



**First Speech by Geraldine Atkinson  
Inaugural Meeting of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria**

**10 December 2019**

I want to acknowledge the welcome that we received this morning that was graciously given by Aunty Di and Shane to this country belonging to the Kulin nations. I stand here before you as a Bangerang woman who is honoured to represent the people of North East Region; those who supported me to be elected on the First Peoples' Assembly, who have faith in me to deliver and to work for those things that they want to achieve through the treaty process.

I want to in particular thank my first grandson, Kobe Atkinson, who actually inspired me—who nagged me to death—to actually put in my application to sit for a place in the Assembly. I want to thank and acknowledge four very important people that have been in my life that have passed—that is, Kevin Atkinson, Rex Atkinson, Mary Atkinson and Alf Bamblett. They have instilled in me the integrity, the value of family, of valuing my culture. They gave me the strength to be able to fight. They also gave me the wisdom to know when not to fight. I also want to acknowledge in the room here today a mentor of mine since the 1970s, Colin Burke. You have given me so much during all those years. When I first started my first job, you were behind me and supported me. I felt that you knew that I was able to deliver particular things.

I wanted to say that one of the important things in this process of this Assembly is that we bring our communities with us. I, during the process of campaigning, had my self-esteem dented. People absolutely refused to take part, to vote, because they did not understand or did not want to be a part of that process. But what we have to do, we have to ensure that during this process we bring them along with us, that we include them. It is just very important. I wanted to say that it is just so important that we get out to all of our community, and I give that commitment today that that is what I will do into my community, because they really, as I said, opened my eyes about what needs to be done.

I want to say thank you very much to Jill, the Commissioner. I want to say very much thank you to the working group, those that during that process had the strength and that ability to stand and to ensure that it was going to be delivered. And I just thank you very much for that, and I thank you very much for my fellow Assembly participants.

