



VICTORIAN TREATY ADVANCEMENT COMMISSION

Quarterly report April to June 2018

PROGRESS TOWARDS THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY

Elders' voice

The Commission is focusing on embedding Elders within the Aboriginal Representative Body, as recommended in the March 2018 report of the Aboriginal Treaty Working Group.

The Elders' voice will be separate to the elected Representative Body members. It will strengthen the cultural accountability of the Representative Body, and ensure that it operates in a culturally responsible way.

The Commission is actively developing the role and responsibilities of the Elders' voice. Throughout the Commission's roadshows, the Commissioner has been speaking with Elders and asking them how they wish to be represented. These discussions have been key to developing the design of the Elders' voice.

Ensuring access to the ballot box and enhancing voter capacity

The Commission has been exploring ways to ensure all Aboriginal Victorians are able to participate in elections for the Representative Body. The Commission has been engaging in research and analysis of experiences across the world to draw lessons from international best practice.

The Commission is considering a combination of postal and in-person voting, as well as online voting, to best

enable participation in elections. The Commission is also developing strategies to ensure communities within prisons and in remote areas are able to participate in elections.

Voter eligibility

All Aboriginal people living in Victoria will be eligible to elect candidates for the Representative Body. The Commission has begun developing a unique, independent Aboriginal electoral roll.

This electoral roll will be independent from state and Federal electoral rolls. Voters will not be required to enrol in those elections to be able to vote for the Representative Body.

The Commission is developing an enrolment process that ensures the integrity of the voter roll, recognising that many Aboriginal people, including members of the Stolen Generations, have limited or no documentation of their ancestral connection. The Commission is working to address these and other challenges in developing the enrolment process.

ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY

Talking with community in western Victoria

The Commission is midway through a series of engagement events throughout regional Victoria.

The first two legs of the roadshow took the Commissioner Jill Gallagher and team through Barwon and south west Victoria (April) and the Grampians and Mallee area (June).

KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THE COMMISSION

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The Commission held meetings with Aboriginal communities in Ballarat, Colac, Framlingham, Geelong, Hamilton, Halls Gap, Heywood, Horsham, Mildura, Portland, Robinvale, Swan Hill and Warrnambool. The Commission spoke with over 500 people on these legs of the roadshow.

Key messages from these meetings included:

- the pivotal role of elders must play in the treaty process
- the importance of bringing non-Aboriginal Victorians along on the treaty journey
- ensuring treaties are sustainable for future generations.

Reports from these roadshows are now available on the Commission's website.

Details of future events are available via the Commission's Facebook and Twitter, and by joining our mailing list.

Learning from Elders

Elders are critical to a strong Aboriginal Representative Body. On each leg of the roadshow the Commissioner dedicates forums to talk with Elders about how to best ensure their voices and knowledge are embedded within the Representative Body.

These meetings are some of the most valuable parts of the Commissioner's engagement and the stories shared are incredibly powerful.

Partnering with Reconciliation Victoria

The Commission has partnered with Reconciliation Victoria to hold events aimed at the general public, reflecting Aboriginal community feedback that non-Aboriginal Victorians must be part of the treaty journey. Reconciliation Victoria partners with local governments, state agencies, police, businesses and community groups to host gatherings during the Commission's roadshow.

These events are a valuable opportunity for the Commissioner to share with community the importance of treaty, the process so far, and why and how they can support the treaty process.

ADVICE TO GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY

Community aspirations for treaty

A key part of the Commission's role involves talking with Aboriginal communities about their aspirations for a future treaty or treaties. The Commission's role is not to negotiate treaties or what is on the table, but will provide this information to the Representative Body to inform their work.

In its engagement with community the Commission has heard that future treaties must encompass many elements.

These include:

- truth-telling
- cultural and economic empowerment
- reparations and reconciliation
- land and water rights
- addressing the high rates of removal of children
- addressing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice system
- ensuring a better future for the next generation of Aboriginal people in Victoria.

Aboriginal communities are overwhelmingly telling the Commission that multiple treaties are the preferred path forward, rather than a single treaty.

Meeting with government and stakeholders

The Commissioner and staff continue to meet with stakeholders in government and community.

In this reporting period, the Commissioner has presented at the Monash University Annual Reconciliation Lecture, University of Melbourne Faculty of Arts and the Victorian Council of Social Services Annual Summit.

The Commission has also presented to representatives of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Court Services Victoria and local and state elected representatives.

ABORIGINAL TREATY WORKING GROUP

The Working Group provides guidance and expert advice on the work of the Commission. From April to June 2018 they had four meetings with the Commissioner.

Working Group members have also represented the work of the Commission at events including the National Native Title Conference in Broome, and have joined the Commissioner on legs of the roadshow.

The Working Group provided advice to the Minister during debate on the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Bill 2018.

