



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 12am, Thursday 24 March**

### **YOORROOK JUSTICE COMMISSION HOLDS FIRST PUBLIC SITTING OF AUSTRALIA'S FIRST AND ONLY TRUTH AND JUSTICE PROCESS**

The Yoorrook Justice Commission (Yoorrook) has today held its ceremonial *wurrek tyerrang* (hearing), marking the first public sitting of Australia's first and only formal truth and justice process.

The ceremonial *wurrek tyerrang*, which coincides with the International Right to Truth Day, is a significant milestone in Victoria's nation-leading work towards truth and justice. *Wurrek tyerrang* is the Wergaia word for 'speaking together'.

Cultural protocols commenced at the Stolen Generations Marker in Fitzroy before moving to Charcoal Lane for the formal sitting. An important mainstay for local First Peoples communities, Charcoal Lane was selected because of its historical significance as a site of First Peoples' organisation and activism.

The ceremonial *wurrek tyerrang* was attended by Commissioners and counsel assisting Yoorrook, as well as Elders from First Nations across Victoria. Commissioners outlined the work of Yoorrook, including its scope and next steps. To coincide with this, Yoorrook also released guidelines, practice directions and information sheets about its approach to truth-telling.

No *pil'kneango mirnk* (evidence) was taken at the sitting. *Pil'kneango mirnk* is the Djab Wurrung word for 'open eyes'. Over the life of Yoorrook, there will be many opportunities for people to tell their truth and give *pil'kneango mirnk*.

Professor Eleanor Bourke, Chair of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, spoke about the significance of this step for all Victorians.

"Yoorrook is a historic opportunity for all Victorians to listen to each other with open ears and hearts. Together we will create a path that leads to truth, understanding and transformation and build a shared understanding of our history. This day is a significant step forward, not just for First Peoples but for every Victorian."

"The stories of Victoria's First Peoples must be told, and in telling their stories, all Victorians can share the history and help create a better future – based on truth," Chair Bourke said.

The day commenced with a calling of Country by Mandy Nicholson and a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony by Uncle Colin Hunter, an Elder of the Traditional Custodians of Narrm (Melbourne), the Wurundjeri WoiWurrung People.

Djirri Djirri dancers then welcomed Commissioners and guests in dance and sang in their mother tongue – the Woiwurrung language. They honoured their Liwik (Ancestors), Kerr-up-non (Family), and Biik (Country).

In a cultural exchange, the Djirri Djirri gifted the Commissioners with ochre. Used by Aboriginal people for thousands of years, it is believed that ochre has spiritual power which is released through ceremonial ritual. The exchange of ochre is an important symbol of how important Country is and will be throughout the Commission's work.

“Yoorrook’s first sitting is a culmination of the work of many First Peoples in Victoria. It is grounded in and guided by the cultural authority of our Elders, who have long advocated for truth-telling. The cultural significance of this day has been reflected in all aspects of the launch,” said Chair Bourke.

Following the ceremonial *wurrek tyerrang*, Yoorrook will commence regional visits across Victoria to yarn with Elders about which matters they consider most important for Yoorrook’s inquiry to focus on.

“Yoorrook is led by Victoria’s First Peoples. Community voices will guide our work,” said Chair Bourke.

There are three ways Elders can meet with Commissioners during visits. The first is through the Elders’ Yarning Circles, a group meeting with Elders and Commissioners. For option two, Elders can request a one-on-one meeting with Commissioners if they don’t want to participate in a group conversation. Lastly, Elders can join the Commissioners to visit historical or culturally significant sites in their region to meet on Country.

Formal Elders’ *wurrek tyerrang* will commence on 26 April 2022.

Yoorrook’s regional visits and formal *wurrek tyerrang* with Elders will lead to the delivery of the interim report, due June 2022.

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

**ENDS**

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