



**First Speech by Michael Bell
Inaugural Meeting of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria**

10 December 2019

Thanks, Eleanor. Firstly, I would like to thank Aunty Di and Uncle Shane for their welcome to country and pay respects to their Elders, past and present, and acknowledge all the Elders in the room, especially Aunty Eunice down there, a Gunditjmara lady. I am Michael Bell, also known as Mookeye. I would just like to acknowledge my mother, Laura Bell, nee Lovett, and her nations of the Gunditjmara and Buandig. I also acknowledge my father, a non-Aboriginal man, Ian Bell, who has always acknowledged Mum's people as the first people of country. I acknowledge my wife, Sandra; our two boys, Billy and Micko; Billy's partner, Lisa, and her two boys, Tyler and Bailey; and our grandson, Archie, along with all the members of our family.

In regard to Mum, she grew up just outside Heywood. Her parents are Frederick Lovett and Mary Murray Rose, and they had a house. Her dad's brother, Uncle Herbie, and Aunty Emma lived there as well. They were seen as one big family. Both brothers served in the Australian armed forces in two world wars. My dad's dad, Oliver Bell, also served. This is significant to me. Both my grandfathers chose to defend our country and provide me with the opportunities I have today. As an elected member of the First Peoples' Assembly for south-west Victoria, I appreciate the support and trust you have invested in me. I have worked across the region for over three decades, working on frameworks that have empowered our people in having a voice in community life. Through this Assembly I will continue the work of my Elders, who have ensured our way of life, and are present. Through their actions, like the Eumeralla Wars, the Alcoa decision, creating Aboriginal community organisations, the Gunditjmara consent determination on land title, the UNESCO World Heritage inscription for the Budj Bim cultural heritage landscape, these outstanding achievements are being created by self-determination and are being Aboriginal led.

In finishing, I believe the members of the First Peoples' Assembly will create a culturally appropriate framework to negotiate a treaty for Victoria. I thank those who have provided me the opportunity to be here today. Thank you.

