



MEDIA RELEASE
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**YOORROOK JUSTICE COMMISSION APPOINTS TWO SENIOR COUNSEL ASSISTING
INCLUDING AUSTRALIA'S MOST SENIOR FIRST NATIONS BARRISTER**

The Yoorrook Justice Commission (Yoorrook) has today announced the appointment of Mr Tony McAvoy SC, a Wiridi man, and Ms Fiona McLeod AO SC to the role of Senior Counsel Assisting. Mr McAvoy is widely recognised as Australia's most senior First Nations Barrister.

Mr McAvoy has had an illustrious legal career and was appointed as the first Australian First Peoples Senior Counsel in 2015. Mr McAvoy was previously the Acting Part-Time Commissioner of the NSW Land and Environment Court between 2011 and 2013. He was also previously appointed Senior Counsel assisting to the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (Don Dale Royal Commission) in 2016/2017.

Over Mr McAvoy's expansive career, he has developed a strong Native Title practice and has acquired significant experience within the areas of environmental law, administrative law, human rights and discrimination law, coronial inquests and criminal law. As recently as 2021, Mr McAvoy used his keynote address at the 2021 Charles Perkins Memorial Oration to advocate for Treaties and truth for Australia's First Peoples.

Fiona McLeod AO SC is a Senior Counsel at the independent Bar practising in the areas of commercial and public law. She has represented the Commonwealth in several Royal Commissions including the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Ms McLeod is a member of the National Co-design Group of the National Indigenous Voice to Parliament. She received an Order of Australia in 2020 for her service to the legal profession.

Professor Eleanor Bourke, Chair of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, spoke about the knowledge and experience Mr McAvoy and Ms McLeod will bring to Yoorrook.

"In addressing the broad scope set out in our Letters Patent of investigating historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Nations people, it is vital we have a broad range of legal experience to pull from," Professor Bourke said.

"Mr McAvoy and Ms McLeod both bring a unique set of skills which will help the Commission towards achieving truth and justice in Victoria and we are happy to have them on board as notable figures in the industry."

As Senior Counsel Assisting, Mr McAvoy and Ms McLeod will work closely with Yoorrook's five Commissioners and will action their guidance on specific matters throughout the historic process. Mr McAvoy and Ms McLeod's work in this role will be critical to accomplishing Yoorrook's mandate of investigating historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria since colonisation.

The appointment to Senior Counsel Assisting will not affect either barrister's existing professional commitments, including Mr McAvoy's role as the Northern Territory's Acting Treaty Commissioner.

"With our Senior Counsel now in place, we have a greater range of expertise to contribute to the development of our interim report which will be delivered in June of this year."

"Our interim report will investigate a range of themes and include critical recommendations and reform."



Senior Counsel Assisting is directly responsible for legal strategy, instructions and delegations from the Yoorrook Chair and will examine the most important witnesses during hearings. The roles of Counsel Assisting at all levels is to advise Yoorrook on its powers, duties, functions and obligations.

Mr Tony McAvoy and Ms Fiona McLeod's appointment as Senior Counsel Assisting follows the appointment of Yuin man Mr Timothy Goodwin and Ms Sarala Fitzgerald to the role of Junior Counsel Assisting in November 2021. Mr Goodwin and Ms Fitzgerald will support the new Senior Counsel, and bring specific, complementary experience to the work of Yoorrook.

To learn more about the Yoorrook Justice Commission, please visit the website at:
<https://yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au/>

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