

## ISSUES PAPER ON ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

### INTRODUCTION

The Yoorrook Justice Commission (Yoorrook) is investigating systemic injustice experienced by First Peoples in economic life, including economic development and prosperity.

Economic development is critical for self-determination of First Peoples in Victoria and is an essential element of the treaty process. Without full and fair economic participation, justice cannot be achieved, and the human and cultural rights of First Peoples will not be realised.

For thousands of years, First Peoples had sustainable economies in the place now called Victoria. These were based on their connection to, and care for, country - its land, water and resources.

The economic injustices experienced daily by First Peoples at present are directly linked to the actions of the state and the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Theft of land, removal of First Peoples from their country, prohibitions on movement, forced labour and stolen wages are just some of the practices that have created intergenerational trauma and intergenerational poverty. Those harms continue to affect First Peoples' economic position, and all aspects of their wellbeing. In current times First Peoples continue to be denied economic development opportunities and to benefit from resources on their country.

First Peoples have the right to participate in all aspects of Victoria's economy as employees, employers, consumers, suppliers, investors, creators and contributors.<sup>1</sup> Yet stark inequalities persist in all areas of economic life.

Data show that First Peoples do not experience the same level of participation in economic activity as other Victorians. For example, when compared to Victorian averages, in 2021:

- working age First Peoples in Victoria are less likely to be in the labour force;
- First Peoples in Victoria are less likely to hold occupations with higher earning capacity;
- First Peoples in Victoria have lower weekly income levels.<sup>2</sup>

Despite initiatives such as Closing the Gap and various State Government strategies and commitments, First Peoples are much more likely to live in poverty than non-Indigenous Victorians.

Denial of economic opportunities remains despite First Peoples population growth and younger population. In 2021, 61.9 per cent of First Peoples in Victoria were of working age (15 to 64 years).<sup>3</sup> Generally, this youthful population pattern would deliver a demographic

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<sup>1</sup> State of Victoria, Department of Jobs Skills Industry and Regions. *Yuma Yirramboi – Invest in Tomorrow – Aboriginal Employment and Economic Strategy* (July 2022) vii.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by age(a), Victoria: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary*, URL: [Victoria: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/australian-bureau-of-statistics/publications/summary-tables/20210001/abst0101) Accessed 17 January 2024; Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by age(a), Victoria: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary*, URL: [Victoria: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/australian-bureau-of-statistics/publications/summary-tables/20210001/abst0101) Accessed 17 January 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by age(a), Victoria: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary*, URL: [Victoria: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/australian-bureau-of-statistics/publications/summary-tables/20210001/abst0101) Accessed 17 January 2024.

dividend as the largest part of the population moves into key income-earning age groups.<sup>4</sup> However, this opportunity is unachievable if young First Peoples remain locked out of education and employment opportunities.

First Peoples, supported by their organisations, are working hard to build prosperity. They are leading local and statewide initiatives to grow the Aboriginal economy. They are providing employment and business opportunities across a number of industries and sectors. They are promoting Aboriginal businesses both locally and internationally. They are improving outcomes despite lack of access to capital, hostile markets and lack of acknowledgement and respect for First Peoples' cultural, scientific and environmental knowledge. Yet very significant barriers to economic and other developmental opportunities remain systemically embedded in Victoria for First Peoples. These need to be overcome.

The Koori Caucus of the Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Council (VAEEC) noted:

*For too long, we have been kept on the fringe of the Victorian economy... However, we are resilient and our entrepreneurial spirit and desire to be part of a vibrant and growing economy remain strong.<sup>5</sup>*

## ABOUT YOORROOK

Yoorrook is the first formal truth-telling process into historical and ongoing injustice experienced by First Peoples in Victoria since colonisation.

Guided by its values and principles, Yoorrook is:

- establishing an official record of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples in Victoria
- developing a shared understanding among all Victorians of the impact of colonisation, as well as the diversity, strength and resilience of First Peoples' cultures
- recommending immediate legislative and policy changes as well as reforms that may be implemented through the treaty making process.

Yoorrook is independent of government. It has been established as a Royal Commission under the *Inquiries Act 2014*.

Yoorrook's goals are to achieve truth, understanding and transformation in Victoria. [Yoorrook's Letters Patent](#) sets out its mandate in detail. Yoorrook is due to complete its work in June 2025.

Yoorrook was designed and is led by First Peoples.

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Natalie Jackson (2011) Maori and the [potential] Demographic Dividend, NIDEA Working Papers No 2, University of Waikato, National Institute of Demographic and Economic Analysis, 1. <https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/6540/NIDEA%20Working%20Paper%20No%202.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> Accessed 22 January 2024.

<sup>5</sup> State of Victoria, Department of Jobs Skills Industry and Regions. *Yuma Yirramboi – Invest in Tomorrow – Aboriginal Employment and Economic Strategy* (July 2022).

## **YOORROOK IS INVESTIGATING SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE IN ECONOMIC LIFE**

This work responds to Yoorrook's Letters Patent instruction to inquire into and report on ongoing systemic injustices in 'economic, social and political life'. The goals of Yoorrook's inquiry into economic life are to:

- develop a record of the contemporary economic status/circumstances of First Peoples in Victoria
- identify the source and breadth of injustice for First Peoples across the different dimensions of economic life
- identify the causes and consequences of economic injustice for First Peoples
- improve state and private sector accountability to prevent the continuance or recurrence of economic injustice for First Peoples
- identify ways to achieve economic justice for First Peoples.

Yoorrook is scheduled to deliver its final reform report in 2025. In addition to economic issues, this report will include evidence, findings, and recommendations about systemic injustice in education, housing, health, and in relation to land, sky, waters and resources.

## **FOCUS OF YOORROOK'S INQUIRY**

This inquiry will consider both historic and current injustices, as well as actions and solutions. We are particularly interested in your insights and evidence on the following questions/topics:

### **Theme 1- Historic and current barriers**

1. How did colonisation disrupt First Peoples' economies and prosperity? What are the ongoing effects of this upon First Peoples in Victoria?
2. How should success be measured when it comes to economic justice for First Peoples?
3. What are the current systemic barriers to First Peoples in Victoria achieving economic equity with non-Indigenous people, such as in:
  - a. income
  - b. wealth
  - c. capital
4. What are the consequences of systemic injustice faced by First Peoples in their participation in the Victorian economy? How does this affect:
  - a. individuals and families
  - b. communities
  - c. First Nations businesses and enterprises?
5. What are the economic and social costs (including opportunity costs) of limited participation or exclusion of First Peoples from the Victorian economy?

## **Theme 2 - Current government and corporate strategies**

6. How effective is *Yuma Yirramboi* (Invest in Tomorrow)?
  - a. Is it achieving its goals?
  - b. If not, why not?
  - c. What is driving good progress and how can that be scaled up?
  - d. Is the strategy effectively monitored? How effective are current governance and accountability mechanism? How can they be strengthened?
7. What would you recommend be changed in the policy and its implementation?
8. How would you describe the quantum and sustainability of government funding programs and investment in First Peoples' enterprises, First Peoples women in business, First Peoples economic development, First Peoples employment and Traditional Owner corporations on-country economic initiatives?
9. What corporate strategies currently exist that promote First Peoples employment, economic development and investment in First Peoples businesses? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

## **Theme 3- Procurement, employment and corporate governance**

10. What is the current level of First Peoples' participation in:
  - a. public sector boards (including those relating to resources such as water)?
  - b. private sector boards (If possible, please provide this information by gender)?
11. How would you describe the current effectiveness and achievements of:
  - a. public sector First Peoples employment targets and strategies?
  - b. private sector First Peoples employment strategies?
12. How would you describe the current effectiveness and achievements of:
  - a. public sector First Peoples procurement policies (including major procurements such as the Big Build)?
  - b. private sector First Peoples procurement policies?

## **Theme 4- Ending systemic economic injustice**

13. What works and doesn't work when it comes to building strengths-based First Peoples' economic participation?
14. What will support building intergenerational wealth amongst First Peoples?
15. How can Victoria grow the Aboriginal economy?
16. What needs to be done to improve the way the public and private sectors value, invest in and protect First Peoples' cultural knowledge, science and intellectual capital?
17. What sectors can/should be accelerated to generate wealth amongst First Peoples and grow the Aboriginal economy?

18. What sectors of existing government expenditure and the Victorian economy should be leveraged (and investment made) to increase First Peoples' economic participation and market share? What needs to be done to make this happen?

The questions above are intended to guide your submission. You may respond to any or all of these issues or raise others. You may attach relevant submissions or research you have provided to other inquiries or reform processes.

In addition to Yoorrook welcomes:

- examples of good practice, innovative approaches or successful models that should be expanded upon to improve economic outcomes and experiences of First Peoples;
- consideration of what economic self-determination should look like now and into the future;
- suggested systemic changes or recommendations needed to remedy economic injustice, ensure state and corporate accountability and prevent the continuance or recurrence of economic injustice for First Peoples.

### **CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS**

Yoorrook calls for submissions from individuals and organisations including:

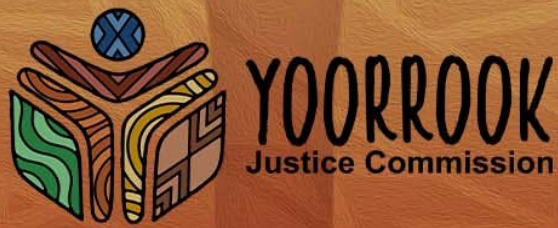
- First Peoples
- First Peoples organisations, service providers and groups including Traditional Owner groups
- First Peoples business and enterprises (both for profit and not for profit)
- current and former staff of organisations and agencies working in First Peoples employment, economic development, creative industries/the arts, business development, corporate partnerships and other aspects of economic life
- current or previous private or public board members who are First Peoples
- non-government organisations
- academics and researchers, and
- current or former staff in government or government agencies.

Submissions should be made no later than **27 March 2024** to allow time to analyse submissions and to inform hearings and other inquiry processes that Yoorrook will undertake for its report. Submissions received after this date will continue to inform Yoorrook's ongoing inquiry and official public record.

Yoorrook will publish the submissions it receives on its website with the consent of the person or organisation making the submission. Yoorrook will not make a submission public without the consent of the person or organisation making the submission. Yoorrook will accept anonymous submissions. Yoorrook reserves the right to choose not to publish all or part of a submission if it considers it inappropriate to do so.

### **WHAT YOORROOK WILL NOT DO**

Yoorrook cannot overturn or change decisions of courts or tribunals or make findings about whether those decisions were correct or not. However, Yoorrook can inquire into First Peoples' experience of these processes and whether they cause or contribute to systemic injustice and



may make recommendations for processes or systems changes to ensure this injustice does not continue.

### **HOW TO MAKE YOUR SUBMISSION**

To make your submission please click [here for individuals](#) and [here for organisations, agencies or other entities](#).

Submissions should be made by **27 March 2024**.

For queries about this issues paper or making a submission please contact [enquiries@yoorrook.org.au](mailto:enquiries@yoorrook.org.au) or 1800 YOO RRK (1800 966 775).