



30 December 2022

Dear Commissioners

We welcome the opportunity to provide our submission to Yoorrook but do so with mixed feelings of frustration and hope.

The Aboriginal Justice Caucus has worked in partnership with Victorian governments for over 22 years to reduce the incarceration of Aboriginal people, prevent deaths in custody and advocate for strengths-based solutions suggested by Aboriginal people, families and communities across Victoria. While much has been achieved, the reality remains that the Victorian 'justice' and child 'protection' systems do not work for our people. They do not protect us. They are not just.

Through Aboriginal justice networks, programs and services we are privileged to work with and hear from our communities, colleagues and clients. Fortunate to traverse Country and connect with Community for Aboriginal Justice Forums, but saddened that amidst the changing scenery and seasons, issues raised repeat with frightening regularity. So too do the recommendations of successive Royal Commissions, inquiries and reviews.

Often the stories shared with us are heart-breaking. The contemporary carnage of colonisation, of racist systems that perpetuate violence and harm, and traumatise our children, families and Elders across generations. Those stories, those truths, are not ours to tell. We encourage you to travel far and wide across regional Victoria, to conduct hearings on Country, and provide opportunities for those stories to also be shared with you.

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement's wide-reaching impacts, along with its strong partnerships, are a great strength. However, in the pursuit of true self-determination, there are significant limitations to this partnership approach where ultimate authority remains with the State. Realisation of Aboriginal Community aspirations is impeded by lack of political will, and 'tough on crime' agendas that respond to mainstream community perceptions, rather than Aboriginal realities. Reforms that are a matter of life or death for our mob, become political pawns, cast aside until the 'time is right'.

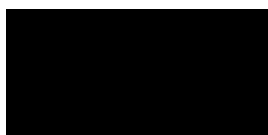
That time must be now. Urgent reforms are required. The age of criminal responsibility must be raised, bail laws and sentencing reformed, the criminalisation of our people must cease and mechanisms for independent oversight be established. Aboriginal deaths in custody and child protection must end.

At the same time, work must begin to *transform* the existing systems and their institutions. To transfer authority, resources and responsibilities until there is Aboriginal oversight of all aspects of systems designed *by* Aboriginal people *for* Aboriginal people.

Yours Sincerely



Marion Hansen
Co-chair



Chris Harrison
Co-chair