



**First Speech by Tracey Evans  
Inaugural Meeting of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria**

**10 December 2019**

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where I stand today, and pay my humble respects and gratitude to Elders past, present and emerging. I acknowledge my sister who has joined me today, community in the gallery and the many cultural mentors and dear Elders that have guided me. I thank the community for trusting in me and giving me this chance to speak for and on behalf of them.

I am from the fighting Gunditjmara whose ancestral lands are from the western districts of Victoria. I am the child of a Stolen Generation—my mother, Myrtle Roach/Austin, often a sadness that never really goes away—a single mother of two sons, a protector of them both.

I grew up in Collingwood-Fitzroy, a young girl from the housing commission flats, and I rose above it to find a place for myself. I went to Fitzroy. I saw the battles of my people there. I saw the pain and suffering in their eyes, that I have never forgotten. I think of my loved ones and community we have lost along the way. They do not get to be a part of this.

Here at the table we have members of our community who have been involved in our political, economic and social struggles for as many years if not more than me. There are new leaders here, including me, who will continue to carry the firestick of hope into the future for our Elders, youth and children. We need to be stronger together to give voice to our people.

We, the First Nations people of Victoria, are resilient. We have survived, responding to the devastating consequences of invasion, which have adapted our ways of being and added to our ways of thinking, being of the land and remaining strong on culture. Our values and principles have remained steady as we have maintained the essence of our values of family, community, country and culture, ensuring our birthright of revival, maintenance and survival of our culture. It is what brings us together as a community. There is a real need to bring the voices of our people to the table, those who have not been heard, our Stolen Generation, our men and women and children, our youth in juvenile justice. We should not be asked to go without, to compromise, to be given less and to struggle continuously for many more years to come.

Aboriginal self-determination will be defined by the community, not by government. I stand here with 1000 footsteps of my ancestors behind me, telling me to be brave, fight hard. I hope to do my very best for the community. Thank you for listening.

