

Yoorrook Justice Commission

Witness Statement of Vicki Yvonne Ward
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and
Minister for Employment

WITNESS STATEMENT OF THE HON. VICKI WARD

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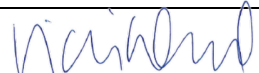

- i I, Vicki Yvonne Ward, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and Minister for Employment, of 1/2 Treasury Place, East Melbourne, in the State of Victoria, say as follows:
- ii Acknowledgement I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country on which I live and work, the Wurundjeri people, and the Traditional Owners of Country across all lands and waters now known as the State of Victoria. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I recognise that First Peoples' sovereignty has never been ceded.
- iii I acknowledge victim survivors of family violence amongst First Peoples and I respect their stories, experience and knowledge. I acknowledge those whose voices have been silenced through family violence. I acknowledge those who continue to live with this violence or in fear of this violence. It is for them that we work to eradicate violence in our families and our homes.
- iv I acknowledge the enduring effects of colonisation and dispossession. This history has resulted in historical and ongoing social injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria who have not been afforded appropriate respect, a willingness to listen and to understand the consequences of colonisation and entrenched racism.

Scope of statement

- v I make this statement to the Yoorrook Justice Commission (**Commission**) in my capacity as Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. I commenced in this role on 2 October 2023.
- vi This statement responds to the Commission's Social Injustice Health Request for Information questions 31 and 32, issued to the State of Victoria on 11 February 2024. These questions provide an opportunity for me and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (**DFFH**) to reflect on the high prevalence of First Peoples – overwhelmingly women – with lived experience of family violence in Victoria and to express our commitment to ensuring systemic reform is driven by self-determination.
- vii In preparing this statement, I consulted with subject matter experts within DFFH including Family Safety Victoria (**FSV**), a division of DFFH. I confirm the contents of this statement are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.
- viii This statement should be read in conjunction with the Victorian Government's submission to the Commission regarding systemic injustices in the family violence system.

Professional background and relevant qualifications

- ix I was elected to the Legislative Assembly, representing Eltham in 2014. I currently hold the offices of Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and Minister for Employment. I was born on the lands of the Wurundjeri, where I continue to work and represent the people of Eltham District. I recognise the history of Eltham District, the scar trees, the eel traps, the middens, the

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meeting places that run throughout our area, quiet reminders of what is likely to have been an ugly and violent history of early colonialists and settlers towards local Wurundjeri people. It saddens me that much of Wurundjeri history in my area has been lost because of the effects of colonisation.

- x I have held various other Parliamentary positions since being elected to Parliament – including as member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee; member of the Joint Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee; member of the Integrity and Oversight Committee; parliamentary Secretary for Employment and Industry; Parliamentary Secretary for Transport Infrastructure and Public Transport; and Parliamentary Secretary for Education.
- xi I hold a Bachelor of Arts (hons) which I obtained in 1998.

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PART A

Background and Context

Colonisation and dispossession, and experiences of Family Violence

1. First Peoples experience unequal amounts of harm; colonisation, dispossession, intergenerational trauma and racism intersect in ways that can shape experiences of family violence. First Peoples women in Victoria experience family violence at several times the rate of other women. According to Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (**ANROWS**), First Peoples women in Australia are five times more likely to die as a result of family violence, and 35 times more likely to be hospitalised for family violence-related assaults.¹ These statistics are shameful, and I alongside DFFH am committed to changing this.
2. I acknowledge that the enduring impact of colonisation and dispossession has resulted in historical and ongoing social injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria. I recognise the devastating effects of family violence on First Peoples families and communities, and I am deeply and genuinely committed to embedding self-determination in all that we do in reforming the Victorian family violence system.
3. In addition to being more likely to experience family violence than non-First Peoples women, First Peoples women may experience racism, discrimination and lack of cultural understanding and safety. These forms of injustice and the ongoing effects of colonisation – including trauma and dispossession – can magnify and compound the impacts of family violence.
4. The consequences of these intersections can be substantial. There are First Peoples women for whom government is not seen as a safe or viable means of gaining support. Government can be treated with a degree of suspicion. A reason for this can be due to an association with the removal of children from First Peoples families. We understand that the majority of First Peoples prefer to be supported by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (**ACCOs**), and it is imperative that First Peoples have this choice. Additionally, First Peoples women are more likely to be misidentified as the ‘primary aggressor’ in police responses to family violence.² This may particularly be the case when the perpetrator is a non-First Peoples man and uses his status and the trauma of his victim, simultaneously tapping into racist and sexist biases, to blame the victim survivor.
5. Building a family violence system that responds to the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage First Peoples women face is crucial to appropriately

¹ ANROWS (n.d.) *Fast Facts – Indigenous family violence*. Accessible at: <https://anrowsdev.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Fast-Facts-Indigenous-family-violence.pdf>

² FVRIM (2021) *Monitoring Victoria’s family violence reforms Accurate identification of the predominant aggressor*. Accessible at: https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-12/FVRIM%20Predominant%20Aggressor%20December%202021_0.pdf.

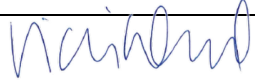

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addressing violence against First Peoples women. It is also essential to ensure the system itself is not perpetuating any forms of oppression. Several of the initiatives referred to in this statement work towards these aims.

Findings and recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence

6. The Royal Commission into Family Violence (**Royal Commission**) was established in Victoria in 2015. It was the first of its kind in Australia and was tasked with examining the family violence landscape in Victoria, investigating how government agencies and community organisations could be better coordinated and making recommendations about how to evaluate progress towards ending family violence.
7. The Royal Commission’s final report, handed down in 2016, included 227 recommendations for reforming Victoria’s family violence system.
8. The Royal Commission’s findings included that existing programs were unable to:
 - a. reduce violence’s frequency and impact
 - b. hold perpetrators accountable
 - c. support victim survivors
 - d. prevent family violence via early intervention
 - e. provide sufficient coordination between community and government services
9. The Royal Commission specifically considered family violence towards First Peoples in Victoria. It noted the high prevalence of family violence experienced by First Peoples women and recognised this occurs in a context of dispossession, breakdown of kinship and lore systems, racism, economic exclusion and inherited trauma.³
10. The Royal Commission formed a key point in Victoria’s timeline to address family violence, and its findings and recommendations set the scene for significant and ambitious reform.
11. The Royal Commission made nine recommendations specific to First Peoples. The recommendations included:
 - a. Increased investment in ACCOs.
 - b. Increased culturally appropriate services for First Peoples women and children experiencing family violence, and First Peoples men using family violence.
 - c. Making mainstream family violence organisations culturally safe for First Peoples.

³ Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) Volume V: Report and recommendations, p. 10.

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12. These recommendations have informed the way we have been working to reshape Victoria's family violence system and to embed self-determination into our reform approach.

Prevention of Family Violence Portfolio

13. The Prevention of Family Violence portfolio leads Victoria's work to build a future where all Victorians are safe, thriving and living free from family and sexual violence in environments built on gender equality and respectful relationships. My portfolio's key responsibilities include:
- Managing a large and complex service system, to provide victim survivors with the support they need and to work with perpetrators to change their behaviour.
 - Driving whole-of-government reforms and measuring their impact.
 - Providing policy leadership on family and sexual violence.
 - Delivering primary prevention initiatives to stop violence before it starts.
14. My portfolio does this work in partnership with a diverse range of organisations across the community, represented by strong and engaged peak bodies.
15. As Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, I have responsibility for stewardship of the family violence system, including key functions such as The Orange Door, victim survivor support services, perpetrator interventions, primary prevention and information sharing. Legislation that enables this work includes the *Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018 (Vic)* and *Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)*. These are in addition to legislation relevant to all Ministers, such as the *Financial Management Act 1994 (Vic)* and the *Public Administration Act 2004 (Vic)*.
16. In addition to the prevention of family violence, DFFH is responsible for the portfolios of children, housing, disability, LGBTIQ+ equality, veterans, and the offices for Women and Youth. I am aware that Melanie Heenan, Deputy Secretary of Family Safety Victoria has responded in detail to questions from the Commission relating to current departmental policy, practice and operational components of the family violence system.

Victoria's approach to preventing and responding to family violence and how it responds to the needs of First Peoples

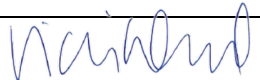

17. The family violence system in Victoria is comprised of a broad range of services and programs, delivered by government and non-government agencies and providers. Work to address family violence is usually considered to sit in one (or more) of four categories of intervention. The categories form a spectrum and include primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery. To end family and sexual violence in Victoria, work is needed across this spectrum.
18. Victoria's family violence work is guided by a 10-year plan, *Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan For Change (Ending Family Violence)*, as well as the *Family Violence Outcomes Framework* which functions to ensure the plan meets its objectives.

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19. The Ending Family Violence 10-year plan is complemented by *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families (Dhelk Dja Agreement)*. The Dhelk Dja Agreement is the key First Peoples-led Victorian agreement that First Peoples services, First Peoples communities and government will work together so that First Peoples and First Peoples families and communities are living free from family violence.
20. First Peoples' self-determination is foundational to the Dhelk Dja Agreement, and self-determination underpins Victoria's work to prevent and respond to family violence against First Peoples. This means First Peoples and First Peoples communities and organisations take the lead in designing and delivering programs and services for First Peoples. Self-determination requires government to value and respect First Peoples knowledge, systems and expertise, and to transfer authority, decision making control and resources to First Peoples. This requires a significant cultural shift and a new way of working together. Self-determination also means that First Peoples can choose supports delivered by First Peoples organisations.
21. The Dhelk Dja Family Violence Fund, established in 2019-20, has allowed First Peoples-led frontline family violence initiatives in four streams:
- Holistic healing
 - First Peoples frontline family violence services
 - Preventing the cycle of violence
 - First Peoples family violence workforce capacity building
22. Through the Dhelk Dja Agreement, FSV provides funding to ACCOs to support First Peoples victim survivors of family violence across a number of program areas. These include: the Aboriginal Access Points working alongside The Orange Door; First Peoples-led case management; refuges for First Peoples victim survivors; therapeutic responses for First Peoples victim survivors; and others.
23. In addition, *Free from Violence*, Victoria's 10-year primary prevention strategy, has supported First Peoples-led primary prevention initiatives. This includes 13 projects which received funding via the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Innovation Fund.

Budget and funding allocations

24. Victoria's Ending Family Violence 10-year plan has been supported by substantial investment. To date, Victoria has invested \$3.86 billion to prevent and respond to family violence since the Royal Commission. This figure is larger than the investments of all other states and territories combined.
25. In support of self-determination, there has been a significant increase in family and sexual violence funding to ACCOs. Between 2017-18 and 2022-23, this amount increased ten-fold, from approximately \$5.2 million to approximately \$52.5 million. In the 2022-23 financial year, of

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all family violence and sexual assault service delivery funding, 12 per cent was allocated to ACCOs.

- 26. The 2019-20 Budget provided \$28.8 million for the Dhelk Dja: Aboriginal 10-Year Family Violence Plan over four years. This includes funding for First Peoples Orange Door access points and to expand frontline First Peoples family violence services.
- 27. In 2022-23, the Victorian Government announced \$2.2 million in funding for the 2022-23 Victorian Aboriginal Community Initiatives Fund. Further detail regarding the initiatives supported with this funding is available in the Statement of Melanie Heenan which responds to the Commission’s Social Injustice Health RFI issued on 11 February 2024.
- 28. Between 2019-20 and 2022-23, ACCOs were funded a total of \$18.2 million through the Dhelk Dja Family Violence Fund to deliver First Peoples-led family violence services, holistic healing and prevention activities.

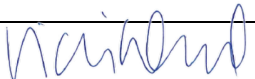

Continuing reform approach

Moving towards greater self-determination

- 29. Since the conclusion of the Royal Commission, and in close partnership with the family violence sector, we have undertaken to transform the way Victoria prevents and responds to family violence through an ambitious 10-year plan. As a result, all 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission have now been implemented and are making a real difference for Victorians.
- 30. We now have a much deeper understanding of the causes and effects of family violence on Victorians. We know not all family violence is the same; people experience family violence differently. This means a diverse range of prevention, early intervention and response supports are needed.
- 31. While this is a significant investment and action, I acknowledge there remains a long way to go. First Peoples are still disproportionately experiencing the effects and damage of family violence.
- 32. I acknowledge the devastating effects and accumulation of trauma across generations as a result of colonisation, and the violent dispossession of land and the removal of loved children by the State. In doing so, I also acknowledge the long-standing leadership of First Peoples communities and Elders in Victoria and recognise the role this has played in preventing and responding to family violence and improving outcomes for First Peoples, and First Peoples children and families. In continuing our efforts to reform Victoria’s family violence system, self-determination remains at the core. Drawing on knowledge, insight and wisdom of First Peoples is critical to success in driving down the numbers of people who use violence.

Dhelk Dja – Safe Our Way: Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families

- 33. As previously mentioned, the Dhelk Dja Agreement is the key First Peoples-led Victorian Agreement. Signed by First Peoples communities, First Peoples services and government, the

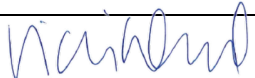

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agreement is to work together and be accountable for ensuring that First Peoples, and First Peoples families and communities are living free from family violence. The agreement is built upon the foundation of First Peoples self-determination.

34. The Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum oversees the Dhelk Dja Agreement and its successive Three-Year Action Plans. First Peoples community leaders and the Victorian Government work closely with the community and stakeholders to refine the First Peoples-led agenda for culturally safe responses to family violence and to make key decisions, advance the strategic priorities and monitor progress against the Dhelk Dja Agreement.
35. Ensuring the principles of self-determination are at the heart of the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum’s work, there are a number of associated First Peoples community-led governance structures:
 - a. Aboriginal Caucus comprises the First Peoples community members of the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, responsible for priority setting including First Peoples led-prevention responses for women and children, men, Elders and those who use violence.
 - b. Eleven Dhelk Dja Action Groups across Victoria provide place-based, First Peoples community-led approaches to drive local action to prevent and address family violence in partnership with key community stakeholders.
 - c. The Dhelk Dja Agreement sets out five strategic priorities to ensure that individuals, families and First Peoples communities are culturally strong and self-determining, safe, thriving and living free from family violence. Dhelk Dja Priority Sub-Working Groups track progress and outcomes against each strategic priority through the development of the Dhelk Dja Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Plan.
 - d. The Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Family Violence Sector Forum comprises CEOs of all family violence funded ACCOs and provides a formal engagement and consultation mechanism under the auspice of the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum to support the development of culturally safe services and responses for First Peoples people impacted by family violence.
 - e. The Dhelk Dja Three-Year Action Plan 2019-2022 articulates the critical actions and supporting activities required to progress the Dhelk Dja Agreement’s five strategic priorities. Each of these priorities recognises the need to invest in First Peoples culture, leadership and decision making as the key to ending family violence in Victorian First Peoples communities.

Future directions

36. The key future direction for the Victorian family violence system regarding First Peoples is delivering on the Closing the Gap target 13: ‘the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse

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against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50%, as progress towards zero through the second Dhelk Dja Three-Year Action Plan 2023-2025⁴.

37. Opportunities that the Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus identified for the second action plan include:
- a. Leadership capability for Action Groups to be able deliver against the 10 Year Plan
 - b. Data sovereignty and First Peoples communities controlling the narrative, supporting communities to collect and interpret data
 - c. Funding reform – longer term, sustainable funding and job security for service system staff
 - d. Holding mainstream agencies accountable, funding and improving referral pathways to ACCOs to ensure they can provide prevention and early intervention
 - e. Building an evidence base of what works when family violence services are delivered by First Peoples organisations and tailored to the local community

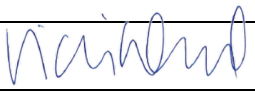

Importance of self-determination and First Peoples-led reforms

38. The Victorian Government is committed to self-determination and recognises that this requires the transfer of decision-making power and resources to First Peoples to lead policies and programs that affect them. The best outcomes are achieved when initiatives for First Peoples are led and guided by them and informed by their knowledge, experience and expertise.
39. The 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence report acknowledged the disproportionate effects of family violence on First Peoples, especially women and children, and the unique barriers that First Peoples face in being able to access culturally appropriate service responses that meet their needs and aspirations. The Royal Commission made specific mention of *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families* as foundational work in family violence policy. *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families* was the original 10-year plan, launched in 2008 by the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum (now known as the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum). It considered family violence through a First Peoples lens and included the impact of colonisation. A new agreement was written in 2018: the Dhelk Dja Agreement referred to throughout this statement.
40. To ensure that First Peoples, and First Peoples children, families and communities thrive, the Victorian Government is committed to an enduring community-led response to end family violence against First Peoples, underpinned by self-determination.

Conclusion

41. As a member of the Cabinet and in acquitting my portfolio responsibilities related to the Prevention of Family Violence, all my decisions are, and will be, carefully calibrated to continue

⁴ DFFH.0019.0001.0267

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to advance self-determination, respect human rights and seek to support the safety and wellbeing of First Peoples women, children and families.

42. I thank the Commission for its important work and opportunity to contribute to the first formal truth-telling process into injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria. I look forward to the Commissions findings and recommendations.

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PART B

RESPONSES TO HEALTH REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI) QUESTIONS 31 AND 32

Question 31

In relation to the Dhelk Dja Agreement second Three-Year Action Plan to be implemented from 2023 to 2025 (DFFH Paper, page 3), provide an explanation of:

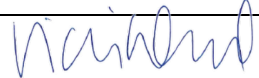

- a. The current implementation status of the plan;
- b. The processes for monitoring and reporting; and
- c. Accountabilities within the Department to ensure the plan’s effectiveness.

Response to Question 31(a)

- 43. The Dhelk Dja Agreement commits to the development of Three-Year Action Plans to articulate the critical actions and supporting activities required to progress the Dhelk Dja Agreement’s five strategic priorities.
- 44. A draft second Three-Year Action Plan has been developed by First Peoples communities across Victoria with government partners participating in an agreement-making process to identify their commitments to support implementation of the Action Plan.
- 45. The second Three-Year Action Plan takes a whole-of-government approach with critical actions and supporting activities spanning across departments and ministerial portfolios in relation to the prevention of family violence, Treaty and First Peoples, justice, housing, child protection, police, and education.
- 46. As implementation of the Action Plans requires whole-of-government endorsement, the draft Action Plan is pending approval prior to public release. DFFH is anticipating this process will be finalised by mid-2024. This is consistent with the approach taken in 2019 with the first Three-Year Action Plan.

Response to Question 31(b)

- 47. All members, associate members and observers of the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum are accountable to the actions under each Three-Year action plan that advance the strategic priorities and realise the vision of the Dhelk Dja Agreement, including through regular reporting to the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum. Members of the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum provide reports and updates against their commitments and progress against the Action Plans. Further detail on the membership of the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum is provided in response to question 32(a)(i).

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48. The Dhelk Dja Agreement sets out five strategic priorities to ensure that individuals, families and First Peoples communities are culturally strong and self-determining, safe, thriving and living free from family violence. Dhelk Dja Priority Sub-Working Groups track progress and outcomes against each strategic priority through the Dhelk Dja Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Plan.
49. The Dhelk Dja Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Plan was developed by the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum to support regular monitoring and evaluation of the Dhelk Dja Agreement and Action Plans, using First Peoples-defined outcomes and measures of success. The outcomes, measures and indicators align with the whole-of-government Family Violence Outcomes Framework.⁵ The Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum is the governance mechanism to oversee delivery of the agreement, which occurs through the development of reporting against the Action Plans.
50. The Action Plans are guided by the Dhelk Dja Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Plan⁶ and the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor's 2022 recommendation to develop departmental actions plans for Koori Caucus consideration (see the response to question 59 and 60 further detail).⁷
51. The Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum and its members are the individual and collective champions and strategic leaders for the Dhelk Dja 10-Year Agreement. Further detail on the membership and purpose of the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum is provided in response to question 32(a)(i).

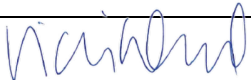

Response to Question 31(c)

52. The Dhelk Dja Inter-Departmental Committee was established in 2019. Membership of the Committee is comprised of senior representatives from relevant Victorian Government departments and agencies: Department of Premier and Cabinet; Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (**DFFH**); Department of Health; Department of Justice and Community Safety; Department of Education; Department of Treasury and Finance; and Victoria Police.
53. The Terms of Reference for the Inter-Departmental Committee stipulate meetings will occur a minimum of 6 times per year with meetings scheduled within 4 weeks before and after each meeting of the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum.
54. The Dhelk Dja Inter-Departmental Committee was established to:
- provide an overarching governance mechanism within government to oversee implementation of Dhelk Dja to strengthen strategic oversight, governance, reporting and funding

⁵ Accessible at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-outcomes-framework>.

⁶ Accessible at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/dhelk-dja-monitoring-evaluation-and-accountability-plan>



⁷ Accessible at: <https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-12/Aboriginal-led-prevention-and-early-intervention-report-21-December-2022.pdf>

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- b. monitor the implementation and compliance against the departmental commitments in the Dhelk Dja 3 Year Action Plan
- c. improve collaboration across government to address underlying issues, work towards common goals, problem solving across shared accountability and ensure timely and coordinated responses to emerging issues
- d. increase the visibility of achievement and progress towards goals
- e. ensure that government represent a coordinated view across the various work areas of their department or agency. This includes ensuring they are informed of all relevant work within their department/agency
- f. ensure there is connection between the work and effort of Dhelk Dja and other Victorian First Peoples policy frameworks and agreements, and broader family violence or social service reform in Victoria
- g. take action to advance self-determination in a family violence context, including:
 - (i) promoting or transferring authority, delegation, decision making, control and resources relating to family violence services and programs to First Peoples communities and services
 - (ii) maximising First Peoples representation on family violence related governance and engagement structures
 - (iii) sharing and providing available data across areas of portfolio or program responsibility that relate to family violence or that will impact more broadly on First Peoples communities
 - (iv) ensuring adequate preparation for the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum meetings including understanding and knowledge of the issues likely to be raised and discussed at the meeting

55. The inclusion of departmental commitments was a recommended action in the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor report *Aboriginal-led prevention and early intervention December 2022*, Action 6: 'In developing the next Dhelk Dja action plan, government departments and agencies commit to how they will deliver on Dhelk Dja's priority areas and ensure their accountability for the agreed actions through the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum'.

56. Draft action plans from DFFH, the Department of Education, the Department of Justice and Community Safety and Victoria Police were presented to the Koori Caucus for feedback in March 2023 to support the delivery of activities under the draft second Three-Year Action Plan endorsed by Koori Caucus and the Partnership Forum in 2022. Departmental action plans were then endorsed at the April 2023 Partnership Forum (see the response to RFI question 31(a) for further detail).

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Question 32

In relation to the Dhelk Dja Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Plan (DFFH Paper, pages 7 & 10):

- a. Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum:
 - i. Provide an overview of the Forum's membership; and
 - ii. Provide any minutes of the Forum's meetings to date;
- b. Aboriginal Data Mapping and Data Needs project:
 - i. Provide any documents in relation to the design and status of the project.



Response to Question 32(a)(i)

57. An overview of *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 2018-2028* is provided at paragraph 19.
58. The Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum and its members are the individual and collective champions and strategic leaders for the Dhelk Dja 10-Year Agreement and action plans. It is their responsibility to work closely with the community and stakeholders to implement Dhelk Dja and ensure that the principles of self-determination for First Peoples is at the heart of the Partnership Forum's work.
59. Membership of the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum constitutes:
 - a. Chairpersons of the Dhelk Dja Action Groups representing First Peoples communities in Victoria
 - b. Senior representatives from First Peoples organisations and services: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd., Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc., Djirra, Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service, Aboriginal Housing Victoria, Aboriginal Community Elders Services, and Koorie Youth Council
 - c. Senior representatives from relevant Victorian Government departments and agencies: Department of Premier and Cabinet, DFFH, Department of Health, Department of Justice and Community Safety, Department of Education, Department of Treasury and Finance, and Victoria Police
 - d. First Peoples representatives from the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council

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- e. Commonwealth National Indigenous Australians Agency⁸
60. Associate members include the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria, Respect Victoria, the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Dardi Munwurro, and Safe and Equal. Updated Terms of Reference for the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum were endorsed in July 2023.
61. The purpose of the Partnership Forum is to:
- a. lead the development of Dhelk Dja Action Plans, commencing in 2018-19 with the first Action Plan (2019-2021). Subsequent Action Plans will be developed for 2023-2025 and 2026-2028
 - b. oversee and coordinate the strategic implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Dhelk Dja and its Action Plans to drive improved safety outcomes for First Peoples
 - c. lead the development of the Dhelk Dja Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Plan, including measurable outcomes and key performance indicators
 - d. ensure that First Peoples self-determination informs every aspect of the implementation and evaluation of Dhelk Dja and its Action Plans
 - e. build and maintain a self-determining and self-authorising environment
 - f. influence family violence reforms, funding decisions and policy development by providing a strong and informed voice, cultural perspective, and strategic policy advice based on self-determination
 - g. take a strengths-based approach that values First Peoples knowledge, systems and expertise, and recognises the importance of First Peoples culture and cultural strengthening as a critical protective factor against violence
 - h. promote the strategic leadership role of the Dhelk Dja Action Groups, ensuring this leadership is reflected at a local level across Victoria and that they are involved in leading local solutions for their communities
 - i. build capability to enable and support Dhelk Dja Action Groups and community-led and driven local initiatives
 - j. work to strengthen connections to community, family and Country, and promote respectful relationships
 - k. promote First Peoples-led service delivery and partnerships with mainstream services
 - l. promote innovation and best practice models for working with First Peoples and families (e.g. community care and practice, clinical skills, therapeutic practice)

⁸ See DFFH.0020.0001.0323 for membership list.

Signature		Witness	
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- m. make best efforts where possible to hold services and systems accountable for outcomes for First Peoples, including, as appropriate, through funding agreements and service delivery indicators
 - n. collaborate on cross-portfolio issues through existing First Peoples governance mechanisms such as the Aboriginal Executive Council, Aboriginal Justice Forum, Aboriginal Children's Forum, Korin Korin Balit Djak Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum and Marrung Central Governance Committee
62. The Terms of Reference provide that Partnership Forum meetings will be held three times per year and hosted by metropolitan and regional Dhelk Dja Action Groups.
63. Secretariat for the Partnership Forum is provided by DFFH.
64. For community members to become a member of the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum they must be a Chair or Co-Chair of a Dhelk Dja Action Group. For a First Peoples organisation to become a member of the Partnership Forum the service must demonstrate that it delivers any combination of significant family violence prevention, specialist intervention, early intervention or crisis intervention programs for First Peoples. In the case of a Victorian government department, agency or statutory body, it should have an interest in, or fund First Peoples family violence services.
65. The Terms of Reference outline the four-step process to become a member of the Partnership Forum. Applicants must forward an expression of interest to the FSV Secretariat. A completed application must be submitted to the FSV Secretariat who will then make a recommendation to Koori Caucus. Koori Caucus will make a determination based upon the recommendation consistent with the criteria for membership as outlined in the Terms of Reference. The Koori Caucus can make a recommendation to appoint a new member following review of an application; a final decision will be made in a formal meeting of the Partnership Forum.

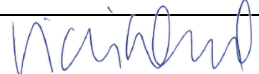

Response to Question 32(a)(ii)

66. DFFH has provided these documents to the Commission.⁹ The Terms of Reference for the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum are outlined in response to question 32(a)(i).

Response to Question 32(b)(i)

67. The Aboriginal Data Mapping and Data Needs project was established to support baseline understanding of First Peoples family violence and build the evidence base for prevention and intervention.

⁹ DFFH.0020.0001.1034; DFFH.0020.0001.0871, DFFH.0013.0001.0594, DFFH.0020.0001.0913, DFFH.0013.0001.0633, DFFH.0013.0001.0655, DFFH.0013.0001.0677, DFFH.0013.0001.0691, DFFH.0013.0001.0714, DFFH.0013.0001.0734. DFFH.0013.0001.0756

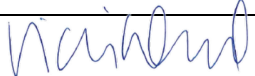

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68. As part of this project, DFFH sought feedback at the July 2023 Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum (DFFH.0020.0001.1034) to pilot a solution to address ongoing family violence data needs. It was agreed that the project focus on data available at the Dhelk Dja Regional Action Group area level. Regional Action Groups are the place-based, First Peoples community-led groups that drive local action to prevent and address family violence.
69. Bringing together existing data with a regional focus is an opportunity to:
- integrate data points and view the sector in greater totality
 - monitor systems health through service delivery and understand trends in incidence and caseload over time
 - understand areas of strength and weakness, including risks in the alignment to service delivery
 - demonstrate how ACCOs strengthen Victoria's family violence response
 - understand where First Peoples families and people vulnerable to family violence are concentrated
70. Since the July 2023 Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, DFFH has progressed work to develop the pilot product to facilitate the sharing of family violence data with Dhelk Dja Regional Action Group areas. The pilot product data pack¹⁰ for each of the 11 Dhelk Dja Regions will be presented to Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum members at an upcoming meeting, along with a proposal for ongoing, periodic release to Dhelk Dja Regional Action Groups as the underlying data is updated.


EXPLANATION OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS USED IN THIS RESPONSE

Term	Meaning
ANROWS	Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety
Commission	The Yoorrook Justice Commission
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
Dhelk Dja Agreement	Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families is the key First Peoples-led Victorian agreement that First Peoples services, First Peoples communities and government will work together so that First Peoples and First Peoples families and communities are living free from family violence.
Ending Family Violence	Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan For Change is the 10-year plan guiding Victoria's family violence work. The Family Violence Outcomes Framework functions to ensure the plan meets its objectives.

¹⁰ The pilot products can be made available to the Commission on request.

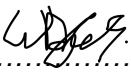
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First Peoples	The term "First Peoples" is used to refer to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria. The term "Traditional Owner" is used to refer to the Traditional Owners of Country in Victoria. Other terminology, such as "Aboriginal", is used where it is in the title of a program, initiative or organisation, or where it is necessary to improve readability.
FSV	Family Safety Victoria, a division of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
Royal Commission	The 2015 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

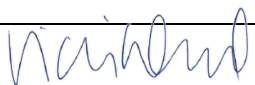
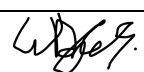
Sign here: 

Print name: Vicki Ward

Date: 27/03/24

Witness signature: 

Date 27/03/24

Signature		Witness	
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