



FIRST PEOPLES' ASSEMBLY OF VICTORIA

When Elders Speak, We Listen

A report to Community on the Elders' Voice



Acknowledgement of Country

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.

Disclaimer This document has been prepared by the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria for First Peoples in Victoria. It is intended to provide an outline of community feedback on the shape of the Elders' Voice for general informational purposes only.

Cover artwork: Gary Saunders, message Stick graphic.



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When Elders Speak, We Listen

Foreword



Ngatanwarr!

As a Gunditjmara Woman and Elder this report would not have been possible without the many contributions by Elders across the state.

We visited communities far and wide from the Murray river to Gippsland, traversing east and west of the state.

Elders spoke candidly about the issues affecting their communities and asked directly what the Elders' Voice to Treaty will give them and their communities. It is the vision that we are building a platform that supports self-determination and reinstated the cultural and social role of the Elders. The Cultural Pillars that underpin the Elders' Voice emphasize the distinctive role and regard that Elders bring to discussions on Treaty at the local, regional, and State level.

In reflecting on this work and yarns we held with Elders. It made me see the values that we as Aboriginal people have: a deep sense of community, the selfless commitment to justice, a love of family, community and a deep resilience.

Without a doubt, Treaty would have no real credence without the Elders' Voice. The way the Elders' Voice sits alongside the Assembly, it has oversight and a cultural advisory role. It's not just honorary, its essential culturally that we have that process. It grounds us. Elders Voice is there to remind us to be truthful and faithful to our own cultural heritage and values, the value of being an Aboriginal person.

I am proud of this report and am grateful to share this with my Co Chair Andrew Gardiner.

I also wish to thank Drew Berwick our Co-ordinator for his tireless work and support.

This is a team effort but most importantly this report belongs to the Aboriginal Elders of Victoria. To whom I am humbly grateful.

Aunty Charmaine Clarke

Interim Elders' Voice Co-Chair



Wominjeka!

As a proud Wurrundjeri Woi-wurrung clansman I have always considered the Elders' Voice to be a priority. It was an honour to be nominated alongside Aunt Charmaine Clarke and knowing that it was a good opportunity to have both men's business and women's business contributions. I felt responsibility to participate and talk with Elders on the Treaty process so that they got a fuller knowledge to help deliver an overarching Treaty.

Elders have had a profound impact on me. Through many yarns, I have learned a lot about what and how different people view an Elder. All of it has been a deep learning experience. The opportunity to uplift Elders is a great responsibility but it has been really rewarding. It adds so much to the value of the work we are doing to engage with them within the Treaty aspects and for their communities. We are trying to put Elders back up on the pedestal where they belong.

The Elders' Voice gives the Assembly cultural protocol and authority. It gives it cultural recognition. It gives it cultural acknowledgement that our Elders can participate and help lead their communities to participate in the Treaty process.

Thank you to all the Elders who have participated so far. We respect you. We want you to be involved, We need you to participate and help lead your communities along this Treaty journey. The fundamental message of this report remains, "When Elders Speak, We Listen".

Uncle Andrew Gardiner

Interim Elders' Voice Co-Chair

Introduction

‘The voices of our Elders must be heard and respected. Elders are at the heart of every step we take on the journey to Treaty.’

The First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria (the Assembly) is the independent and elected voice for Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Treaty process. There are currently 30 Members of the Assembly, all Traditional Owners of Country in Victoria, elected by their communities to represent their hopes, needs and ideas.

In March 2023, following 20 months of extensive consultation with Elders across the state, the Assembly established an Elders’ Voice that will guide the Assembly’s journey to advance the Treaty process in Victoria.

The purpose of this report is to outline:

- the Assembly’s Elders’ Voice and how feedback from Elders has been included, and
- consultations undertaken by the Assembly’s Interim Elders’ Voice Co-Chairs, respected Elders and Assembly Members, Aunty Charmaine Clarke (Gunditjmara) and Uncle Andrew Gardiner (Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung).

The Assembly established an Interim Elders’ Voice with two key purposes:

- to consult Elders on the design of an Elders’ Voice, and
- provide cultural and ethical advice, wisdom and oversight to the Assembly.

Between August 2021 and March 2023, the Interim Elders’ Voice Co-Chairs spoke with over 390 Elders in 36 different engagements that included yarning circles, meetings, kitchen-table conversations, individual phone calls and long yarns. This makes this consultation process one of the most extensive processes undertaken with Elders in Victoria’s recent history.

COVID-19 impacted on the Co-Chairs’ consultations significantly. The Co-Chairs re-started in-person gatherings and meetings with Elders across the state as soon as it was possible. Additional time was taken to respond to requests to revisit some areas for further consultation.

Many in the community hoped the Elders’ Voice would be established sooner. Others thought more time was needed to speak with as many Elders from remote and regional communities as possible. The Co-Chairs agreed that the importance of the Elders’ Voice warranted careful and respectful consideration.

The Interim Elders’ Voice Co-Chairs’ guidance has informed the Assembly’s decision-making on key parts of the Treaty process, particularly developing the Treaty Negotiation Framework, Self-Determination Fund and Treaty Authority.

With the foundations for the Treaty process now in place, the role of the Assembly will shift to focus on representing mob in negotiating a Statewide Treaty and overseeing the Self-Determination Fund. The Elders’ Voice will continue to provide cultural and ethical advice, guidance and wisdom to the Assembly at all levels of decision-making.

What is Treaty?

A Treaty is an agreement between First Peoples and the Government. It is an opportunity to make sure First Peoples have the power to make the decisions that affect their communities, culture and Country.

In Victoria there will be two types of Treaty:

- Statewide Treaty to cover state-wide matters that may result in significant changes to Victoria's structures and systems of government and
- Traditional Owner Treaties, where Traditional Owners can negotiate matters over their Country.

For more information about Treaty and what it may mean for First Peoples see www.firstpeoplesvic.org/treaty/

How to get involved in the Elders' Voice

The Elders' Voice plays a crucial role in guiding the work of the Assembly. Any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Elder living in or with ties to Victoria can attend Elders' Voice events.

If you are an Elder, we want to hear from you!

Call the Elders' Voice Hotline, email us, or find an in-person Elders' Voice gathering happening near you.

Phone: 1800 TREATY (1800 873 289)

Email: Eldersvoice@firstpeoplesvic.org

Website: firstpeoplesvic.org/elders-voice

Sitting fees will still be paid for your time and input.

WHEN ELDERS SPEAK, WE LISTEN.



1 The Elders' Voice

Overview

The Assembly has established an Elders' Voice that acknowledges the role, status and cultural authority of the Elders' Voice as an essential part of the Assembly's governance.

The Elders' Voice will:

- provide cultural and ethical advice, guidance, wisdom and oversight to the Assembly, including the Youth Voice,
- assist the Assembly to develop and carry out a process to seek the support of First Peoples to Treaty negotiation outcomes,
- provide cultural and ethical guidance to the Treaty Authority when asked, and
- continue to consult with Elders on the future design of an Elders' Voice under Statewide Treaty.

There will be two Co-Chairs of the Elders' Voice, both Members of the Assembly. The Co-Chairs must be Elders, must represent different regions of Victoria and there will be a gender balance. The Co-Chairs will be appointed by the Assembly.

The Assembly will resource and provide operational support for the Elders' Voice, so it is able to fulfil its functions.

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.

The Assembly considered whether to establish an Elders' Council with the election of a set number of Elders from different regions. In response to feedback that the Elders' Voice be inclusive, and with the Assembly moving into preparing to negotiate Statewide Treaty, it was decided that a more flexible and inclusive model was required at this stage.

The Elders' Voice has the flexibility to evolve over time in line with Community aspirations, and as Treaty negotiations progress to Treaty outcomes. The Elders' Voice will continue to consult with Elders on the future design of an Elders' Voice under the Statewide Treaty.

“Who is going to tell the stories of our Elders, the ones that came before us?”

How the Elders’ Voice will do business

The Elders’ Voice will have autonomy to decide how it undertakes its business.

The Assembly recognises that the Elders’ Voice needs to be culturally strong and include cultural requirements into its design and approach.

Four cultural pillars, cultural safety protocols and the use of a Message Stick are used in Elders’ Voice meetings and yarning circles. Throughout the consultations there was strong and consistent community support for all three elements. As a result, they have been built into the Elders’ Voice.

- The four cultural pillars are **Respect**, **Connectedness**, **Knowledge Base** and **Aboriginal Lore of the Land**. Further detail about the pillars can be found at Appendix 3.



- **Cultural safety** was often raised by Elders along with the need for highly respectful, considerate, and democratic practices and processes. The cultural safety protocols (as listed in Appendix 4) are read out and discussed at each yarning circle and meeting.
- **Message stick** - the Interim Elders’ Voice introduced a process at yarning circles and meetings where a traditionally carved Message Stick is passed between participants who wish to speak. The Message Stick was crafted by Peek Whurrong Elder, Uncle Rob Lowe, specifically for the Elders’ Voice. The Message Stick ensures everyone gets a fair go when having their say and was a welcome cultural element in Elders’ discussions.



The Elders' Voice and Eldership

The Elders' Voice will not define Elder or Eldership or set criteria for participation in Elders' Voice meetings and events.

“Our Elders are defined by our family groups.”

It was clear from consultations across Victoria that First Peoples' families, clans and communities value their Elders highly, with each giving the responsibility of Eldership in their own unique and culturally determined ways. Elders felt that a process to confirm who are Elders and Eldership should be led by families and the Elders themselves.

The Elders' Voice invites all First Peoples living in Victoria who consider themselves an Elder to participate in the Elders' Voice.

“Elders have a particular role, and we need to make a framework that reflects that. Elders must be an integral part of how that develops.”

How the Elders' Voice will engage with Elders

Feedback from Elders as part of the consultations were:

- the Assembly should meet Elders where they are located,
- Elders should be able to engage with the Assembly in a flexible manner,
- regional representation via regional forums and events is important, and
- that the Elders' Voice is inclusive, meaning all Elders across the state can participate in activities and provide input.

In response to this feedback, the Elders' Voice will:

- engage and seek input from Elders at the state, regional and local level,
- have a calendar of Elders' forums, meetings and yarning circles held at the state, regional and local level. Elders participating in these events will be provided with supporting materials to assist Elders be fully informed about the Treaty related matters before them,
- provide support for Elders to participate and make sure that Elders' Voice events are accessible and easy to attend,
- continue to engage and inform Elders via newsletters and the Elders' Voice Hotline, and
- work closely with all Traditional Owner Elders' Councils and all new and emerging Elders' groups around the state.



“Everyone should have their voice. If they have their children, grandchildren they have a duty to the next generation.”

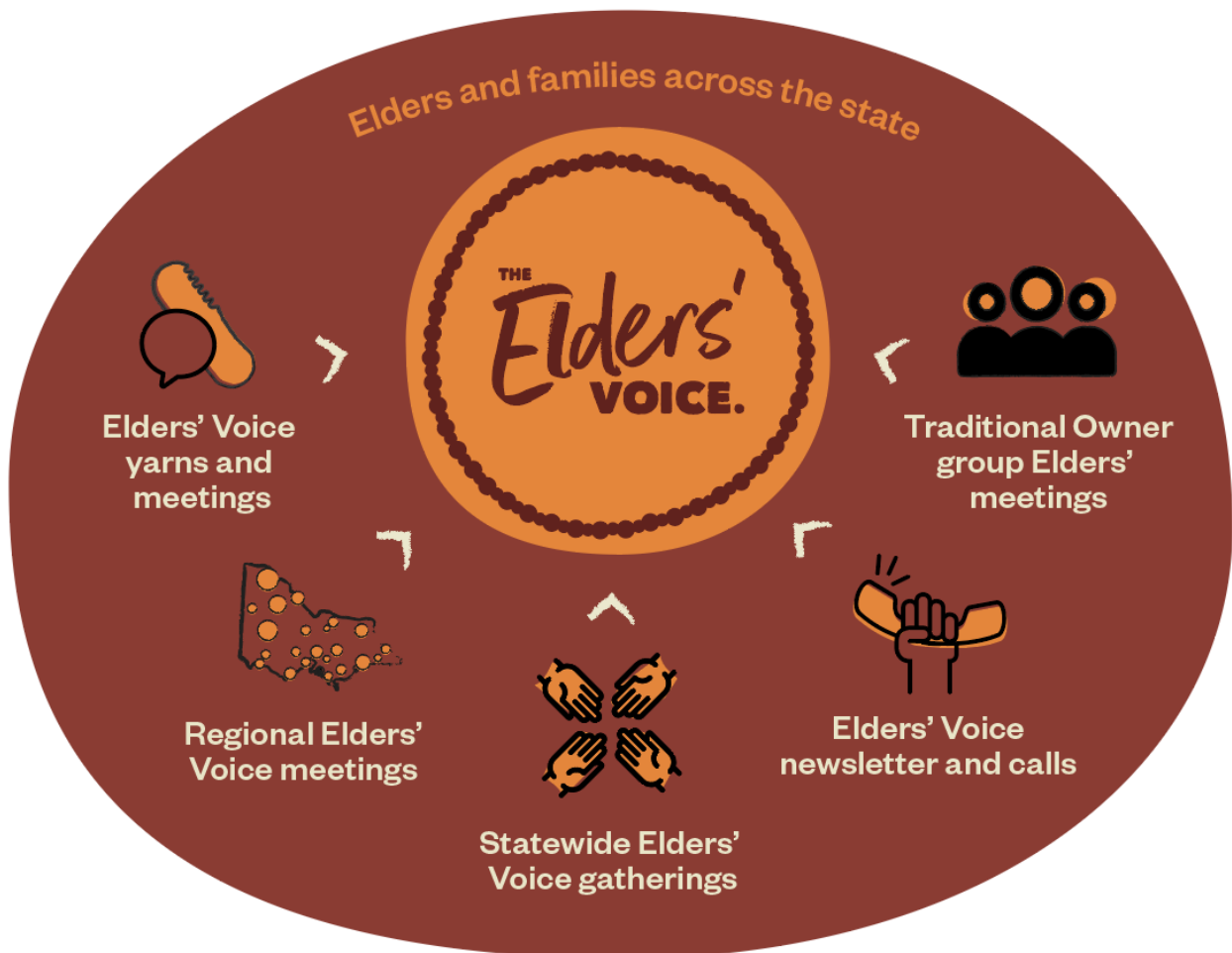


Figure 1: How the Assembly's Elders' Voice will engage Elders

“Elders remember the stories told from their families before them and are able to pass them on to members of the community.”

2 Listening to Elders – Summary of Consultations

From August 2021 until March 2023, the Interim Elders' Voice Co-Chairs, Aunty Charmaine Clarke and Uncle Andrew Gardiner, spoke with over 390 Elders in more than 36 yarning circles, one-on-one meetings and other engagement activities across Victoria. The dates and locations of these engagements are listed in Appendix 1.

Elders have advised how the Elders' Voice should define Eldership, where and how it should meet, and how it could be structured. This rich community feedback is summarised in the following two sections.

2.1 The importance of Elders

Consultations with Elders asked a consistent series of open-ended questions exploring Eldership. Responses to these questions are summarised under the following themes:

- What defines an Elder?
- Cultural Authority of Elders
- Elders as mentors and educators
- Elders as community leaders
- Strengthening and supporting Eldership.

2.2 What an Elders' Voice should look like?

Elders were also asked a series of questions exploring what the Elders' Voice should look like. Elders' feedback and responses to these questions are summarised under the following themes:

- Representation and size
- Meeting locations and frequency
- Roles and functions of the Elders' Voice
- Support for participation in the Elders Voice
- What Treaty outcomes are important to Elders?

The following sections collate the ideas, input, and contributions from Elders and First Peoples across Victoria. Feedback is not identified by region or Traditional Owner groups. Feedback from Elders specific to a local area, town, a Traditional Owner group has not been highlighted.

All the quotes in this report are directly from Elders who have participated in the yarning circles or meetings.

Not all stories can be shared or are included in this report. Some stories told to us by Elders are public and some stories are private. We have strived to protect and preserve the cultural knowledge, stories and wisdom that Elders have decided to share.

The Assembly is committed to ensure that the ideas, stories and knowledge shared with us is maintained in a way that respects and protects Indigenous Data Governance and Indigenous Data Sovereignty and is only used in ways that are respectful, protective and accountable to Traditional Owners and First Peoples across Victoria to empower self-determination and effective self-governance.¹

The ideas, concerns and feedback from Elders have fed directly into how the Elders' Voice can be shaped and how it should provide its wisdom, guidance, and advice to the Assembly.

We honour and thank all Elders for giving their time and wisdom to this process.

2.1 The importance of Elders

What defines an Elder?

How Elders are defined by their communities was an initial question for discussion at all Elders' Voice events. This fundamental question opened rich conversations and views on the roles and status of Elders in Victoria's diverse Traditional Owner and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

“An elder is someone who is strong and worked in the community. An elder is someone who is respected in their community for what they have done.”

“The age don't matter for our way. It is about your knowledge and what you have done and brought to the community.”

There was a common view that Eldership is about more than age. Personal integrity, leadership, community respect, a person's life experiences, and cultural knowledge were all seen as important characteristics of Eldership that went beyond and were separate to a person's age.

Whilst a person's age was raised as an important characteristic, there was a range of views about what that meant, and the status conferred by reaching a certain age in life. The differing life expectancies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within Australia was also acknowledged.

¹ **Indigenous Data** as endorsed by delegates at the 2018 Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit, refers to information or knowledge, in any format or medium, which is about and may affect First Peoples both collectively and individually. **Indigenous Data Governance** as endorsed by delegates at the 2018 Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit, refers to the right of First Peoples to autonomously decide what, how, and why Indigenous Data is collected, accessed, disclosed and used. It ensures that data on or about First Peoples reflects First Peoples' priorities, values, cultures, worldviews, and diversity. **Indigenous Data Sovereignty** as endorsed by delegates at the 2018 Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit, refers to the rights of First Peoples to exercise ownership over Indigenous Data. Ownership of Indigenous Data can be expressed through the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination, and reuse of Indigenous Data.

“Age can define an Elder, but it is their knowledge and life experiences they can pass on that really makes them an Elder.”

“Cultural experiences and respect. Only talk when you are asked.”

The idea that a person of more than 50 years of age could be considered having Elder status was a consistent view, with the acknowledgement that someone far younger could be seen and treated with the respect and status of Eldership depending on their community context. It was widely accepted and agreed that age alone does not determine Eldership.

“It is hard to determine what defines an Elder. It can be about someone that is respected. It could be someone who is 95 but no one respects them.”

Participants raised many qualities of Eldership considered important beyond a person’s age. These included resilience, honesty, generosity, patience, and care for family and younger generations. The roles that an Elder takes on within their family, clan or community or within wider society were also seen as important.

“It’s not the age, it is about how the people view you in the community and give you that honour of recognition to be an Elder.”

It was acknowledged that the deep respect for a person’s age, as reflected in terms ‘Aunt’ and ‘Uncle’ used to address Elders or other respected community members, regardless of their actual familial relationship, is a widely shared cultural value and common to First Peoples’ communities throughout the country and around the world.

These terms convey a sense of respect, warmth, and kinship. The use of these terms embodies the importance of kinship, community, and intergenerational learning in Indigenous cultures, and underscores the value placed on relationships and social connections. Additionally, these terms reinforce the importance of traditional cultural practices and customs that have been passed down through generations.

“We need to share the stories and pay respect to those Elders that have been forgotten about. We need to walk in their shoes and share their memories.”

It was an honour to hear the voices and views of so many of our Elders across the state and to be able to discuss these issues in respectful, culturally safe ways.

The Cultural Authority of Elders

“As we get older and wiser we become Elders. The young people look at us for leadership, for cultural support and knowledge of heritage. An Elder could be someone who has advice. Elders don’t have to be from my family - they can be community.”

It was widely agreed that Elders have cultural authority, referring to the power and influence that they hold in matters related to cultural traditions, knowledge, and values. Cultural authority comes from Aboriginal Lore and Law and includes rules about Eldership and who has authority to speak about Country.

This cultural authority is based on several factors, including Elders’ life experiences, wisdom, and knowledge of traditional or customary practices that have been passed down through generations. Knowledge areas include language, spirituality, land use, and social relationships.

Aboriginal Lore and Law lives in dreaming, art, song, ceremony, dance, and stories and informs relationships, ways of doing business and governance. We heard about the vital role of Elders in preserving, maintaining and transmitting this to future generations. We heard the grief expressed by Elders that so much has been lost through colonisation.

The Elders’ Voice is committed to maintaining and strengthening the cultural authority of Elders within the Assembly’s work and in all aspects of Treaty.

Elders as mentors and teachers

“We need to encourage the next generation to walk alongside, encourage young people to walk alongside our Elders, and understand cultural history.”

Elders’ roles in providing formal and informal mentoring and education were commonly raised in yarning circles and all Assembly consultations. This was linked with the awareness that the role Elders played in the holding of Cultural Knowledge as well as the passing on or teaching of that Cultural Knowledge.

“We have to keep telling these stories. If we don’t, the younger people won’t know and have that knowledge.”

“Self-determination is to promote our Aboriginality for our young people, so they are strong and know where they come from.”

The importance of the relationship between Elders and young people in the community was discussed, including the need for Elders’ involvement in rites of passage and kinship systems. Elders’ important position as role models and mentors for younger members of the community was often raised. Elders often act as leaders, guiding and advising younger members of the community on important matters. They provide guidance and support for those who are struggling and help to instil a sense of cultural identity and pride in younger generations. It was acknowledged that many Elders are working to re-build and strengthen this important role.

“We are getting in the schools now and educating our young ones. They are proud and standing up for themselves. They are confident to talk as an Aboriginal person.”

“Young people look up to the Elders to see how they present themselves. It is about honesty, integrity, and leadership.”

The Elders’ Voice’s relationship with the Assembly’s Youth Voice has been informed by these conversations.

Elders as community leaders

“An Elder is a leader, pushes other people and someone you can confide in.”

In addition to their knowledge, it was widely recognised that Elders are also respected for their life experiences.

They have lived through many struggles and have a wealth of knowledge and wisdom that comes from lived experience. They have faced challenges and overcome obstacles, and their ability to navigate difficult situations makes them a valuable resource for the community.

These leadership roles can entail responding to and assisting communities with conflict and lateral violence. Elders’ roles as peacemakers, mediators and even a calming and respectful presence in community were acknowledged. The cultural burden, personal stress and individual accountabilities attached to these roles were also acknowledged.

“Elders that are connected, know who we are and who each other is in their communities.”

“Elders know family connections. They would provide a feed and a bed.”

Elders spoke of culturally based rules and values that stress the expectation that Elders only speak on behalf of their own mob or Traditional Owner group about issues regarding their own Country and business.

Whilst it was acknowledged that an Elder should, first and foremost, ‘look after’ and be accountable to their family, Clan, and local group, the broader leadership roles of Elders was praised. There were discussions that Elders’ representation and accountability operates across many layers of family and community networks.

The Elders’ Voice remains committed to supporting and building the role of Elders as strong community leaders.

Strengthening and supporting Eldership

Many agreed that the roles and status of Elders was under significant stress from both historical dislocation and modern stresses upon families and communities.

“Some people don’t have Elders and family to guide them so they don’t respect their Elders the way they should.”

Some participants expressed feeling uncomfortable about being called an Elder. Others reflected on the fact that they may have Elders who are older than they are – but at the same time will be seen as Elders by the younger members of their community. This reflects the degree of complexity and uncertainty that is involved in taking on both the title and responsibilities of Eldership.

“I never liked being called an Elder.”

**“If you are the last of your family, do you become an Elder?
Even if you are younger?”**

Participants widely agreed that Eldership needed to be strengthened within communities and the status of Elders needed to be respected.

The status and role of Eldership within First Peoples’ communities is not conferred lightly. It was seen to be earned as well as conferred. Elders said that strong relationships with family and close kin, and values of sharing and mutual responsibility are at the very heart of Eldership.

This complex, unique, and powerful cultural process is time honoured and immemorial. We honour it.

2.2 What the Elders’ Voice should look like

Representation and size

Representation was seen as integral to the Elders’ Voice. The importance of adequate representation across communities and regions was raised consistently.

The need to represent all Traditional Owner groups was considered important, ensuring that both legally recognised Traditional Owner groups as well as other Traditional Owner groups are included. Elders urged representation for those from Stolen Generations and for Elders whose Country is far away.

Some participants indicated a preference that Elders be chosen from the wider community rather than representing specific groups or nominated by specific groups.

Gender balance was raised consistently, as an important cultural requirement and to reflect the significant but differing roles of Aunts and Uncles in communities.

It was stressed by many Elders that representation of the Elders' Voice should not be concentrated in the metropolitan or regional centres but include the voices of remote and regional Elders. Including local knowledge and insights was considered important.

“Needs to be reps from river people, mallee people, desert people...”

There was more varied feedback on the number of representatives on the Elders' Voice.

Some said that eighty or more Elders would be needed to represent the diversity across the state. Others suggested that representatives could be drawn from each of the five Assembly electoral regions and that a small number would be sufficient.

The Elders' Voice agrees that representation is vital. It is for this reason that the Assembly has adopted a model that allows for the broadest possible participation and representation of voices and views.

Meeting frequency and locations

Community feedback varied on the frequency and locations of Elders' Voice meetings and events.

The capacity of Elders to attend long and distant meetings was consistently raised as a consideration.

Holding regional meetings at locations where Elders could travel to easily was considered important by many. Others highlighted the importance of holding gatherings on Country.

“Melbourne is not the centre.”

Meeting four times a year was raised as a suggestion whilst others suggested bi-monthly. The option of holding online meetings and providing support to Elders to provide for this were raised as suggestions.

“The Elders Voice needs to go and visit the Elders that aren't as mobile.”

“Be good to have it on Country, the Elders want to be on Country.”

In response, the Assembly has adopted a model that allows for broad regional inclusion and the holding of Elders' Voice meetings and events where Elders are located.

“Community wants to meet with Elders on ceremony grounds in each region to have these discussions – we need to get back on land for doing business.”

Roles and functions of the Elders’ Voice

“Our Elders are our kings and queens.”

There was a range of community feedback on the roles, functions, and decision-making powers of the Elders’ Voice.

There was wide agreement that the Assembly needs to listen to and be guided by the wisdom and insight of Elders. There was wide agreement that the Assembly’s decision-making be influenced by the Elders’ Voice at every level.

The authority and status of Elders within Clans, families and groups were discussed as significant. Elders felt that the Elders’ Voice should be a powerful, guiding role which reflects the unique roles Elders play in First Peoples’ society.

“Elders’ Council has equal law to the coloniser law.”

“The Elders’ Voice is there to guide the Assembly Members.”

It was suggested that the Elders’ Voice work with and support local Elders’ groups and those established by Traditional Owner groups.

The name of the Elders’ Voice was discussed at many Elders’ Voice events. An ‘Elders’ Council’ was suggested as having more authority. Others preferred to maintain an Elders’ Voice. There were also concerns that the ‘Elders’ Voice’ in Victoria, might be confused with the National Voice to Parliament.

The need for the Elders’ Voice to have a relationship and role with young people, and a formal relationship with the Assembly’s Youth Voice, was raised consistently.

Elders maintained diverse views on various roles and powers of Elders’ Voice and often did not reach agreement about all elements of an Elders’ Voice. The Interim Elders’ Voice Co-Chairs sought to incorporate different points and ideas and identify commonalities and principles.

The result of this work is described in Section 1 of this report, *The Elders Voice*.

Support for participation in the Elders' Voice

“I don't want the carer to hold my hand but just someone to get me to and from the meeting and assist me if I need to.”

“We should be paying Elders for their time and contributions.”

“The Assembly needs to engage better with Elders through different [avenues] other than online.”

“The Assembly could send more information out to Elders considering most of them are not online.”

“I'm concerned about whether Elders have transport to attend meetings.”

The barriers to participation in Elders' Voice events were explored by the Interim Elders' Voice and was an area of concern for the Co-Chairs. The importance of supporting Elders to participate in Elders' Voice events and activities was raised often.

Suggested supports required for the Elders' Voice included:

- remuneration for attendance at meetings
- transport or transport assistance
- provision of and support with online technology
- capacity for carers or family members to attend meetings if required
- the provision of childcare and healthcare as needed
- flexible meetings times outside of drop off and pickup school hours.

We also heard that Elders' Voice participation and engagement should consider the wider family of Elders.

“We need to come together as a community to move forward and teach each other lore/cultural knowledge. Elders should be teaching kids cultural knowledge.”

Treaty outcomes for Elders

As community leaders, advocates and spokespeople, Elders raised a wide range of issues that are important to communities.

Elders spoke clearly for the need for strong and impactful Treaty outcomes that benefit the most vulnerable and that meet long-held aspirations for self-determination and the restoration of the rightful place of First Peoples. Many Elders had been calling for Treaties their entire lives.

A range of issues were raised by Elders including:

- strengthening self-determination
- access to local health and Elders' services
- family violence services
- young peoples' education
- access to adequate housing
- Cultural Knowledge and history-keeping
- justice reforms and strengthening of the Koori Courts
- the repatriation of ancestral remains and sacred objects
- support and mentoring of young people.

“More support for Aboriginal health and disability, particularly Elders.”

“We want to see our aspirations for our old people and Elders.”

‘We need to have our spaces for our Elders, and our youth. We also need to have a space for disability, for LGBTIQ+.’

Many of these issues are likely to be included within core subject matters in both Statewide and Traditional Owner Treaty negotiations in the years ahead.

The Elders' Voice is committed to ensuring that all issues of importance to Elders across the state are heard by the Assembly and included in Treaty negotiations.

For more information about Treaty and how you can have your say, go to www.firstpeoplesvic.org



Appendix 1: Interim Elders' Voice Engagements

Interim Elders' Voice engagements and events

Below is the list of 36 engagements with 390 Elders that took place between August 2021 and March 2023.

Year	Date	Location	Assembly Region	Attendees	Mode
2021	17 August	Swan Hill	North West	3	Online
	18 August	Mildura Session 1	North West	22	Online
	18 August	Mildura Session 2	North West		Online
	23 August	Barengi Gadjin Land Council	North West	1	Online
	28 September	Ringwood	Metro	7	Online
	16 November	Eildon - Taungurung	North East	6	In person
	8 December	Hamilton	South West	3	In person
2022	8 February	Warrnambool	South West	2	In person One-on-one
	9 February	Portland	South West	1	In person One-on-one
	14 February	Preston	Metro	1	In person One-on-one
	26 May	Robinvale	North West	4	In person
	14 June	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency	Metro	30	Online
	20 June	Bendigo – Dja Dja Wurrung	North West	12	In person
	20 July	Horsham	North West	18	In person
	21 July	Ballarat	South West	26	In person
	16 August	Geelong - Wathaurung Co-Op Day Session	South West	23	In person
	16 August	Geelong - Wathaurung Co-Op Evening Session	South West		In person
	17 August	Warrnambool	South West	17	In person
	23 August	Shepparton	North East	10	In person
	26 August	Ararat	North West	18	In person
	12 September	Warrnambool	South West	2	In person One-on-one

Year	Date	Location	Assembly Region	Attendees	Mode
	13 September	Warrnambool	South West	1	In person One-on-one
	14 September	Geelong	South West	1	In person One-on-one
	10 October	Yarrawonga	North East	10	In person
	2 November	Seymour	North East	7	In person
	8 November	Wodonga	North East	9	In person
	21 November	Lake Tyers	South East	9	In person
	22 November	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Council Elders Council	South East	15	In person
	23 November	Morwell	South East	10	In person
2023	8 February	Aborigines Advancement League	Metro	32	In person
	10 February	Warrnambool	South West	11	In person
	22 February	Heidelberg	Metro	23	In person
	23 February	Frankston	Metro	17	In person
	10 March	Hastings	Metro	21	In person
	22 March	Shepparton	North East	4	In person
	23 March	Echuca	North East	14	In person

Other engagements and consultations with Elders

In addition to the group consultations, the Elders' Voice Co-Chairs conducted many one-on-one yarns with Elders, that took place over the phone and in person.

Assembly Members also spoke with and consulted with Elders as they engaged with community in their regions or Traditional Owner groups.

The role of Elders and the Elders' Voice was discussed in Assembly engagements from 2020 through to 2023, many of which were attended by the Elders' Voice Coordinator. The role of the Elders' Voice was also raised in responses to the Assembly's large state-wide Treaty Survey in March and April 2022. Reports from those engagements and the Treaty Survey are available on the Assembly's website.²

² See First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, Our Journey to Treaty: Report on Community Feedback, 2022, <<https://www.firstpeoplesvic.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FPAV-Community-Engagement-Report-2022.pdf>>

Appendix 2: Privacy Consent statement

Privacy Consent Statement - Interim Elders' Voice consultations

This statement should be read by one of the Co-Chairs at the start of the meeting.

Before we begin this conversation, I would like to explain how your information will be used and stored and make sure you are comfortable with this.

The Assembly is honoured to hear your story, and to listen to your aspirations for the Elders' Voice and Treaty.

We, the Assembly, are collecting this information for the purposes of carrying out our work. The information you share will be used within the Assembly to collate Elders' feedback on the Elders' Voice and the Treaty negotiation process. Your information will not be disclosed except in accordance with our Privacy Policy or as required by law. You can find our Privacy Policy on our website (www.firstpeoplesvic.org/privacy-statement).

You may request access to any information that we have collected from you. You can contact us to access and seek correction of your information or make a complaint about how we have handled your information. This is outlined in our Privacy Policy.

Do you agree to us collecting your information purposes of establishing a permanent Elders' Voice and progressing the Treaty process?

Community member must agree.

Do you agree to us recording this conversation for the purposes I've outlined? (This recording will be securely stored and only used by the Assembly to collate feedback and will not be publicly available)

Community member must agree.



Appendix 3: Four Cultural Pillars

Four Cultural Pillars

The Elders' Voice is underpinned by four cultural pillars: respect, connectedness, knowledge base, and Aboriginal lore of the land.

Respect – Honour, Cultural Authority and Integrity.

Connectedness – Building communities, Kinship/ Clan, Future Generations.

Knowledge Base – Wisdom, Cultural and spiritual connection.

Lore of the land – Cultural Protocols, Uphold Cultural Lore.



These cultural pillars have been discussed at every consultation and are often referred to in Elders' Voice conversations.

The Elders' Voice found that there was strong and consistent community support for the Four Cultural Pillars. These will continue to underpin the work of the Elders' Voice.

Appendix 4: Cultural Safety Protocols

Cultural safety is an important principle that underpins how the Elders' Voice operates. Cultural safety was raised often by Elders along with the need for highly respectful, considerate, and democratic practices and processes.

Cultural safety can only be defined by First Peoples and can mean different things to different people. Its meaning is still evolving. The term originated in the 1980s in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the work of Māori nurse and scholar Dr Irihapeti Ramsden³, when exploring the influence of colonialism in nursing education.

There is a general understanding that a culturally safe environment is free of racism.⁴

Other features supporting cultural safety include:

- an understanding of and respect for one's culture
- an acknowledgement of difference, and a requirement that participants are actively mindful and respectful of difference(s)
- an understanding and acknowledgement of power relations
- an appreciation of the historical context of colonisation, the practices of racism at individual and institutional levels, and their impact on First People's living and wellbeing, both in the present and past.

The Cultural Safety Protocols were read out by one of the Elders' Voice Co-Chairs and discussed at each yarning circle and meeting. There was strong and consistent community support for the Cultural Safety Protocols.

The Cultural Safety Protocols

- We are all equals
- We pay our respects to Elders, past present and emerging
- We conduct ourselves with honesty and integrity
- We respect each other and our differing opinions
- We pay our respects to cultural differences and requirements
- We follow the agenda and processes
- We are accountable and neutral
- Everyone has an opportunity for input without being talked over
- Everyone gets a fair go
- We talk about the issue, not making it personal
- We avoid personal disagreements
- Arrive open-minded and listen to all points of view
- Remain calm and respectful whilst talking and making your point

³ Irihapeti Ramsden, 'Cultural Safety and Nursing Education in Aotearoa and Te Waipounamu', (1993) 8(3) Nursing Praxis in New Zealand 4, 4.

⁴ Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, 'The National Scheme's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Cultural Safety Strategy 2020-2025' (n.d).

