



MEDIA RELEASE

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YOORROOK JUSTICE COMMISSION BEGINS HISTORIC FIRST WURREK TYERRANG (PUBLIC HEARINGS)

The Yoorrook Justice Commission will hold its first wurrek tyerrang (public hearings) from Tuesday 26 April to 6 May 2022 at Charcoal Lane Fitzroy.

Yoorrook Chair Professor Eleanor Bourke said the wurrek tyerrang will hear from Victorian First People Elders, beginning with Uncle Jack Charles, whose experiences illustrate many of the key impacts of colonisation still felt today.

Uncle Jack Charles, one of Australia's most respected actors and activists, was born to a Bunurong mother and Wiradjuri father. His great-great-grandfather was a Djadjawurrung man, among the activists who resisted government policy at the Coranderrk reserve in Victoria in 1881. Uncle Jack is a survivor of the Stolen Generations.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon Gabrielle Williams MP and Marcus Stewart, Co-Chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria will also appear before the Commission in the first block of wurrek tyerrang.

"Wurrek tyerrang provide an historic opportunity for First Peoples and the broader Victorian community to finally listen to each other and build a shared understanding of our history," said Chair Bourke.

"Through wurrek tyerrang, Yoorrook will investigate past and ongoing injustices experienced by Victorian First People since colonisation - what happened in the past and what is still happening now. Wurrek tyerrang will also demonstrate the resilience of Traditional Owners including the survival of cultures, knowledge, histories and traditions."

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

Wurrek tyerrang is a Wergaia word for 'speaking together' and has been adopted by Yoorrook as the term for public hearings.

The Commissioners sitting at the wurrek tyerrang are:

- Professor Eleanor Bourke AM, Chair
- Ms Sue-Anne Hunter, Deputy Chair
- Dr Wayne Atkinson, Commissioner dhamangalnya
- Distinguished Professor Maggie Walter, Commissioner
- Professor the Hon Kevin Bell AM QC, Commissioner

Commissioners will be assisted at the wurrek tyerrang by Mr Tony McAvoy SC and Ms Fiona McLeod AO SC, supported by junior counsel Ms Sarala Fitzgerald and Mr Timothy Goodwin.

Mr McAvoy is a Wirldi man from the central Queensland area. He was appointed Australia's first Indigenous Senior Counsel in 2015. He has provided legal advice to jurisdictions on treaty matters, including negotiations in Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. In 2021 Mr McAvoy was appointed Acting Treaty Commissioner in the Northern Territory. He previously acted as co-counsel assisting the Royal Commission into Youth Detention in the Northern Territory in 2016 and 2017.

Ms McLeod has represented the Commonwealth of Australia in major cases including leading the legal team in the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Queensland Floods Commission and the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sex Abuse. She has acted in other notable matters including leading the legal team representing the successful plaintiff in the Murrindindi bushfire class action and the plaintiffs in the Don Dale class action.

“This wurrek tyerrang will not be conducted like a normal Royal Commission,” said Chair Bourke.

“First People’s ways of talking and sharing and telling story will be prioritised. Truth telling will be done in a culturally safe way, with social and emotional wellbeing support available for witnesses. Witnesses are also able to access free legal support through the Lotjpa Independent Legal Service.”

“First Peoples stories will be protected through Yoorrook’s unique Indigenous data sovereignty protocols. These protocols protect First Peoples’ data ownership and ensure that participants decide how their information will be accessed and used.”

Beyond engaging with the wurrek tyerrang via livestream and social media, there are several ways Victorians can participate in the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

From 26 April, First People Elders are invited to make nuther-mooyoop (submissions) to the Yoorrook Justice Commission. Nuther-mooyoop from all other Victorian First People and non-Indigenous Victorians will be opened later in 2022.

Nuther-mooyoop is a Boonwurrung word for ‘truth’ and has been adopted by Yoorrook to refer to ‘a submission’.

Nuther-mooyoop can be made in any form, such as writing, an audio or video recording, or through a truth-telling object such as an artwork, cultural artefact, or photo. Nuther-mooyoop can be made as an individual, family, community or Traditional Owner group.

A second block of wurrek tyerrang will be held later in May 2022, with additional sittings to take place in the second half of 2022.

Witnesses will be invited by Yoorrook to participate in wurrek tyerrang based on their direct experiences and perspectives on matters within Yoorrook’s Letters Patent and preparedness and readiness to engage in truth-telling in a public setting. Broad representation across families, communities, regions, gender and other characteristics will also be taken into account.

Yoorrook’s interim report is due by 30 June 2022 with a final report due by June 2024.

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

ENDS

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