

## Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission

**From: Julian Bernard Cleary**

**Dated: 11 October 2024**

### Submission:

I write this submission in response to the invitation to all Victorians to do so. I am a descendant of predominantly Irish catholic settlers/colonisers of the lands now known as Victoria, who began to arrive here in the 1850s.

I have come to recognise how their own story of dispossession and colonisation culminated in being part of the colonial invasion of Dja Dja Wurrung Country and dispossession of Djaara. There are similar elements across my other ancestral lines that are linked to the story of displacement and dispossession of Taungurung, Bangerang, Yorta Yorta and other Nations.

In my life and work today I try to play a role in recognising this truth, righting some of the wrongs, and acknowledging how my privilege, opportunities and advantage and the marginalisation and dispossession of First Nations in Victoria are two sides of the same coin, and demand action. I am committed to continuing to take such action, alongside Traditional Owners and First Nations people in this place:

Below is a poem that tracks part of the story of one line of my ancestors.

--- 21 years old she was, in 1831 Her home: "the most disturbed and lawless part of Ireland"  
Of the McInerney clan, who once were mighty, she was born By her arrival, though, they faced  
a bleak horizon Almost fully dispossessed of her clansmen's ancient lands Young Honorah  
joined the many who were rising The Terry Alts resistance had the gentry in their sights  
motivated, by injustice, and surviving The policemen and the magistrates were truly  
unprepared As they toppled walls and fences quick as lightning With their spades and their  
pitchforks they broke the grass and turned the sods Hey for O'Connell, hey for Clare' they  
were acrying

And as the poor folks took a stand, demanded just a little land The British Military were arriving  
And many of them hung, and the worst was yet to come For the famous famine lurked on that  
horizon Honorah soon was wed, could she keep the babies fed? And will her own descendants  
ever know that island?

And will her own descendants ever know that island? 21 years old he was in 1863 His mother's  
touch the faintest recollection In a jailhouse in Sandhurst [Bendigo] sits Honorah's oldest son  
With his sister's husband, waiting to be sentenced Patrick came here as teen, and my  
goodness what he'd seen Now its booze and toil and theft and disconnection Bid farewell to  
County Clare and starvation and despair Dared to dream of something better for his brethren  
Paddy's dead at 38, for those to come a better fate Their salvation, though, through Djaara  
dispossession See he stole/acquired some land after Mary took his hand, And in Goornong  
town his children seek connection ----

I now live and work on Djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country) with my young family and am  
inspired daily by the vision, tenacity and resurgence of Djaara in this place. I also see  
constantly, through my work and activism, how often the rhetoric of self-determination and  
reconciliation within governments is often hollow.

I see how effective those who are comfortable with the status quo are at sidestepping change, disregarding legal obligations, and holding on to power and resources. This is through daily work with local and state governments and other agencies. I have been deeply moved and inspired by the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission and the frank and fearless evidence given by First Nations people, questions posed by Commissioners, and admissions made by Ministers of the State Government. I hope that this will be followed by adequate action, through accepting the recommendations that you make, and through the Statewide and Traditional Owner Treaty processes.

Below I have included another poem that seeks to convey a little of how important I believe truth telling is, and how it is incumbent on every non-Indigenous person in what is now known as Victoria to acknowledge the truth that has been so powerfully told through this Commission, and act alongside First Peoples to push for transformational change.

--- Let me tell you where my story begins Inner south-east Melbourne, Irish catholic kid Wurundjeri land, (I didn't know it at the time) Where my dad grew too, he was one of nine Mumma grew up in Goornong, (Djaara) Country-side Irish catholic too, she was one of five Nearly everyone I knew growing up was white Not that I noticed at the time It was a privileged life Hiding away In the comfortable Embrace of white Australia I didn't ever really ask I didn't ever really question I didn't ever really stop to think Or to count my blessings But If we never stop to ask If we ignore these questions Keep the blindfolds on How will we learn our lessons? Is that really where the story begins? Or is it 1850s Clare, Tipperary and Limerick Escaping famine ancestors fled

Seeking vacant land to escape oppression From the shores we left, to the shores we arrived Changed from colonised to the coloniser We can seek to justify in the name of survival But acknowledging the truth is vital Because, this isn't truly how the story is First Nations have lived here ever since The dawn of time But we're all inclined to deny the truth of the genocide I didn't ever really ask I didn't ever really question I didn't ever really stop to think Or confront that bloodshed But If we never stop to ask If we ignore these truths Keep the blindfolds on How will we make it through? Let me ask where the story takes me?

Rejecting the lies, slightly more awake Try to play my part in creating change Interrogate my whiteness and racist ways Like my mother did, now I live on Djaara country And now I've brought some kids into a world that must be Changed for the better Better play my part By listening and acting to confront this past ---

Thank you to all of the Commissioners for your powerful work in seeking to set the record straight and create lasting change. I hope this contribution is helpful in some way. I look forward to your reports and to advocating alongside you for the substantial change that is needed in so called Victoria.

**END**