

# TREATY FOR VICTORIA





We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pay our deepest respects to all Elders, past and present. Our work takes us through all Country in the area now known as Victoria, from the coast to the mountains, the rivers and the plains. We give thanks to all who welcome us to their unceded lands and waters, and further extend that gratitude to all First Peoples in Victoria who have generously offered their time, their ideas and their feedback to help guide this journey to Treaty.

*Thanks to the following photographers for their assistance throughout the year and taking many of the photographs featured in this report:*

Tyson Austin	Leroy Miller
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Kathy Chambers	Martin Philby
Kristy Crawly	Wayne Quilliam
Andres Lomp	Tamati Smith



First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



FIRST PEOPLES'  
ASSEMBLY OF  
VICTORIA

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE OUTGOING CO-CHAIRS

When the inaugural Assembly first met in Parliament in December 2019, Treaty felt like a distant dream – we knew it was possible, but we had no clear path to walk along.

There were no promises and no guarantees, but we had the collective resilience and determination of the countless champions and activists that came before our time behind us.

After spending the last four years yarning and consulting with Community on ‘how’ the journey to Treaty should unfold, we now have the foundations in place for Treaty-making.

We also have a new Assembly – elected by mob in the historic Treaty Elections held in May and June – who will focus on actual Treaty negotiations!

We are so proud of how far we have come.

As this report shows, together we reached some very significant landmarks on the shared journey towards Treaty. For example, the Assembly successfully:

- ✓ **Negotiated the establishment of the Yoorrook Justice Commission truth-telling process.**
- ✓ **Negotiated the establishment of an independent umpire, the Treaty Authority, which will sit completely outside of the usual government bureaucracy.**
- ✓ **Created a Self-Determination Fund to help Traditional Owners get ‘Treaty-ready’ and to help generate wealth and prosperity for future generations.**
- ✓ **Reached agreement on the ‘Treaty Negotiation Framework’, which will enable the various Traditional Owners across the state to negotiate Treaties in their areas, as well as the Assembly to negotiate a statewide Treaty.**



These are tangible outcomes of the Assembly’s hard work and commitment to making Treaty a reality for our people.

They were created by mob, for mob. Their very existence is an act of self-determination and of decolonisation.

**We have started to put power back in Aboriginal hands, because policies and programs for Aboriginal people are always going to deliver better results when Aboriginal people have the ability to make those policies and programs.**

Treaty will make this country a better and fairer place.

It will secure structural change that will deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal people. But it will also provide opportunities for everyone who now calls Victoria home to come together and recognise, respect and celebrate the oldest living culture in the world.

While the inaugural Assembly has done the groundwork, it’s now over to the new Assembly Members to make Treaty a reality.

It’s been an honour to serve as Co-chairs of the Assembly. We would like to thank all the inaugural Members for their hard work and dedication to getting Treaty done.

Although we are passing the message stick on, we will continue to walk with you on the journey to Treaty – and we look forward to seeing where it leads.

Thank you for walking with us.

**Gowola Nagarra,** **Ngun godjin,**  
**Aunty Geraldine Atkinson** **Marcus Stewart**  
*Outgoing Co-chairs of the First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria*



# ABOUT THE ASSEMBLY

## A Voice for Victoria

The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is the independent and democratically elected body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the journey to Treaty in Victoria.



Established in December 2019, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is the first body of its kind in Australia.

The inaugural Assembly finished its term in 2023, and a new Assembly has been elected.

The Assembly Members are all proud Traditional Owners, elected by their communities to represent them on the journey to Treaty.



In its next term, the Assembly will negotiate a statewide Treaty to tackle the big overarching statewide issues like improving health, education, and justice.

The Assembly will also help empower the diverse Traditional Owner groups in Victoria to negotiate Treaties in their areas that reflect their specific aspirations and priorities.





# THE INAUGURAL ASSEMBLY 2019-2023



Thank you to all  
outgoing Members

N'arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs AM  
Aunty Charmaine Clarke  
Aunty Geraldine Atkinson  
Jamie Lowe  
Kaylene Williamson  
Leanne Miller  
Marcus Stewart  
Aunty Muriel Bamblett  
Nartarsha Bamblett  
Raylene Harradine  
Robert Ogden  
Sean 'Waikarra' Fagan  
Uncle Shane Clarke  
Sissy Austin  
Travis Morgan  
Trent Nelson  
Uncle Trevor Gallagher



# WHAT A YEAR!

## JULY 2022

Yoorrook Justice Commission hands down interim Truth-telling report

## SEPTEMBER

Assembly gathers final feedback from Community about their aspirations and priorities for the Self-Determination Fund

Assembly Meeting held on Gunaikurnai Country

## NOVEMBER

The Self-Determination Fund trustee is set up and a group of five First Nations experts are appointed as interim directors

## AUGUST

Legislation to establish the Treaty Authority passes parliament

North West Youth Forum held on Dja Dja Wurrung Country

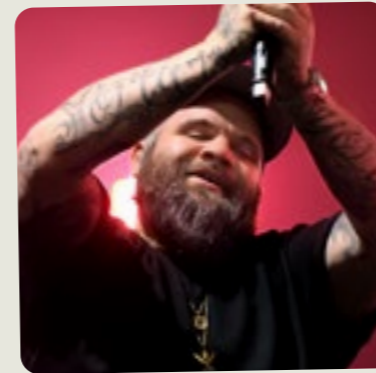
## OCTOBER

Treaty Day Out Bendigo held on Dja Dja Wurrung Country

Historic agreement to create a Self-Determination Fund and the 'rule book' for Treaty making: the Treaty Negotiation Framework

## DECEMBER

Assembly provides evidence to the Yoorrook Justice Commission on Youth Justice and Child removal



## JANUARY 2023

Assembly renews its call for governments to rethink January 26

## MARCH

Assembly decides to back the Yes vote for the Voice to Parliament at meeting on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country

Assembly releases a Statement of Intention, outlining its intent to negotiate a statewide Treaty and steps to be taken to meet the Treaty Negotiation Framework standards

## MAY

Mob turn out in their thousands to vote in the 2023 Treaty Elections

The search begins for the first members of the Treaty Authority

## FEBRUARY

North East Youth Forum on Yorta Yorta Country in Shepparton

## APRIL

Over 70 Traditional Owners nominate to stand as candidates in the Assembly Elections

Victorian Government formally acknowledges the ongoing racism and injustice experienced by First Peoples in a submission to Yoorrook

## JUNE

Treaty Day Out Naarm held on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country

**THE NEXT FIRST PEOPLES' ASSEMBLY OF VICTORIA IS ANNOUNCED!**



# WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW ON THE JOURNEY TO TREATY



## NEW ASSEMBLY LEADERSHIP

Members elect new Assembly Co-chairs, the Council, Elders' Voice Co-chairs and the Youth Voice Convenors at their first Assembly Meeting in July 2023.



Yes

## SUPPORT THE YES CAMPAIGN

The Assembly will help urge everyone in Australia to vote YES at the referendum.



## MEET THE STANDARDS OF THE FRAMEWORK

The Assembly will deliver on the commitments outlined in the Statement of Intention to satisfy the standards of Land and Waters, Community, Leadership and Inclusivity of the Treaty Negotiation Framework.



## STATEWIDE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

The Assembly is preparing to negotiate a statewide Treaty with the Victorian Government that can tackle the big structural issues. It will help create jobs, build more homes, improve education and health, reform the justice system, and more.



## HELP TRADITIONAL OWNERS GET TREATY-READY

The Self-Determination Fund will publish its funding guidelines so Traditional Owners can start accessing the resources to help prepare for Treaty negotiations in their areas.



“Youth will be living the treaties we negotiate, but they will need to carry with them the **wisdom and the knowledge** of our ancestors and Elders.”







**TREATY ELECTIONS 2023:  
YOUR VOTE, YOUR TREATY**

The Assembly has more than tripled its electoral roll since its first election in 2019 – **now more than 7,000 people** are able to have their say in Assembly Elections!



**200%**  
INCREASE IN VOTES



Mob right across the state came out in force to cast their votes in the Treaty Elections!

Voting was open between 13 May and 3 June. All eligible First Peoples were invited to choose the people who will represent Community on the shared journey to Treaty.

People could vote online, in the post, or in person at 56 locations across the state.

**Mob making decisions for mob to get Treaty done**

The new Assembly Members will be the people who negotiate the statewide Treaty with the Victorian Government – tackling the big, overarching statewide issues such as improving health, education, and justice.

The Assembly will also help empower Victoria's diverse Traditional Owner groups to negotiate Treaties that reflect the priorities and aspirations in their areas.



**56**  
VOTING BOOTHS

**74**  
CANDIDATES



**11**  
MEET THE CANDIDATES EVENTS





# WE ROCKED THE VOTE



Treaty Day Out is a music festival created by the First Peoples' Assembly to raise awareness and support for the journey towards Treaty in Victoria.

With each festival boasting an all-First Nations lineup of artists, Treaty Day Out is also a celebration of our mob, our culture and Blak excellence.

Tickets are free for mob enrolled with the Assembly, making Treaty Day Out a great reason for mob to get involved.

Our events in Bendigo (on Dja Dja Wurrung Country) in October 2022 and Naarm (Melbourne, on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country) in June 2023 brought thousands of mob and allies together in support of Treaty.

## TREATY DAY OUT BENDIGO

10

First Nations acts

3,000+

Tickets





# TREATY DAY OUT NAARM

**11**

First Nations acts

**4,400+**

Tickets

**12**

First Nations small business

**67%**

of attendees said Treaty Day Out increased their support of Treaty

**35%**

of attendees said Treaty Day Out significantly increased their awareness of Treaty





# MANY VOICES ONE JOURNEY



How strong Treaty is and what issues it will cover depends on mob getting involved.

This means getting more people enrolled with the Assembly, but it also means yarning with First Nations communities, groups, organisations and individuals to keep them up to date and seeking out their ideas and hopes for Treaty.

With momentum growing around Treaty, truth-telling and the Voice referendum, we're also starting to ask allies to walk with us and listen to what First Peoples have to say.

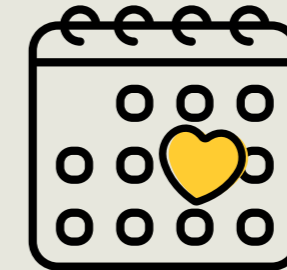
Bringing everyone on the journey is a big job. We've had pop-up stalls, yarning circles, prison visits, educational presentations and entertainment events all over the state.

## STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



**21,000+**  
EVENT ATTENDEES



**450+**  
ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

**5.2K**  
TEXT MESSAGES

**426K+**  
EMAILS

**3.5K**  
CALLS



**23**  
VISITS TO MOB  
IN PRISON



**31**  
SCHOOL  
ENGAGEMENTS



**↑ 149%**  
INCREASE IN  
ENROLMENTS  
SINCE 2021/22





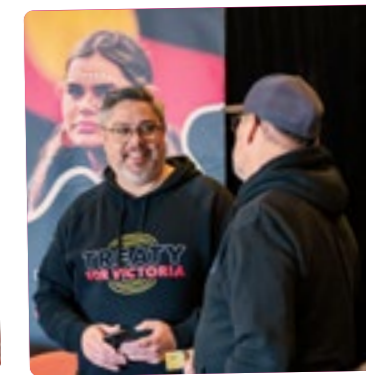
**Comedy for Treaty**

The Assembly's Comedy for Treaty Roadshow brought mob and allies together to have a laugh and show their support for Treaty.



Comedy nights featuring First Nations standup legends Sean Choolburra, Shiralee Hood and Andy Saunders were held in Warrnambool, Horsham, Melbourne and Mildura during February and March 2023.

The event series launched off the back of the successful 2 Gins on the Rocks event, held in Sebastopol in October, as well as the Garribak Comedy Night held in Shepparton in November.



**Treaty Community Forums**

There were 32 Treaty Community Forums held across Victoria in 2022/23 with over 900 people attending.

With the Treaty Authority legislation passing through Parliament

in August and agreement reached on the Treaty Negotiation Framework and Self-Determination Fund in October 2023, these events were crucial for keeping communities informed and hearing mobs' ambitions for the Treaty-making process.

**Statewide Treaty Update**

The Assembly held a Statewide Treaty Update in March 2023 with mob gathering in Naarm to yarn with Assembly Members Ngarra Murray, Alister Thorpe, Rueben Berg, Matthew Burns, Andrew Gardiner, Carolyn Briggs, Trevor Gallagher and Michael Bell.







### Connecting through sport

Mob love their sport, so what better way to get the word out about Treaty than through sporting clubs and events. The Assembly's sporting engagements included Treaty basketball tournaments, our Treaty Cup community and celebrity basketball game (in partnership with Koorie Academy Basketball), a Fitzroy Stars Treaty Round (and regular attendance at their home games), Buroinjin School Cup as well as numerous collaborations with local sporting groups across the state.

The Assembly has also worked with AFL clubs to raise the profile of Treaty.



## NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

Two centuries of racist policies and systemic problems with the justice system has taken a toll on our people and prisons are at the forefront of the effects of colonisation in Australia.

We need to hear from the people the system has failed if we want to ensure Treaty delivers real change for them and future generations.

That's why during the Assembly's elections, we specifically went into prisons to yarn with mob there given they can't come to our usual community events. In total we made 23 prison visits across the State.


Because of these yarns, 10–15% of people on our roll were incarcerated when they enrolled. These are people who often know too well the impacts of structural racism and their lived experience and knowledge is invaluable to the Treaty process.

Treaty is about systemic reform — it's about mob having a voice and the freedom and power to make the decisions about what happens to our community, Country and culture.

Our strength is in our numbers, and our numbers must include everyone. We won't be constrained by colonial structures. This is Aboriginal democracy in action.

 **23**

visits to corrections facilities

 **10–15%**

of people on our roll were incarcerated when they enrolled

## THE PATH FORWARD

The Assembly seeks feedback from mob at each of our pop-ups and events, so we can ensure we're meeting their needs on the path forward. Here's what we heard and will continue to deliver:

**TREATY PROGRESS UPDATES**

**MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG MOB TO GET INVOLVED**

**YARNS WITH ELDERS**

**BUILD UP LEADERS AND EMPOWER MOB**

**YARNING CIRCLES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ASK QUESTIONS**

**MORE EVENTS IN REGIONAL VICTORIA**

**INVOLVE MORE RAINBOW MOB, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY AND NON-VICTORIAN TRADITIONAL OWNERS**

**SUPPORT WITH RESOLVING DISPUTES**

**INFORMATION ABOUT HOW THE VOICE COULD IMPACT TREATY FOR VICTORIA**

**OPPORTUNITIES TO YARN WITH MEMBERS**

**INFORMATION ON ASSEMBLY MEETING DECISIONS**





## ROADMAP TO STATEWIDE TREATY NEGOTIATION

Following the Assembly Meeting in March, the elected Members published their “Statement of Intention” – as required by the Treaty Negotiation Framework – which confirms the Assembly’s intention to negotiate a statewide Treaty with the Victorian Government.

The statement is essentially a “roadmap” detailing the various steps the Assembly needs to take to meet the standards to enter statewide Treaty negotiations that are outlined in the Treaty Negotiation Framework.

The statewide Treaty will tackle the big, over-arching structural reform will that benefit all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria – it will seek to put the power to make decisions about Aboriginal affairs back into Aboriginal hands.

Meanwhile, Traditional Owners will also be empowered to negotiate Treaties that reflect the aspirations and priorities specific to their Country.

The roadmap outlines the steps the Assembly will take to ensure it:

- Represents and is accountable to the full diversity of all First Peoples in Victoria
- Builds and strengthens its representative structures and processes to ensure that all First Peoples’ voices are heard, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal Trusts
- Has strong governance and decision-making processes in place
- Demonstrates the collective support of all Traditional Owners and First Peoples living in Victoria for Treaty outcomes

By following the roadmap, the Assembly seeks to satisfy the Land and Waters, Community, Leadership and Inclusivity criteria set out in the Treaty Negotiation Framework.

**“We’ve been entrusted by our communities to find a path for the important and long overdue journey towards Treaty.**

**This statement is the map that will guide the next Elected Members to complete the journey and get Treaty done. Treaty will benefit everyone who calls this state home.”**

– Marcus Stewart



**A Statewide Treaty will not be a static document or a list of deliverables frozen in time. Treaty is about how we journey together. It is a living commitment to evolving and continuous agreement-making.**

*A passage from the Statement of Intention to negotiate Statewide Treaty*



# THE SECOND ASSEMBLY MEET THE MEMBERS

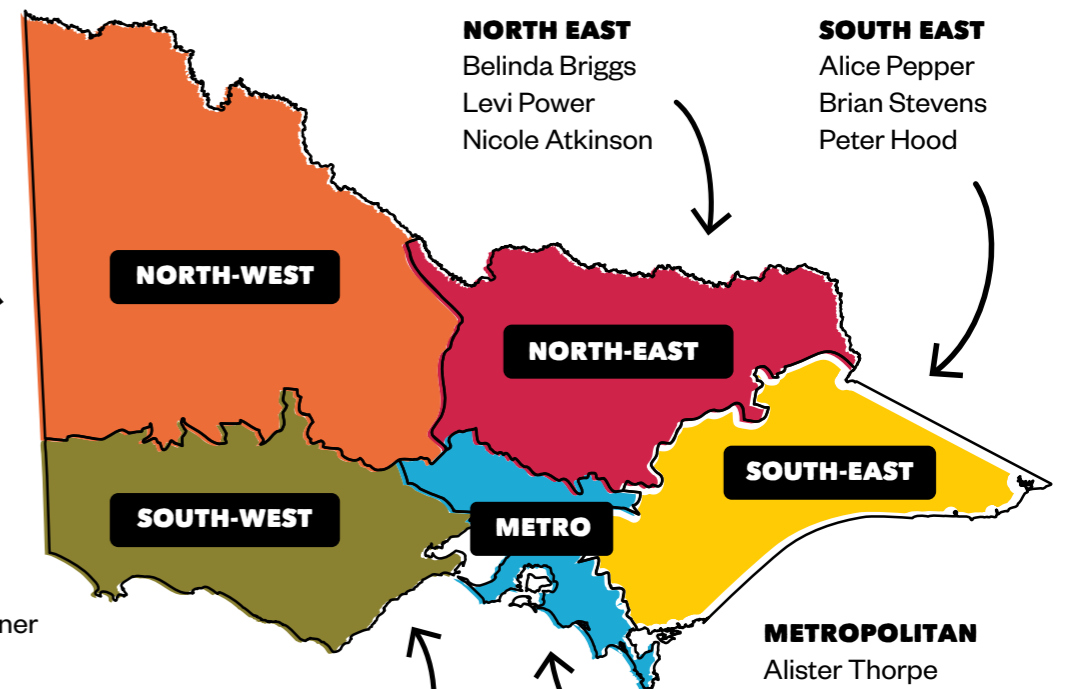


Our Members are all Traditional Owners of Country in Victoria, elected by their communities to represent their interests during the Treaty process

**NORTH WEST**  
Jacinta Chaplin  
Jason Kelly  
Uncle Rodney Carter

**NORTH EAST**  
Belinda Briggs  
Levi Power  
Nicole Atkinson

**SOUTH EAST**  
Alice Pepper  
Brian Stevens  
Peter Hood



**RESERVED SEATS**  
Uncle Andrew Gardiner  
Aunty Donna Wright  
Djaran Murray-Jackson  
Dylan Clarke  
Matthew Burns  
Melissa Jones  
Rueben Berg  
Troy McDonald  
Uncle Bryon Powell  
Zoe Upton

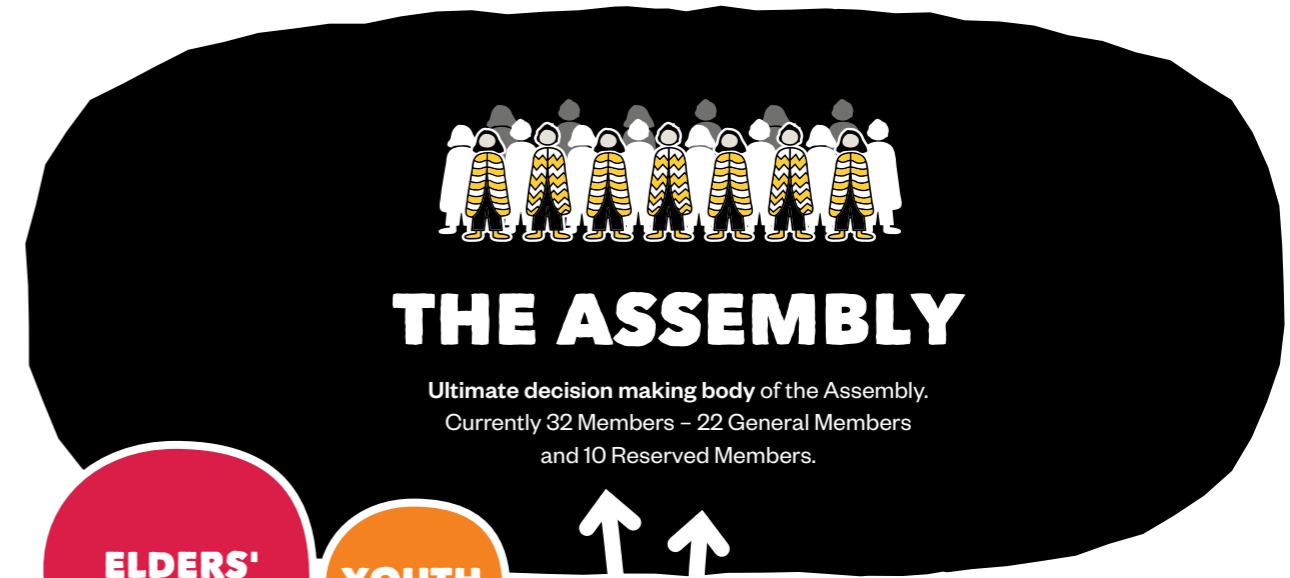
**SOUTH WEST**  
Jordan Edwards  
Sheree Lowe  
Uncle Michael "Mookeye" Bell

**METROPOLITAN**  
Alister Thorpe  
Aunty Esme Bamblett  
Barry Firebrace-Briggs  
Gary Murray  
Indi Clarke  
Nerita Waight  
Ngarra Murray  
Tracey Evans  
Troy Austin  
Uncle Shane Charles





## HOW THE ASSEMBLY IS STRUCTURED



**ELDERS' VOICE**

**YOUTH VOICE**

### ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

The Assembly looks to the Elders' Voice and the Youth Voice to ensure that mob of all ages are informing the journey to Treaty.

**Elders' Voice** provides cultural and ethical advice, guidance, wisdom and oversight to the Assembly.

**Youth Voice** will ensure that young peoples' ideas, aspirations and input is shared with the Assembly.



### COMMUNITY

- Engaged through our events, pop-ups, yarning circles, prison visits, etc.
- Eligible mob are encouraged to enrol and vote in the Assembly Elections.
- Members yarn with the mob in their region and represent their views.



### TARGETED ENGAGEMENT

To ensure the voices of all First Peoples in Victoria are heard, the Assembly seeks out the views and expertise of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal Trusts, all Traditional Owner groups, as well as First Peoples who are not Victorian Traditional Owners.



# GENERAL SEAT MEMBERS

Meet the Traditional Owners of Country who have been chosen by their communities to represent their hopes, needs and ideas on the journey to Treaty.

General Seat Members represent communities across five regions that cover Victoria: North West, North East, South West, South East and Metropolitan.



**JACINTA CHAPLIN**

*Wadi Wadi and Wamba Wamba*  
Member for North West



**JASON KELLY**

*Mutthi Mutthi and Wamba Wamba*  
Member for North West



**RODNEY CARTER**

*Dja Dja Wurrung*  
Member for North West



**JORDAN EDWARDS**

*Gunditjmara, Waddawurrung  
and Arrernte*  
Member for South West



**SHEREE LOWE**

*Peek Whurrung, Djab Whurrung  
and Kirrae Whurrung*  
Member for South West



**UNCLE MICHAEL  
'MOOKEYE' BELL**

*Gunditjmara and Boandik*  
Member for South West



**BELINDA BRIGGS**

*Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba,  
Wurundjeri and Ngiyampaa*  
Member for North East



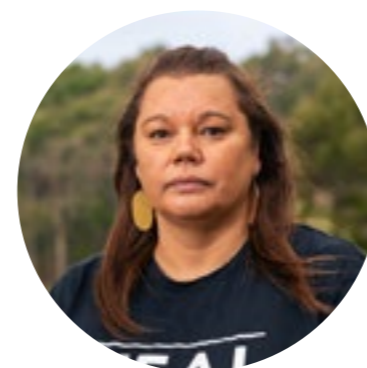
**LEVI POWER**

*Yorta Yorta*  
Member for North East



**NICOLE ATKINSON**

*Bangerang and Gunditjmara*  
Member for North East



**ALICE PEPPER**

*Gunnai, Yorta Yorta, Mutti Mutti,  
Gunditjmara and Arrernte*  
Member for South East



**BRIAN STEVENS**

*Gunai*  
Member for South East



**PETER HOOD**

*Kurnai*  
Member for South East





**ALISTER THORPE**

*Gunai, Yorta Yorta, Gunditjmara and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung*  
Member for Metro



**AUNTY ESME BAMBLETT**

*Bangerang, Taungurung and Wiradjuri*  
Member for Metro



**BARRY FIRE-BRACE-BRIGGS**

*Yorta Yorta and Ulupna*  
Member for Metro



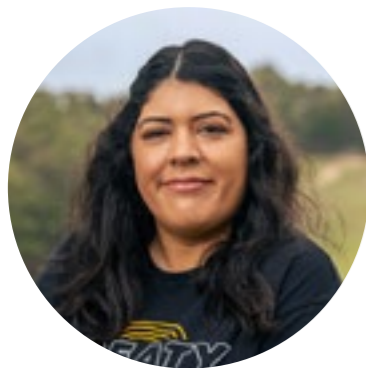
**GARY MURRAY**

*Dhudhuroa, Yorta Yorta, Barapa Barapa, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wamba Wamba, Wergaia, Wiradjeri and Waywuru*  
Member for Metro



**INDI CLARKE**

*Wemba Wemba, Mutti Mutti, Boon Wurrung, Trawlwoolway and Lardil*  
Member for Metro



**NERITA WAIGHT**

*Yorta Yorta and Narrandjeri*  
Member for Metro



**NGARRA MURRAY**

*Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta, Dhudhuroa and Dja Dja Wurrung*  
Member for Metro



**TRACEY EVANS**

*Gunditjmara and Bundjalung*  
Member for Metro



**UNCLE SHANE CHARLES**

*Wurundjeri, Boon Wurrung and Yorta Yorta*  
Member for Metro



**TROY AUSTIN**

*Gunditjmara*  
Member for Metro



# RESERVED SEAT MEMBERS

Reserved Seat Members are Traditional Owners of Country who have been chosen by their Traditional Owner groups to represent their hopes, needs and ideas on the journey to Treaty.



**UNCLE ANDREW GARDINER**

*Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung*  
Reserved Seat holder representing Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation



**UNCLE BRYON POWELL**

*Wadawurrung*  
Reserved Seat holder representing Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation



**AUNTY DONNA WRIGHT**

*Kerrympara, Nilla and Tjap Wurrung*  
Reserved Seat holder representing Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation



**DJARAN MURRAY-JACKSON**

*Dja Dja Wurrung, Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta, Dhudhuroa, Waywurru, Barapa Barapa, Wergaia and Wiradjuri*  
Reserved Seat holder representing Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation



**DYLAN CLARKE**

*Wotjobaluk, Jaadwajali, Jadwaa, Wergaia and Jupagulk*  
Reserved Seat holder representing Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation



**MATTHEW BURNS**

*Taungurung*  
Reserved Seat holder representing Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation



**MELISSA JONES**

*Latje Latje and Jupagulk*  
Reserved Seat holder representing First People of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation



**RUEBEN BERG**

*Gunditjmarra*  
Reserved Seat holder representing Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation



**TROY MCDONALD**

*Gunaikurnai*  
Reserved Seat holder representing Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation



**ZOE UPTON**

*Bunurong and Trawoolway*  
Reserved Seat holder representing Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation





# A MESSAGE FROM THE INCOMING CO-CHAIRS

Hey mob!

It's an honour and a privilege to be elected as the next Co-chairs of the Assembly.

We have a big journey ahead of us, but together with all Assembly Members and with the guidance of Community, we're ready to help get Treaty done.

Thank you to the outgoing Members of the first term of the Assembly for helping to forge the path forward towards Treaty and for staying true to mob along the way.

Through Treaty, we're getting ready to put decision-making powers back into the hands of First Peoples.

It's the right thing to do and it's the smart thing to do. It will deliver better outcomes for our people now and into the future.

**If we're going to negotiate the best and strongest Treaty possible, we'll need everyone to walk with us on this journey. There's strength in numbers, so please help encourage more mob to enrol and get involved with the Assembly to help determine the next steps we take together.**

Treaty offers us a path to a future in which our rights, our dignity, and our sovereignty as the First Peoples of this land are respected, and where everyone can enjoy, share and protect a healed and healthy Country.



We'd also love to see our collective identities, cultures and languages better recognised, respected and celebrated by everyone who now calls Victoria home.

With your support and guidance, we're confident that what was once a dream for our Elders will be a reality for our children!

**Wurruk, Booyen,  
Rueben Berg Ngarra Murray**

*Incomng Co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria*





# THE FOUNDATIONS FOR TREATY ARE IN PLACE



The Assembly has spent the last few years yarning with mob all over the state about 'how' Treaty will happen – what's the process, how can we ensure it's fair and inclusive, and so on. Those yarns have been used

to develop the foundations for Treaty-making – three important elements that work together, and that have been agreed upon with the Victorian Government to ensure that Treaty can be negotiated on our terms.

## SELF-DETERMINATION FUND

Treaty must bridge the economic divide caused by dispossession. That's why as part of the journey to Treaty, the Assembly has established the Self-Determination Fund.

The Self-Determination Fund is a First Peoples controlled and managed financial resource. It has two key purposes: to ensure Traditional Owners can enter Treaty negotiations with the state on a more level playing field, and to empower First Peoples to build capacity, wealth and prosperity for current and future generations.

**"The Self-Determination Fund will be a real game-changer as it will empower Traditional Owner groups to do things their way and let us start to bridge the economic divide that colonisation has inflicted on our people."**

– Marcus Stewart

The Fund was established in November 2022. Respected Aboriginal leader and former Victorian Treaty Advancement Commissioner, Jill Gallagher, made a foundational donation of \$102 to kickstart the Fund – followed by an initial down payment of \$35 million by the Victorian Government. A further minimum \$30 million from the government will be received for the Fund over the next two years.

Five trusted experts – all First Nations people – were appointed to manage the establishment phase of the Fund: Kerry Arabena, Nadina Brockhurst, Chris Croker, Rohan Henry and Geoff Scott.

The Interim Directors developed the Funding Guidelines that will be used for supporting Traditional Owners and First Nations communities and began the search for a CEO of the Fund. The Guidelines, along with more information about the Fund and how to access it, will be published in the coming months.

The Self-Determination Fund will have strong cultural governance processes, high standards of financial responsibility, and it will be transparent and accountable to Community in its operations.

The direction of the Fund will be capable of changing over time so that it can remain responsive to First Peoples' priorities in delivering its purposes.

**"This journey to Treaty is about putting First Peoples in the driver's seat, because we know our communities, we have the solutions. We don't need policies imposed on us, we want the freedom and power to make our own decisions. The Self-Determination Fund is a building block to make that a reality."**

– Aunty Geraldine Atkinson

The Fund will empower First Peoples to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development in exercise of First Peoples' inherent right to self-determination, which is affirmed in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

With the establishment phase of the Self-Determination Fund completed, five Directors have been appointed to oversee the next phase of the Fund. They are Nadina Brockhurst, Chris Croker, Rohan Henry, Jason Mifsud and Lisa Briggs.

It is hoped the Fund will be ready to start providing support and funds to First Peoples by the end of 2023.





## TREATY NEGOTIATION FRAMEWORK

The Treaty Negotiation Framework sets out the principles that will guide Treaty-making in Victoria and puts our Lore, Law and cultural authority at the heart of everything.

The Framework was set in place in a landmark agreement between the Assembly and the Victorian Government in October 2022. This historic agreement was the culmination of everything that we have heard from Community, and much of our work during the Assembly's first term.

The Framework covers the ground rules that will enable Traditional Owners of Country to negotiate Treaties across the state, and for the Assembly – as the democratic voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria – to negotiate a statewide Treaty to deliver structural reform.

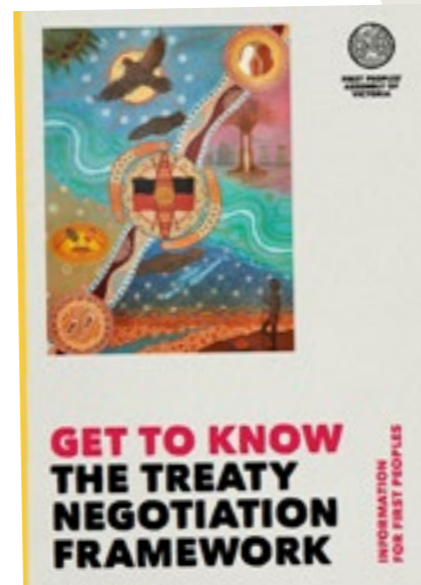
It provides Traditional Owner groups with the ability to choose their own pathways and timelines for negotiating Treaties that reflect their priorities, needs and aspirations. The Framework also explains the criteria and standards that groups need to meet if they want to enter Treaty negotiations and how they can be supported – with resourcing from the Self-Determination Fund and guidance from the Treaty Authority – to enter negotiations on more equal footing with the government.

**“We want the Framework to support Traditional Owners to decide how they want to approach negotiations. This won't be a one size fits all thing, it's about empowering groups to choose and shape their own pathways forward”**

– Aunty Geraldine Atkinson

The Framework will see the Assembly negotiate a Treaty that will deliver bold structural change – improving the lives of our people and ensuring we always have a strong voice and decision-making power. The Framework outlines the standards the Assembly must meet before negotiations begin.

In March 2023, the Assembly released a roadmap (Statement of Intention, see page 28) detailing the steps we will take to ensure the Assembly lives up to these standards.



A simplified guide to the Framework (pictured above), is available on our website. This document answers important questions for First Peoples.

The Treaty Negotiation Framework has self-determination and empowerment at its heart. It represents a new relationship between First Peoples and the State that restores cultural authority to its rightful place and recognises Aboriginal Lore, law and First Peoples' rights and responsibilities. It requires the State to step back and ensures that First Peoples can shape our own path forward, deciding how we want to approach negotiations and get Treaty done.

## TREATY AUTHORITY

The journey to Treaty isn't only about the destination – how we get there is vitally important. The Treaty Authority is the independent umpire to oversee Treaty negotiations between First Peoples and the Victorian Government and also help mob settle disputes.

Designed and led by First Peoples, the Treaty Authority will help to resolve disputes and ensure that Treaty negotiations are grounded in our culture, Lore and law.

**“Ours is the oldest living culture on the planet. It's clear that our Lore and law has stood the test of time and I'm overjoyed and very proud to see it being embedded into the very core of the new institutions we're creating to get Treaty done.”**

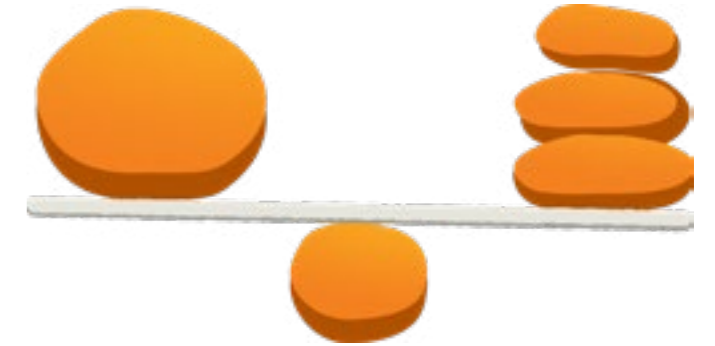
– Aunty Geraldine Atkinson

In August 2022, the Treaty Authority was enshrined into law, with historic legislation to facilitate its establishment passing the Victorian Parliament with support from all political parties.

In her address, Aunty Geraldine Atkinson urged parliament: “Don't look back on this moment in years to come to see yourself on the wrong side of history. Instead, step into this moment and have the courage to help create change.”

And to their credit, the politicians listened. The passing of the Treaty Authority legislation in August 2022 marked a significant step towards decolonisation, with the government agreeing to give up some of its power.

The Treaty Authority will sit completely outside of the usual government bureaucracy – it won't report to a Minister, its funding is insulated from the whims of political cycles, and it will be led entirely by First Peoples.



The Treaty Authority's role is to oversee and facilitate Treaty negotiations. It will make sure that parties follow the process for entering Treaty negotiations and negotiate Treaties in accordance with the Treaty Negotiation Framework. It will also help resolve any disputes that arise in the Treaty negotiation process, including between Traditional Owner groups.

The Treaty Authority will perform its role in a way that respects, observes and upholds Aboriginal Lore, law and cultural authority. It is underpinned by five key principles: self-determination and empowerment, independence and impartiality, accountability, relationships and facilitating Treaty-making, and integrity of the Treaty process for all.

**“If we want Treaty to deliver, if we want it to improve the lives of our people, we have to think outside the colonial system and instead put Aboriginal culture at the heart of all we do. I'm pleased to say the Treaty Authority will do exactly that.”**

– Marcus Stewart

An appointment process for the Treaty Authority members is currently underway and includes a public call for nominations.



## TRUTH FOR TREATY

Sometimes to move forward, we need to look back. First Peoples have been asking for truth-telling for generations and it's an important part of the journey to Treaty.

“There can be no Treaty without Truth” was a message the Assembly heard loud and clear and it's why one of the first things we negotiated with the government was the establishment of the Yoorrook Justice Commission – the first formal truth-telling process in Australia.

The role of Yoorrook is to make an official record of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples in Victoria using First Peoples' stories, and to help find solutions to systemic injustices inflicted on us. It will make detailed recommendations about practical actions and reforms needed in Victoria.

In August 2022, the Commission handed down its interim truth-telling report, which outlines the Commission's foundational work to date. Outgoing Assembly Co-chair, proud Nira illim bulluk man of the Taungurung Nation Marcus Stewart, said that the report marks the beginning of a process that will inform the shared journey to Treaty.

**“Truth-telling is important to Community. That's what we heard loud and clear during our consultations with mob across the state. Our hope is that the evidence Yoorrook has begun to gather can help us find the path towards Treaty and achieve justice for First Peoples in Victoria.”**

– Marcus Stewart.

Since September 2022, Yoorrook has focused its inquiry on the criminal justice and child protection systems. The third block of public hearings in April and May 2023 involved Victorian Government ministers, senior, bureaucrats and the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police.

### **Aunty Geraldine Atkinson gives evidence**

Outgoing Assembly Co-chair Aunty Geraldine Atkinson presented evidence at a December 2022 truth-telling hearing examining harm the justice and child protection systems continue to inflict on First Peoples.

Aunty Geraldine, a Bangerang and Wiradjuri Elder, drew on personal experiences to highlight the insidious and omnipresent nature of the racism built into government systems.

**“People were taken away from their communities, not due to anything they had done, but because the policies were inherently racist. The objective of the policies was to eradicate our people and our culture and the legacy of that objective lives on within the system today.”**

– Aunty Geraldine Atkinson

### **Next steps**

Yoorrook will deliver a 'critical issues report' in August 2023, identifying urgent reforms needed in the criminal justice and child protection systems, as well as the importance of pursuing transformative change through the Treaty process. Following the critical issues report, the focus of Yoorrook's hearings will be land justice issues.



**My mother moved us around often. She wanted to stay one step ahead, because always in the back of her mind was a very reasonable fear that the government would steal her children. We saw it happen around us.**



# EMPOWERMENT THROUGH THE GENERATIONS



When it comes to Treaty, we need the ideas and aspirations of our young people and cultural guidance of our Elders. The Elders' Voice and Youth Voice were created to empower our Elders and young people to get involved in the Treaty process.

## THE ELDERS' VOICE

The Elders' Voice is a platform for Elders in Victoria to provide cultural authority to the work of the Assembly.

Lead by two Assembly Members elected as Elders' Voice Co-chairs, the Elders' Voice brings Elders together across the state to share their knowledge and inform the journey to Treaty.



Gunditjmara Elder Auntie Charmaine Clarke and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elder Uncle Andrew Gardiner (above) served as Interim Elders' Voice Co-chairs. They yarned with Elders at gatherings all over Victoria to hear how Elders wanted to be represented in the Elders' Voice and gain an understanding of what role Elders need to play on the journey to Treaty.

Since the inception of the Elders' Voice, over 400 Elders have participated in Elders' Voice events, with more than 350 attending 17 Elders' Voice gatherings in 2022/23.

The feedback of all the Elders who attended these events has helped define the Elders' Voice and its role on the journey to Treaty.

Thanks to the work of the interim Co-chairs, the Elders' Voice was adopted as a permanent addition to the Assembly's governance structure in March 2023.

Some of the ways the Elders' Voice will inform the Assembly's decision-making are:

- having matters referred to it by the Assembly,
- requiring the Assembly to develop specific processes for Elders' Voice input into statewide Treaty negotiations,
- requiring the Assembly to report back to the Elders' Voice to show how their knowledge has been used in Assembly business, and
- requiring the Assembly hears from the Elders' Voice at Assembly Chamber meetings and Committee meetings.

Aunty Esme Bamblett (Bangerang, Taungurung and Wiradjuri Elder and Member for the Metropolitan region) and Uncle Rodney Carter (Dja Dja Wurrung Elder and Member for the North West region), pictured below, were elected as the new Elders' Voice Co-chairs at the first meeting of the new Assembly in July 2023.

They will continue to consult with Elders on the future design of an Elders' Voice under the statewide Treaty.



Artwork by **Gary Saunders**  
*Bangerang, Wiradjuri, Yorta Yorta  
and Dja Dja Wurrung*





## THE YOUTH VOICE

The Youth Voice brings young mob (ages 12 to 28) together to talk about our history, connect with other young people, practice our culture, learn from Elders and get involved in the Treaty process.

The Assembly held Youth Voice forums in Bendigo in August 2022 and Shepparton in February 2023, with more than 80 young mob in attendance.

The Youth Voice was also adopted as a permanent addition to the Assembly's governance structure in March 2023.

Alice Pepper (Gunnai, Yorta Yorta, Mutti Mutti, Gunditjmara and Arrernte woman and Member for the South East region) and Jordan Edwards (Gunditjmara, Waddawurrung and Arrernte man and Member for the South West region) were elected as the Youth Voice Convenors at the first meeting of the new Assembly in July 2023.

The Youth Voice will work with and be guided by the Elders' Voice and give young people opportunities to learn about the resilience, survival and activism of our Elders who have walked before us.

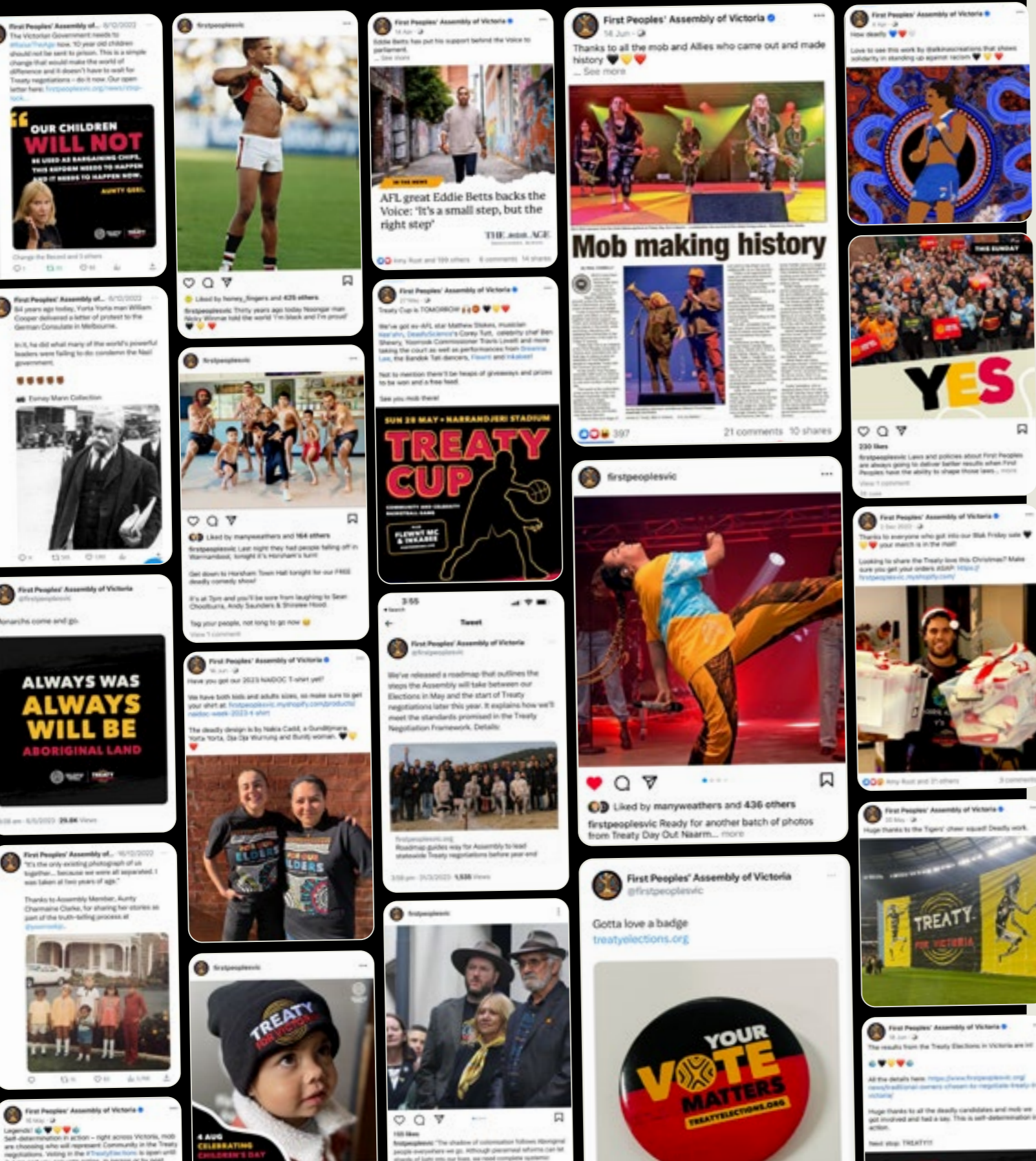


Forum artwork by **Amelia Bell**, Gunditjmara

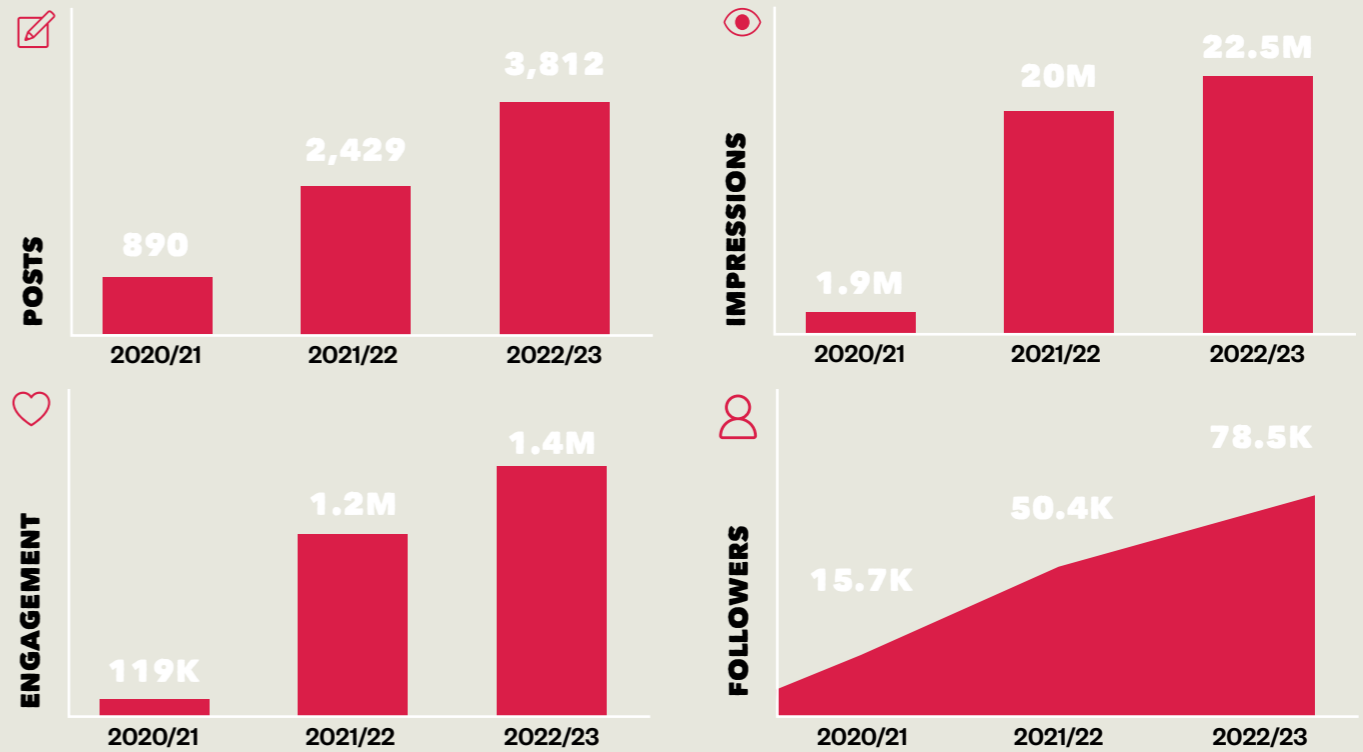




# HEARD IT ON THE RADIO SAW IT ON THE TELEVISION



## OUR GROWING SOCIAL MEDIA REACH



**27K** ↑

New followers

Including 5,788 new followers on Instagram, 8,857 on LinkedIn and 9,863 on Facebook.

**2M+**

Video views

**22.5M**

Impressions

**1.3M**

Engagements

### We're on TikTok!

We had a 95% increase in video views in 2022/23. This was largely due to our increased presence on TikTok. TikTok alone had more than 274,000 video views, amassing 2,100 followers. Importantly, our best performing videos pertained specifically to the path to Treaty, and exposure to our Co-chairs.

### Assembly takes on racist trolls

The year saw an unfortunate uptick in racist and abusive engagement with our content – likely due to the broader national debate surrounding the Voice to Parliament. The Assembly penned an open letter to Meta, the company behind Facebook, calling for better moderation and safe online spaces. The petition generated media coverage and resulted in Meta agreeing to meet with the Assembly to discuss them lifting their game ahead of the referendum.

### Winner winner

It was a big year for competitions! We ran a number of campaigns calling for community input, such as our annual NAIDOC T-shirt design competition and Treaty car design competition. Our double-pass Dreamtime at the G' competition saw 490 new enrolments, while our 'enrol a friend' campaign during the election period saw 85 new enrolments. Our 'update ya deets' competition saw 414 enrollees update their contact details ahead of the Treaty Elections.



# THE ASSEMBLY BACKS YES!



The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria supports all elements of the Uluru Statement from the Heart – **Voice, Treaty, Truth** – and has been working hard to advance all three in Victoria.

The Assembly, as the democratic and collective Voice for our people in Victoria, has been able to establish a truth-telling process and now Treaty is firmly within our reach.



## YES TO THE VOICE

We want all First Peoples around the country to also experience the benefits that come from pursuing Voice, Treaty, Truth.

As such, while recognising and respecting the diversity of views within the community, Assembly Members voted to support the proposal for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to be enshrined in the Constitution of the Commonwealth.

The Assembly will be sharing information and raising awareness as well as encouraging people to vote YES in the upcoming referendum.

**Any step forward that gives First Peoples a greater say in the decisions that affect our lives, is an important step worth taking to secure better outcomes for First Peoples.**

If governments want to help improve the lives of Aboriginal people, they need to listen to Aboriginal people. That's what the Voice is all about.

During the referendum in 1967, Aboriginal people asked to be counted. In 2023, we're asking to be listened to.

That's why the Assembly will be urging everyone in Australia to vote YES at the referendum.



## ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART EXPLAINED

The Uluru Statement was issued to the Australian people and calls for Voice, Treaty and Truth – with the first step being a constitutionally entrenched First Nations Voice to Parliament.

The Australian Government has committed to hold a Referendum – a national vote required to change the Constitution and create The Voice to Parliament. The question that will be put to the Australian people at the Referendum later this year is:

**“A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve this proposed alteration?”**

And voters will be asked to choose YES or NO.

Even when governments have good intentions, we know it doesn't work when governments make decisions about our communities without local knowledge and involvement.

Whereas, when our people are listened to, and decisions are based on local knowledge, the outcomes are always better.

The Voice is about getting better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, children, and communities.

A co-design process has explored and outlined the options for the design and structure of the Voice and its functions.



As the proposal is not to 're-invent the wheel', it's our understanding that as the democratic representative body for mob in Victoria, the Assembly will play a key role in choosing who represents Victoria on the Voice to Parliament.

If the YES vote is successful, the Assembly will be involved in shaping the final design of the Voice and will continue to yarn with mob across the state to make sure all views and ideas are heard.

You can read the Uluru Statement online at [ulurustatement.org/the-statement](http://ulurustatement.org/the-statement)

And find more information at: [firstpeoplesvic.org/yes](http://firstpeoplesvic.org/yes) and [yes23.com.au](http://yes23.com.au)





# GET ENROLLED TO GET INVOLVED

## Support Treaty and have your say

Treaty is about having the freedom and power to make the decisions that affect us and our Community – and that starts now.

## Did you know?

Our electoral roll is exactly that – ours. It's made by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people and is completely independent from government.

You can enrol with the Assembly if you are 16 years old and over AND are either:

- A Traditional Owner of Country in Victoria (living in Victoria or anywhere in the world!)
- An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person who has lived in Victoria for at least three of the last five years.

## HOW TO ENROL TO VOTE

You can enrol online or by posting an enrolment form to us.

→ [firstpeoplesvic.org/enrol](https://firstpeoplesvic.org/enrol)

You can also request for a printed enrolment form to be sent to you. If you'd like to request a printed enrolment form or need assistance with your enrolment, please contact:

☎ [enrolments@firstpeoplesvic.org](mailto:enrolments@firstpeoplesvic.org)

✉ 1800 TREATY (1800 873 289)

Those of our mob who are currently incarcerated in Victoria are also eligible to enrol via post.





## Our commitment to Community

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.



FIRST PEOPLES'  
ASSEMBLY OF  
VICTORIA

