the current opportunity, Community will have to work together.

“We cannot do a good job without our mob walking with us and guiding us on each and every step we take,” he says.

“We are accountable to our communities and this is why it’s important we hear your views and aspirations for the future. This isn’t about us in the present, we need to be prepared for the next generation.”

A reserved seat holder representing the Barengi Gadjin Land Council, Mr Clarke says the Assembly has seen enormous progress.

“The first term has been incredible. From the first meeting there has been a lot of movement and the Assembly is progressing towards establishing itself as a strong entity for Aboriginal People,” he said.

“I have been impressed with the feedback from the community and believe this is helping shape how information is shared and managed from the Assembly outward. While there is much more work to do, I think the steps taken to establish a framework are crucial to the success of future Treaties in Victoria.

Your people and Country:

Wotjobaluk

Wotjobaluk/Jaadwajali/Jaadwa/Wergaia
and Jupagulk (WJJWJ)

There are many special places on the vast lands of the Wotjobaluk Nations. Traditionally the availability of foods across our lands encouraged people to move from season to season. Water was essential and the Barringgi Gadyin (Wimmera River) provided abundant food and resources. To this day, our people maintain a strong connection to our land and the ability to manage and protect WJJWJ Country and Culture is intrinsic to the success of our next generation.

“I feel it is important to develop a framework under the right circumstances, this means calling out systematic failures and other areas that have impacted our people immensely. Truth and Justice is an essential step for this work.”

Mr Clarke says that truth (through the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission) will be difficult for many in all corners of the Victorian community, including the non-Aboriginal community, but says it’s a vital next step in the state’s story.

“We have a prime opportunity to work together and rebuild a solid foundation towards a brand new future in Victoria,” he suggests.

“What we are doing is not easy and will provoke some uneasy feelings because the truth is hard to hear from both sides. We are not blaming anyone for the past, but it’s a fact, we are all responsible for the present and we must do this together to heal and grow as equals. Listen deeply and allow yourself to communicate from the heart with compassion and sincerity.”

Peter Hood

Member for the
South-East region



It was a visit to New Zealand that introduced Peter Hood to the concept of Treaty and it was a concept that stuck.

“I had an interest in Treaty because I’d done a lot of work with kids and I was sent to New Zealand for an exchange with politicians,” he recalls.

“I met the NZ prime minister Helen Clark and she mentioned the Waitangi Treaty to me at the time and I read about it some more.

“The Maori and Koori culture are very similar, family oriented. That got me interested in Treaty, and in ATSIC days they were talking Treaty, so when the state government started talking about it I wanted to be involved.

“I think it’s momentous. It’s not just going to benefit blackfellas, it’s going to help all if we bridge this gap in misunderstanding.”

Mr Hood says the first term of the Assembly has given him a whole new education.

“Like going back to school. It’s still a schooling thing. I’m still learning,” he says.

“The COVID thing came at a really bad time, but we still got a lot done with what was put in front of us.”

One line of Assembly work, in particular, has resonated with Mr Hood, the Assembly’s truth-telling campaign that led to the Government establishing the Yoo-rook Justice Commission to investigate past wrongs committed against Aboriginal people in Victoria.

Your people and Country:

Kurnai

Gunai Kurnai – Gippsland,
Lake Tyers mission, Moe

The landscapes down here are different. It’s very hilly, bushy, very green compared to Yorta Yorta country. It’s very flat up there. Near the coast as well. It’s my country. It’s why I live here. I moved away, but you always come home.

“It was a personal thing for me. They’re talking about truth-telling and I’ve got stories I want to share about my father and his family. My grandmother being removed from the mission because she was too white, but didn’t fit in because she wasn’t white enough.

The younger generations need to hear this. I can tell my story, but I know my story isn’t the only one out there.”

Mr Hood is urging all Aboriginal people to get behind the Treaty process by being as constructive as possible.

“Walk with us and always be constructive,” he urges. “If there’s things to criticise, criticise, but be constructive with it.”

And, like he’s learnt so much during this first term of the Assembly, he’s urging people from the broader general public to also be prepared to learn.

“Come in with open minds. Be open minded and come in with the ideal of wanting to learn, being willing to be educated. You can listen here and then you can choose what to do with it.”

Robert Ogden

Reserved seat holder representing Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation in the Metropolitan region



When the Assembly took over parliament house in Melbourne for its first Chamber in December 2019, Robert Ogden said he hoped they were starting something that would honour the losses, sacrifices and struggles of the ancestors.

“I hope we can listen to the aspirations of First Peoples in Victoria and find solutions to issues that have plagued us, plagued our people, since colonisation,” he said in his first speech.

“We will have our differences, but we must at least try to work together for an outcome.”

Reflecting on the Assembly’s first term so far, Mr Ogden says there have been disagreements, but the Members have worked together to advance the Treaty process and achieve some real outcomes for Aboriginal people.

“We all persevered online and have ticked off some milestones with progress on the Elders’ Voice, for example, and have set us up for real progress on the Treaty Negotiation Framework, Treaty Authority and Self-Determination Fund in the next 12 months.”

Mr Ogden says it’s important to note that the Assembly and the Treaty process won’t erase the hurt and atrocities of the past, but it’s a chance to build real outcomes for Aboriginal people.

“There’s been many false promises and lost opportunities of the past, so I understand if people are skeptical of this chance, but I see this as a method that can bring lasting

Your people and Country:

Bunurong people of the south-eastern Kulin nation

Mornington Peninsula, Westernport and part of south-west Gippsland. Southern outskirts of Melbourne from Frankston south, east to Leongatha and north to Warragul

Whenever I’m on Country it feels like a celebration of our survival. You know the ancestors have walked on that ground and it brings a peace we all need.

benefits and justice. I think we needed, as First Peoples, a platform that we control and have initiated, then the healing process can start – and I believe Treaty is that process,” he says.

“If we unite behind this process we can reclaim the ability to live our lives as we choose, we can drive lasting structural change for future generations. This is our moment to come together – us mob and settlers – and create a fairer way of doing things and walking and learning side by side with respect.”

Alice Pepper

Member for the
South-East region



Alice Pepper is an artist who looks through the obvious, past the foreground into the background, into the depth of the picture and she's not always pleased with what she sees.

"I stood for the Assembly to be part of the Treaty process and use this opportunity to help protect our culture and our land, because if we don't, we get sick," she says.

"We need to amplify our voices so we are heard and so a system that so clearly hasn't respected our connection to Country or needs can be changed."

"In my first speech to the first Assembly Chamber I said, 'It is most important for us to be able to address these issues through this journey to Treaty so that our future generations can stand strong on Country, living their culture, living healthy and longer, and aspiring to be who they want to be' and for me that will be the real measure of our success as time goes by."

Mrs Pepper says the first term of the Assembly has not only been difficult for her because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also because of the loss of beloved family members and sorry business within the community.

"It wasn't just that often we haven't been able to meet in-person for the Assembly's work, we also lost precious time with the people most dear to us and that's a loss that can't be filled," she explains.

Your people and Country:

On my mother's side I come from the Yorta Yorta, Mutti Mutti and Arrernte peoples. On my father's side I come from the Gunnai, Gunditjmara and Djab Wurrung people.

My Gunditjmara country is to the west of Melbourne, the Murrumbidgee River system is on my Yorta Yorta/Mutti Mutti country, and the rivers and lake systems and bushlands on my Gunnai/Kurnai country.

The natural beauty of our country gives me life and gives me strength. It's the songlines, it's the ancestors, it's the natural environment, it's peace. We are the custodians and we must protect it for our future generations.

"We've persevered with the Assembly work, though, and have achieved a lot considering the circumstances."

As an artist, Mrs Pepper has contributed to the revival of the craft of creating possum skin cloaks, which hold a significance in Aboriginal culture beyond just being a piece of clothing.

She sees the possum skin cloak as a metaphor for the Assembly and its work for Aboriginal people.

"A skin would be given to children when they were born and, as they grew, it would be added to with images, which helped tell the story of their life," she says.

"The Assembly is something like a cloak. It's at the birth of this Treaty process and the work it does on the framework, Treaty Authority and Self-Determination Fund will help protect our groups as they negotiate Treaties."

Matthew Burns

Member for the
Metropolitan region



“Stick with us.”

That’s the advice of Matthew Burns, a Member from the Metropolitan region, who says the issues are sometimes complex, but the work is too important for Community to lose interest.

“It definitely is a tough slog. There’s a lot of information to digest and given we are in a post-colonial community, we really need to be involved in policy and things like that so stick with us. Really engage with your Members and Community.

“If you’ve got questions to ask, it’s really important that you get in and engage with your representatives because people are there to help answer questions and hopefully provide support to you so I’d encourage that.”

Mr Burns says it took a lot of the Assembly’s time and energy just to establish itself as a representative organisation in the earliest days of its first term, but he emphasises that apart from the administrative side of things, some really important business has also been done.

“We’ve got through such a heavy policy load and I think we’ve achieved some fantastic things, and I hope that that’s provided a platform for us to take through the next couple of years and make some progress.”

He thinks the next 12 months will see development in three key areas of the Assembly’s work.

“I’d love to think we’re in a pretty good place to almost be finalising the framework and in a really good position for the Authority and then clearly in the right direction for the

Your people and Country:

Taungurung

Central, central-north-east Victoria.

What’s special about Country is what you feel when you’re on Country. It’s just one of those things that for me, I live off Country and when I drive back over the Great Dividing Range back onto Country I get a feeling of calm, a feeling of peace and it’s just great to be back home. So for me, what’s special about it for me is the feeling it provides me when I’m on Country.

Self-Determination Fund to assure that when our term comes around, we’re in a position to hopefully, assuming the collective here want this, be electing people who may be sitting on a negotiation body for a statewide Treaty.”

Mr Burns is encouraging the general public to support the Aboriginal community in the Treaty process, but he acknowledges that the Assembly must help non-Aboriginal people by providing them with the information that will improve their understanding.

“Hopefully after the truth and justice commission (Yoo-rrook Justice Commission) has been established, one of the key things that we have to do is actually educate the broader community,” he suggests.

“We can’t expect to go from nothing to Treaty, in the eyes of the broader community, without actually taking them on a journey so when we get to that point of negotiating a Treaty, the broader community are going, ‘Well I get it. I understand, I think this is the right thing to do’.

“What I would say is be open and be willing to listen and learn and do that with a very open mind and with the intent that we are all Australians, one way or another, and this is your history just as much as it is ours and we want to move together collectively and have a full understanding of what it is to be an Australian and how we can move in unity together into the future.”

Melissa Jones

Reserved seat holder representing First People of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation in the North-West region

“It’s been a hard process, but at the same time, rewarding to achieve what we have so far. As a Chamber we have got the engine pulling things together.”

That’s Melissa Jones’ thoughts on the First Peoples’ Assembly’s work so far. A period of time when its 31 elected Members were establishing a whole new Aboriginal organisation to embark on a unique Treaty journey while also dealing with a global pandemic that had been thrust into the equation.

“Being at home and not being able to get out and talk to mob was hard,” Ms Jones explains. “Keeping our mob safe was and is most important for us people. Using social media to family groups and other mob helped get the word out as best we could. So many online meetings to get the work done.”

The experience has been challenging for Members, staff and constituents alike, but Ms Jones says it’s also led to positive outcomes, not least for her.

“I have gained knowledge and the confidence to keep going and doing the best job I can for my people and the rest of the nations of Victoria,” she says.

Ms Jones has played a key role in one of the Assembly’s greatest achievements so far – the establishment of the Yoo-rook Justice Commission – something that has long been called for by Aboriginal people.

Your people and Country:

Latje Latje

North-West of Victoria

Latji Latji Nations are centred around Mildura and include dramatic geographical features from Lindsay Mulcra and Wallpolla islands covering 26,100 hectares of floodplain, Hattah Lakes, Salt Lakes and the Rivers/Creeks.

Ms Jones was Co-Chair, alongside Troy McDonald, of the Truth-Telling Committee that drafted a proposal to be put to the Victorian Government which it ultimately supported.

“Being a board member and a Co-Chair with Troy McDonald on the Truth-Telling Committee was educational and inspiring,” she says.

“With the knowledge and wisdom within the board, and the Committee, it has just been amazing.”

She sees the Assembly’s work over the next 12 months as crucial. “We need to get the job done and do it well because the mob is watching us and relying on us to get it right for the next generations,” she explains.

Ms Jones also has succinct messages for the wider general public as well as for the Aboriginal Community.

“White Australia has the untold story of a Black History,” Ms Jones said. “It’s about time the Truth was told. It needs to be told. The real stories need to be told!”

“And for our Aboriginal community. It’s time, it’s our time and it’s the right time.”

Aunty Muriel Bamblett

Member for the Metropolitan region

Aunty Muriel Bamblett is a true believer in the Treaty process.

“The only way Aboriginal Victorians can enact our rights as First Peoples of this country is through the Treaty-making process,” she says. “Systemic racism continues to be a key driver of government policies and practices that fail to see us as Traditional Owners with inherent and legal rights.

“We have much to lose if we don’t protect our spirituality, cultural practices, and traditions for generations to come.”

Aunty Muriel has urged both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people to throw their support behind the cause.

“The journey to Treaty is for everyone – get on board,” she says. “Don’t be a fence sitter.”

“Imagine this was your personal Treaty that you were negotiating for your grandchildren. What would you want it to achieve? How would you know you did a good job and would they be proud and say, ‘My pop and nan did a great job.’”

Aunty Muriel sees only positives for non-Aboriginal people as well. “Already people are marching in the streets for us. There is change coming, jump on board. Be informed, be a Treaty champion. Are you up for taking a stand against racism, inequity and injustice? Then stand with us for Treaty.”

She says huge progress has been made by the Assembly so far, despite the challenges. “We were set a massive task and we quickly got to work on the tasks at hand,” she explains. “We have challenged the status quo and sought out experts to provide us with thought provoking opportunities to give the best resources to our people in the Treaty-making process.

“We have not taken the easy approach, nor have we rushed the process. We have communicated using a

Your people and Country:

Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Bunurong

Yorta Yorta – the area surrounding the junction of the Goulburn and Murray Rivers in present-day north-eastern Victoria and southern New South Wales

Dja Dja Wurrung – lands embracing the Upper Loddon, Avoca and Wimmera rivers east to Castlemaine, north to Boort, west to Creswick and Daylesford, south to Mount Avoca

Taungurung – lands embracing north of the Great Dividing Range in the watersheds of the Broken, Delatite, Coliban, Goulburn and Campaspe rivers

Bunurong – area from Werribee River to Wilsons Promontory

As an Aboriginal woman Country is more than a descriptor of soil, of terrains and descriptors defined by colonial ownership. To me, it’s about the spiritual, physical, social and cultural. Country has sustained us, nurtured us and all that we are emanates from our relationship with Country. We depict it in our cultural observance through language, ceremony, practice and stories and identifies us and our sense of Aboriginal agency born out of connection and belonging.

number of mechanisms and been innovative in engaging our communities in key stages of our work.

“We’ve been supported by an amazing secretariat and support team. I’m so proud of the Assembly and our Co-Chairs. I can’t believe we’ve been able to achieve so much. We began with three priority areas, expanded to six and have not lost momentum.”

Aunty Muriel believes the Assembly’s second year will see the accomplishments continue.

“I am hoping that Community will engage with the work to date and that communities will take greater ownership of the Treaty Negotiation Framework. Our challenge will be to create a vision for generational change for the future of our people.”

Sean 'Waikarra' Fagan

Reserved seat holder for the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation in the South-West region

Sean Fagan's people, the Wadawurrung, have had to fight for their Country for almost as long as Europeans have set foot on the land that is now known as Victoria, but through the Treaty process, he's confident a fairer approach will be taken.

That was emphasised in his emotional speech to the Assembly's inaugural Chamber in December 2019.

"I guess I want to say I am sick and tired of fighting and crying and sick and tired of seeing my family cry and all the struggle," he said. "It is time we can move forward, and it is time for change."

He says that so far, the Assembly's first term has shown that progress is being made on a process that will give Aboriginal people fairer outcomes.

"There's still a lot to be done, we've only just started really, but we're laying the foundations for a new way of doing things so hopefully there won't be the heartache of the past for our people," he explains.

In the next 12 months, he wants to see the Assembly achieve real outcomes for his Ancestors and Elders; to appreciate and pay homage to them for their hard work and determination to be recognised for the tenacious connection they hold and of which he continues to hold to and for Wadawurrung Country and Peoples.

Your people and Country:

Wadawurrung

I am the sole Wadawurrung person representing Wadawurrung People on the Assembly as the Reserved seat holder representing Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.

My Country goes from the coast to the inland, from saltwater to fresh. It is some of the most beautiful and popular places in Victoria and the world. It is us, we are it, and we have fought for so long to protect it.

"It's a heavy workload, but we owe it to our ancestors and Elders, who have struggled for so long, and for our children and their children, to make this opportunity work," he says.

"We need to use this process to emphasise our survival, our ownership of this land before the invasion, and of our continued presence and connection to the land."

Mr Fagan says although much of the Aboriginal community are jaded by the failures of past processes, the energy mustn't be lost.

"We need the people to come with us," he says. "We need the people to be part of this process. To tell us what they need."

"We need the general public to support us. With their backing the best outcomes will be achieved for all."

Tracey Evans

Member for the
Metropolitan region



Tracey Evans isn't alone in saying she wishes she had been less alone during the COVID-hit first term of the Assembly, but she also emphasises the milestones that have been achieved so far.

She says it's been much harder to connect with her people, but it's also helped to strengthen connections with some others.

"The hardest is that I haven't been able to get out and about and meet face-to-face with Community," she says.

This has not stopped the Assembly's work though, and Ms Evans says the energy of Members and staff, their ability to adapt to the circumstances and the willingness of the Community to get involved is seeing awareness of the Treaty process continue to strengthen.

"I hope Community will feel a growing connection to us as the Assembly and representatives of our communities," she explains.

Despite, or maybe because of, the great challenges and the historic tasks the Assembly has taken on, Ms Evans says she feels great satisfaction from the Assembly's work.

She has taken on key roles in online engagement events, including as Chair of the Elders' Voice Committee, recognising the vital role Elders play in our everyday lives and maintaining our culture for generations to come.

It is a role that Ms Evans is particularly honored to have taken on and proud to have been involved in.

Looking to the future, she urges the Community to take some lessons from the difficult period we find ourselves in.

Your people and Country:

Gunditjmara

Western Districts, Warrnambool

The coastline and the connection to my grandmother whom I never met.

"Always be proud, always stay connected to your people, culture and Elders," she says. "Never give up, and keep fighting, as together we are strongest."

It's a unity Ms Evans would like to be shown by the general public too.

"Walk with us, share in this journey and let your friends know what the Assembly is trying to achieve with Treaties and why it's important to every Victorian."

Trent Nelson

Reserved seat holder
representing Dja Dja Wurrung
Clans Aboriginal Corporation
in the North-West region

It's a pretty big honour to be chosen to represent a campaign called Deadly and Proud, so consider Trent Nelson both deadly and proud.

Mr Nelson was one of 19 Aboriginal people to share their stories and perspectives as Victoria moves towards Treaty.

"Like I said in the Deadly and Proud campaign, I think there's a lot of groundwork to be done if we're to bring the wider general public along with us towards Treaty," Mr Nelson says.

"It's part of our daily struggle, to be recognised as the First Peoples of this country, but a lot of non-Aboriginal people don't know or don't understand about that struggle."

"Hopefully Treaty will help them see that they should be proud that we're still here and that we're still practising our culture and that we want them to be part of that."

He says in the next 12 months the Assembly must work towards securing the main pillars it's been tasked with, including the Treaty Negotiation Framework, the Treaty Authority and the Self-Determination Fund.

"If we get those things right then Traditional Owner groups will have the best possible chance of making good Treaties in the future," he suggests.

Mr Nelson says years of struggle, activism and pride have brought us to this point in history and the resilience of Community will be rewarded with profound life-changing reforms.



Your people and Country:

Dja Dja Wurrung and Yorta Yorta

Parts of Central Victoria around Bendigo and the Murray River north of Shepparton

I am a Yorta Yorta-Dja Dja Wurrung man who grew up in Shepparton. The Murray River and Dja Dja Wurrung Country of my grandfather run through my veins. They are the life blood, they give me life.

"A fairer deal is there for our taking. We just need to stand together with a shared voice and assert our rights. We have the knowledge, we have the answers – we just need the freedom and ability to implement them for our community. That's what Treaty is about."

For Mr Nelson the connection to Country runs deep and he sees Treaty as a way to also share an understanding of and care for Country with the whole community.

"I'm fortunate that my work takes me out on Country, I still have that close connection. It gives me strength and replenishes me every time I'm there. We need Treaties to ensure that lifeblood for others is secured for our future generations."

An invitation to walk with us



Next steps on our shared journey to Treaty in Victoria

Everyone deserves to be treated with equal respect and dignity and to have the freedom and power to choose their own path.

But the racist legacy of invasion and structural racism continues to hold our people back. We're unfairly targeted, face prejudice and discrimination and too often laws and policies are imposed on us by politicians who don't know or understand us or our culture, but arrogantly think they know what's best for us.

We have the wisdom. We know this land. We know our people. We have the solutions – we just need the freedom and power to implement them ourselves.

Treaty is this generation's opportunity to finally come together on an equal footing and negotiate a better way of doing things that gives our community a fair go – genuine control over the decisions that affect us and determine our future.

That's why we all need to work together. Whether your family has been here for five years or 50,000 years, we can all do our part to right the wrongs of the past and create a better and fairer Victoria for everyone.

Over the coming months and years, the Assembly will continue to represent the Aboriginal community during the Treaty process and will stand firm to assert our rights.

But we also extend an invitation for everyone to walk with us, because this is a journey that affects all of us. It's a chance to learn, to share in and celebrate the oldest continuing culture in the world and a chance to make Victoria a fairer place for everyone. Sign up to join Team Treaty at our website: www.firstpeoplesvic.org



Appendix A

First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria Members representing Reserved Seats



MEMBER	REPRESENTING
Dylan Clarke	Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
Sean 'Waikarra' Fagan	Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
Uncle Andrew Gardiner	Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
Melissa Jones	First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation
Jamie Lowe	Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation
Troy McDonald	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
Trent Nelson	Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
Robert Ogden	Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
Marcus Stewart	Taungurung Land and Waters Council
Aunty Donna Wright	Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
To be appointed	Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation



Appendix B

First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria Chamber meetings and resolutions



DATE	LOCATION	CRITICAL DECISIONS
27-28 August 2020	The fourth meeting of the Assembly Chamber was held via video conference because of restrictions in place related to the COVID-19 pandemic.	<p>The Chamber agreed to develop a terms of reference for a Truth-telling process to be negotiated with the State that addresses the scope of Truth-telling, preferred Truth-telling mechanisms, and the sequencing within the broader Treaty process.</p> <p>The Chamber authorised the Assembly's negotiators to finalise an interim dispute resolution process with the State under section 38 of the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 (Vic) provided stated conditions were met.</p> <p>The Chamber agreed to targeted and broad community consultations on the design of the Elders' Voice, reserved seats, and the Treaty Negotiation Framework.</p>
7-8 December 2020	The fifth meeting of the Assembly Chamber was held via video conference because of restrictions in place related to the COVID-19 pandemic.	<p>The Chamber agreed that everything should be on the table for Treaty negotiations. The only matters not up for negotiation should be matters that would interfere with gains already secured by Victorian Traditional Owners or matters outside Victoria's constitutional authority.</p> <p>The Chamber agreed in-principle that the Assembly should hold the Self-Determination Fund and administer it through a trust.</p>
25 February 2021	The sixth meeting of the Assembly Chamber was held via video conference because of restrictions in place related to the COVID-19 pandemic.	<p>The Chamber was asked to make key decisions related to the truth-telling process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chamber agreed to the proposed Terms of Reference for the Commission/Inquiry. • The Chamber agreed on the Assessment Process for selecting Commissioners. <p>The Assembly voted in favour of increased stipends for Members. Increased stipends allows Members to dedicate more time to working with their communities.</p> <p>The Chamber agreed to restructure the workstream committees. This is to improve the operation of the committees and to increase Member participation.</p>

DATE	LOCATION	CRITICAL DECISIONS
<p>1 April 2021</p>	<p>The seventh meeting of the Assembly Chamber was held at Worawa Aboriginal College in Healesville and via video conference.</p>	<p>The Chamber agreed to establish the Interim Elders' Voice. The Interim Elders' Voice will be a committee of the Assembly and will, through the input of Elders, build the framework for a permanent Elders' Voice.</p> <p>The Assembly agreed to negotiation protocols, which will govern conduct between the Assembly and State in negotiating the Treaty elements. The Assembly also agreed to an internal process for triggering disputes with the State.</p>
<p>17-18 June 2021</p>	<p>The eighth meeting of the Assembly Chamber was held via video conference because of restrictions in place related to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	<p>The Chamber agreed to new terms of reference for the three Assembly committees. The terms of reference set out the purpose and roles and responsibilities of each Committee.</p> <p>The Chamber agreed to amendments to the Members' Charter to strengthen Member accountability.</p>

Appendix C

First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria events and public engagements/consultations



DATE	EVENT	DETAIL
11, 21/7/2020	Victorian Traditional Owners Land Justice Group	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
16/7/2020	Victorian Multicultural Commission	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
18/7/2020	Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation General Meeting	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
21/7/2020	Facebook Livestream Event: What should be in a Treaty Framework?	Online community discussion on the Treaty Negotiation Framework
22/7/2020	National Indigenous Australians Agency	Discussion on Voice at a Federal level and the Victorian Treaty process
22/7/2020	Department of Premier and Cabinet	Briefing on the Traditional Owner Nation-building Support Package and Treaty Community Engagement Program
3/8/2020	Formal negotiation begins between the Assembly and the State on the Treaty process	
5/8/2020	Islamic Council of Victoria	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
6/8/2020	Under the Radar: Gender Equity Policy and Practice Forum – Event by Gender Equity Victoria	Panel discussing the unique pressures and challenges experienced by Aboriginal communities across Victoria during COVID-19
10/8/2020	College of Law & Justice, Victoria University	Presentation on the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
11/8/2020	Facebook Livestream Event: What is the Elders' Voice?	Online community discussion on the purpose of the Elders' Voice and how it will strengthen the Assembly in advancing the Treaty process
12/8/2020	Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
19/8/2020	SEDA College	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
23/8/2020	Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-Operative	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
4/9/2020	Castan Centre for Human Rights Law, Monash University	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
9/9/2020	Victorian Local Government Association	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
9/9/2020	ACSO Australia (Australian Community Support Organisation)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
11/9/2020	Treaty Reform Interdepartmental Committee meeting	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
15/9/2020	The University of Melbourne Law School	Guest Lecture on the Treaty process in Victoria – as part of the unit Treaty: Indigenous-Settler Agreements

DATE	EVENT	DETAIL
17/9/2020	Scotch College	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
30/9/2020	Aboriginal Justice Caucus of the Aboriginal Justice Forum	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
5, 8/10/2020	Tati Tati Aboriginal Corporation	Assembly Reserved Seating discussion
5/10/2020	Te Arawhiti – Office of Māori Crown Relations	Interactive discussion on Treaty settlement negotiations, funding supports built into the Treaty process and lessons and considerations from Aotearoa
6/10/2020	Barring Djinang Leadership Program (Victorian Public Service Commission)	Presentation on Treaty and leadership to participants
7/10/2020	SEDA College	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
8/10/2020	Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Council	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
9/10/2020	Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council	Assembly Reserved Seating discussion
12/10/2020	Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations	Assembly Reserved Seating discussion
13/10/2020	Trades Hall	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
13/10/2020	ANZ Bank	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
14/10/2020	Monash University Law School	Guest lecture on the Treaty and Truth-telling processes
14/10/2020	East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
14/10/2020	Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations	Assembly Reserved Seating discussion
15/10/2020	Facebook Livestream Event: First Peoples' Assembly Youth Engagement Yarn	Online community discussion on the role of youth in the Assembly's work advancing the Treaty process
20/10/2020	Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
26/10/2020	Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
6/11/2020	Leadership Victoria's Williamson Leadership Program	Presentation – Voice, Treaty, Truth – First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria
7/11/2020	Taungurung Land and Waters Council	Assembly Reserved Seating discussion
7/11/2020	ANTaR and Reconciliation Victoria	Speaking engagement: Truth, Justice and Treaty: Healing Victoria's Scars
11/11/2020	Rumbalara Elders Facility	Elders' Voice discussion
11/11/2020	Victorian Public Sector Commission	NAIDOC Week panel discussion – 'Always Was, Always Will Be'
11/11/2020	Australian Securities and Investments Commission	NAIDOC Week presentation
12/11/2020	Kinaway Chamber of Commerce Victoria Ltd	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
12/11/2020	Department of Premier and Cabinet	Treaty and Truth NAIDOC Week event
12/11/2020	Seymour Local Aboriginal Network (LAN)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process

DATE	EVENT	DETAIL
18/11/2020	City of Melbourne	Truth Telling and Reconciliation panel event
18 /11/2020	Facebook Livestream Event: The Truth-telling process	Online community discussion about progressing the Truth-telling process
23/11/2020	Mallee District Aboriginal Services	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
23/11/2020	First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
23-24/11/2020	Co-Chair Roadshow – Traralgon, Morwell and Bairnsdale	Community update
23-24/11/2020	Co-Chair Roadshow – Mildura, Swan Hill and Bendigo	Community update
27/11/2020	Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
27/11/2020	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation	Truth-telling session
30/11/2020	Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
30/11/2020	Co-Chair Roadshow – Warrnambool, Heywood and Portland	Community update
1-2/12/2020	Co-Chair Roadshow – Echuca and Shepparton	Community update
3/12/2020	International Indigenous Governance Conference	Panel presentation: Advancing the Treaty process
4/12/2020	International Centre for Transitional Justice	Truth-telling information session
9/12/2020	Department of Treasury and Finance	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
10-11/12/2020	Co-Chair Roadshow – Wodonga and Wangaratta	Community update
11/12/2020	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
11/12/2020	Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
11/12/2020	First Nations Senior Consultative Circle	Elders' Voice discussion
13/01/2021	Lulla's Children & Family Centre	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
14/1/2021	United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues	Participation in the Regional Dialogue on the Pacific
19/1/2021	Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
19/1/2021	Victorian Traditional Owners Land Justice Group	Assembly Reserved Seating Discussion
19/1/2021	The University of Melbourne	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
20/1/2021	Department of Justice and Community Safety	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
21/1/2020	Public Records Office of Victoria	Information session on data sovereignty to inform the Truth-telling process
3/2/2021	Kaiela Institute	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
3/2/2021	Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place Youth Group	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
6/2/2021	First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (AGM)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process

DATE	EVENT	DETAIL
8/2/2021	Yarning Treaty – Shepparton	Community update
8/2/2021	Formal signing of the Interim Dispute Resolution Process, signing by Assembly Co-Chairs and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs	
8/2/2021	Deadly and Proud Launch	Launch of the Deadly and Proud campaign
9/2/2021	Yarning Treaty – Echuca	Community update
9, 11, 16, 24/2/2021	Department of Education and Training Koorie Staff Network	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
10/2/2021	Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
24/2/2021	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Inc (VACCHO)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
26/2/2021	Wimmera South West Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
1/3/2021	Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
1/3/2021	Yarning Treaty – Bendigo	Community update
2/3/2021	Yarning Treaty – Swan Hill	Community Update
2/3/2021	Swan Hill Rural City Council	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
3/3/2020	Scotch College	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
9/3/2021	Joint announcement with the State Government of Victoria on the establishment of the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission	
10/3/2021	Yarning Treaty - Bairnsdale	Community update
10/3/2021	Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
11/3/2021	Yarning Treaty - Morwell	Community update
15/3/2021	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
15-16/3/2021	Yarning Treaty – Metro	Community update
16/3/2020	Reconciliation Victoria	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
16/3/2020	Djirra	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
22/3/2021	Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-Operative	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
22/3/2021	Alpine Valleys Community Leadership Program	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
23/3/2021	Melbourne Assessment Prison	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
23/3/2021	Statewide Local Aboriginal Network (LAN) Brokers	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
23/3/2021	Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
24/3/2021	Ebony Truth, Justice and Healing National Roundtable	Participation in panel on Treaty and Truth
24/3/2021	The University of Melbourne Indigenous Staff and Students	Online engagement on the work of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process

DATE	EVENT	DETAIL
26/3/2021	Dame Phyllis Frost Centre	Truth-telling session
27/3/2021	Taungurung Land and Waters Council (AGM)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
28/3/2021	Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
29/3/2021	Facebook Livestream Event: Yoo-rook Justice Commission	Online community discussion on the establishment of the Yoo-Rrook Justice Commission
30/3/2021	Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
31/3/2021	Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation	Launch of Treaty film event with Wurundjeri Elders and community members
7/4/2021	Treaty Advancement Committee (Queensland)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process and process in Queensland
8/4/2021	Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
8/4/2021	Healesville Local Aboriginal network (LAN)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
10/4/2021	Yarning Treaty – Mildura	Community update
11/4/2021	Yarning Treaty – Horsham	Community update
15/4/2021	Inner East Local Aboriginal Network (LAN)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
17/4/2021	Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (AGM)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
19/4/2021	Monash University Indigenous Students and Staff engagement	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
20/4/2021	City of Wodonga	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
20/4/2021	Beechworth Correctional Centre	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
20/4/2021	Fred Hollows Foundation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
21/4/2021	Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
21/4/2021	Aboriginal Community Elders Service	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
23/4/2021	Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
24/4/2021	Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
26/4/2021	Caulfield Grammar Indigenous student and staff engagement	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
27/4/2021	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
28/4/2021	Santa Maria College Indigenous student staff engagement	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
28/4/2021	Yarning Treaty – Warrnambool	Community update
28/4/2021	Metropolitan Remand Centre	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
28/4/2021	Mitchell Shire Council	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
29/4/2021	Northern Local Aboriginal Network (LAN)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
29/4/2021	Dhurringile Prison	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process

DATE	EVENT	DETAIL
5/5/2021	Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal Corporation	Justice Forum - Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
5/5/2021	Heritage Officials of Australia and New Zealand	Presentation on the Treaty and truth-telling processes
5/5/2021	Australian Multicultural Foundation	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
7/5/2021	Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council Meeting	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
7/5/2021	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
13/5/2021	United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence	Participation and presentation in expert meeting on transitional justice and the legacy of colonialism
14/5/2021	Announcement of the Yoo-rrook Justice Commissioners	
17/5/2021	Yarning Treaty – Sale	Community update
18/5/2021	Yarning Treaty – Lake Tyers	Community update
20/5/2021	Victorian Officeworks Indigenous Staff engagement	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
20/5/2020	Marrngoneet Correctional Centre	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
20/5/2020	Barwon Prison	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
21/5/2020	Hopkins Correctional Centre	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
21/5/2020	Langi Kal Kal Correctional Centre	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
21/5/2021	Yarning Treaty – Glenroy	Community update
24/5/2020	Fulham Correctional Centre	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
24/5/2021	Yarning Treaty – Seymour	Community update
25/5/2021	Yarning Treaty – Mansfield	Community update
26/5/2021	Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
26/5/2021	St Kevin's College Reconciliation Week	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
28/5/2021	Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity	Panel discussion on Treaty processes
28/5/2021	Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS)	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
3/6/2021	Melbourne United Football Club	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
3/6/2021	Essendon Football Club	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process
5/6/2021	Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative	Overview of the Assembly and its work advancing the Treaty process

Acknowledgements



PAGE #	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	TITLE
Throughout	Tom Day	Assembly artwork 'Yarkeen'
Inside cover	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Possum skin cloak
Page 4	Department of Premier and Cabinet	Co-Chairs
Page 7	Little Rocket	Graphics
Page 8	James Henry Photography	Interim Elders' Voice Co-Chairs Aunty Charmaine Clarke and Uncle Andrew Gardiner
Page 10	FPAV	Assembly engagement meeting
Page 10	FPAV	Assembly engagement meeting
Page 10	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Will Shake Spears dancer
Page 10	FPAV	Collingwood Football Club engagement
Page 10	FPAV	Assembly engagement event
Page 11	FPAV	Zoom montage
Page 11	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Message stick
Page 11	FPAV	Assembly engagement event
Page 11	FPAV	Assembly election event
Page 12	Little Rocket	Graphics
Page 13	Jayden Gerrand, FPAV	Assembly engagement event
Page 14- 15	Little Rocket	Graphics and design
Page 17	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Treaty sign
Page 18-19	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Assembly photo
Page 21	Department of Premier and Cabinet	Co-Chairs Truth-telling Committee and Co-Chairs FPAV
Page 22-23	Department of Premier and Cabinet	Aunty Geri speaking
Page 25	FPAV	Assembly election event
Page 27	Little Rocket	Graphics
Page 28-29	Little Rocket	Maps
Page 31	Bronwen Davies, FPAV	Alister Thorpe
Page 32	Bronwen Davies, FPAV	Uncle Andrew Gardiner
Page 33	Supplied	Aunty Charmaine Clarke
Page 34	Murray Silby, FPAV	Aunty Esme Bamblett
Page 35	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Jacinta Chaplin
Page 36	Supplied	Jason Kelly
Page 37	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Kaylene Williamson
Page 38	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Leanne Miller

PAGE #	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	TITLE
Page 39	Bronwen Davies, FPAV	Marcus Stewart
Page 40	Supplied	Ngarra Murray
Page 41	Supplied	Raylene Harradine
Page 42	Bronwen Davies, FPAV	Rueben Berg
Page 43	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Trevor Gallagher
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Page 45	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Aunty Geraldine Atkinson
Page 46	Bronwen Davies, FPAV	Uncle Michael Mookeye Bell
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Page 48	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Aunty Donna Wright
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Page 56	Bronwen Davies, FPAV	Matthew Burns
Page 57	Bronwen Davies, FPAV	Melissa Jones
Page 58	Deadly and Proud Campaign	Aunty Muriel Bamblett
Page 59	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Sean 'Waikarra' Fagan
Page 60	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Tracey Evans
Page 61	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Trent Nelson
Page 63	Wayne Quilliam Aboriginal Photography	Woman entering parliament
Page 65	Department of Premier and Cabinet	Smoking ceremony, Yoo-rook Justice Commission launch
Page 76	Charles Pakana, FPAV	Smoking ceremony, FPAV meeting

Join our Aboriginal Electoral Roll and have your say in the Treaty process!



Enrolling to vote in the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria elections is a way to have your voice heard and help make sure you are represented in the Treaty process.



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