

Yoorrook Justice Commission Ceremonial Wurrek Tyerrang Opening Remarks

Deputy Chair Sue-Anne Hunter

Ngoon godgin (Thank You) Chair Bourke.

As Aboriginal peoples, we always look to our Elders and back further to our Ancestors. As Chair Bourke has said: We hold the stories. It is through this remembering, through our faithful accounts of these remembrances, and through our re-telling of their stories, that we honour our Ancestors and the truths of their lives.

Today marks the first sitting of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. The purpose of today's sitting is to outline the processes that Yoorrook will follow. It is a public sitting that is being live streamed and recorded.

Today we launch the first truth and justice commission in our nation's history. We are joined here by honoured representatives from the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, Elders of many nations, and representatives of the Stolen Generations, to acknowledge the profound role that Victorian First Peoples have played in advocating for truth telling in this state.

Yoorrook overview

The Yoorrook Justice Commission was established by Letters Patent issued by the Governor of Victoria, on advice from the Premier, on 12 May 2021. Our final report is due in two years, in June 2024.

Yoorrook is the outcome of decades of First Peoples' advocacy and activism. And through establishing Yoorrook, the Victorian Government has acknowledged calls by the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria for a truth and justice process informed by the Assembly's consultations with First Peoples across Victoria.

The Assembly chose the name 'Yoorrook Justice Commission' as Yoorrook means 'truth' in the Wemba Wemba/Wamba Wamba language, which is spoken in the north-west region of Victoria.

Yoorrook has been jointly designed by the Government and Assembly to work in parallel with the Victorian Treaty process. Importantly however, Yoorrook has been established to be independent of Government and the Assembly.

Yoorrook's objectives

Yoorrook's Letters Patent set out a range of different objectives, which make it unique among Royal Commissions and other inquiries and reviews.

The first objective is about truth. Yoorrook is required to establish an official public record of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples in Victoria. This record will be based on our truths, the truths of our Ancestors, the truths of the First Peoples.

- Yoorrook will create a lasting public record of systemic injustices that harmed our Ancestors and of the systemic injustices that are still happening to our people today.
- Yoorrook will investigate how these injustices occurred and who or what was responsible.
- The objective of truth will be fulfilled by listening to and recording First Peoples' accounts in a range of different ways, including nuther-mooyoop (submissions), visits with communities, and through wurrek tyerrang (hearings).
- We will draw on a wide range of sources and take a holistic approach that recognises the diversities, as well as the commonalities, and continuities of our experiences as First Peoples.

The second objective is about understanding. Yoorrook is required to develop a shared understanding among the broader Victorian community of the impacts of systemic injustice on First Peoples. We will also seek to build knowledge of the diversity, the strength and the resilience of our cultures, knowledges, and traditional practices.

This is the educational component of Yoorrook's work. It requires deep listening to the voices of our First Peoples. We will link the past, present and future, so that all Victorians can have an understanding of how our cultures have evolved and survived.

The third objective is about transformation. Yoorrook is required to propose changes to laws, institutions, and systems which can be taken up through treaty negotiations and other ways to build new relationships between all peoples in Victoria. These reforms must remedy injustices against First Peoples so that Victoria can turn a new page.

Yoorrook's recommendations will be based on First Peoples' priorities about what needs to change for us to achieve the justice and healing that will transform relationships between all peoples in our state.

Yoorrook's Letters Patent list the types of things that Yoorrook can make recommendations about. These are very broad and include things like:

- cultural restorations and healing and commemorations
- ways to raise public awareness and education strategies, including changes to the Victorian school curriculum
- forms of redress for injustices
- changes that need to happen to laws, systems and institutions to remove injustices and prevent further harms; and
- particular things that could be included in future treaties with the State of Victoria.

Yoorrook's values

These objectives are based on our values of honesty and respect, culture and connection, deep listening, justice and rights, strong spirit and inclusivity. These are the values that will underpin and inform all aspects of our work.

Conclusion

I would like to thank each and every one of you for your presence here today. There is no doubt that as Victorians, we all have challenges ahead of us on this journey of truth and justice. It's going to be hard to undertake this examination of our history and of the continuing injustices.

But if we work together, in a spirit of openness and truth, we have an historic opportunity for all Victorians to finally listen to each other and create a new path forward. A path that leads to truth, understanding and transformation. I want to close my comments to you today, by stating Yoorrook's vision:

A transformed Victoria, based on truth and justice, and grounded in First Peoples' enduring spirit, cultures and self-determination.