

Waiata Takatāpui Yoorrook Justice Commission submission

November 2024

- 1) We are a takatāpui (LGBTQIA+ Māori) rōpū (group) based in Naarm;

We acknowledge the Traditional and Rightful Custodians of the land on which we gather—the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging, and extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We are humbled to walk on this land, we recognise its deep and enduring significance to First Nations communities and we support self-determination and land return for all Aboriginal nations.

As a takatāpui rōpū living in Naarm, we stand in solidarity with First Nations peoples in their fight for sovereignty, justice, land return and healing. Our stories are linked as we stand together in the ongoing struggle for decolonisation here and on our own whenua (land).

We make this submission in the hopes it contributes to the healing of the wounds of colonial violence. We aspire to always stand in solidarity with First Nations people in their struggles and in their resistance.

- 2) As a collective we are Tangata Whenua (people of the land) of Aotearoa who are manuhiri (visitors) on Wurundjeri Country. Collectively we emerge from Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kahu ki Whangaroa, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Awa, Te Whakatōhea, Te Ātiawa, Ngāruahine, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāti Raukawa, Kāi/Ngāi Tahu, Waikato Tainui, Ngāti Kahu ki Whangaroa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa. We also acknowledge the many peoples and sacred lands that have raised us, extending from Aotearoa to Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung lands, Dharug, Kurna, Gadigal and Boorloo. We all currently reside and gather in Naarm;
- 3) We have written this submission as a collective and we speak only for ourselves and to our experiences as manuhiri (visitors) on Aboriginal land;
- 4) Members of our collective have previously and currently;
 - a) practised as bush regeneration workers, educators, lawyers, artists, musicians, community workers, teachers, care workers, labourers, art therapists, death workers, sex workers, trainers, writers, campaigners, organisers, strategists, facilitator, trainers, project managers, and researchers;

- b) Parallel to these professional backgrounds we also have lived experiences of addiction, homelessness, institutionalisation, family violence and the interface of criminal justice and carceral systems here in Naarm. Experiences of which we have shared with many of Aboriginal whānau on these lands.
 - c) Consequently, we come together from a range of backgrounds from which we have each developed and continue to engage in a breadth of learning, collaboration, commitment, relations, and partnership with Aboriginal First Peoples of Te Whenua Moemoea (the Land of the Dreaming).
- 5) This group submission sets out the experiences that we have had as Māori takatāpui individuals that related to Aboriginal community and settler colonial 'Australia' in 'Victoria';
- 6) Our submission covers the following:
- (a) background regarding our whakapapa as a rōpū;
 - (b) The kaupapa of our submission & rōpū experiences;
 - (d) Our expression of support for Aboriginal kaupapa as Indigenous manuhiri in Victoria;
 - (f) and further acknowledgements.

Background of Waiata Takatāpui rōpū:

7) Our whakapapa as a rōpū;

Our group formed at the beginning of 2024 when we took part in the Invasion Day Rally in Naarm. A group of twenty or so takatāpui (LGBTQI+ Māori) walked behind a banner which said, “Māori Tautoko Aboriginal Land Back”. Tautoko is the Māori word to say we support you, we are with you in solidarity, you are not alone. Showing up in this way was galvanising. Many of us were trying to find united ways to support First Nations people in Victoria from the position of being Māori. We also wanted to create stronger connections (whakawhanaungatanga) with Takatāpui (LGBTQI+ Māori) here in Naarm.

What started as a small gathering at one of our homes soon moved to a hall in Coburg as more and more of our community heard about the group. Our youngest member is 17 and our oldest member is 51 years of age. Our weekly gathering became an opportunity to learn more of our cultural songs and share food and stories. When one of our members suggested we submit to the Yoorrook Justice Commission our natural response was to do so by writing and performing a waiata.

Solidarity between Māori and First Nations people is nothing new. We recognise in each other the same values of family and culture through language, community building, song, dance, weaving, painting, carving, dreaming, making, building, hunting and gathering. As Indigenous people we live in reciprocity and practice care for the land, water, sky and greater than human beings. Most importantly we share the joy of being in right relationship with the land and with each other.

The kaupapa of our submission & rōpū experiences within the colony of Victoria:

8) What we have gained in gathering, what we hope for mob whānau, what we recognise;

We firmly believe that truth-telling is an essential process for both personal and collective healing. It is through telling our stories, confronting our shared histories, and acknowledging the wounds of the past that we can begin to rebuild relationships based on respect, justice, and mutual care.

For Takatāpui and Māori people in Naarm, truth-telling also requires us to acknowledge our role in the broader context of settler colonialism. While we share deep bonds with First Nations peoples, we must also be mindful of the complex realities of settler identity and the ways in which our presence on this land intersects with the struggles of the original custodians.

We call on both non-Indigenous and Māori communities to engage in meaningful acts of reconciliation, to listen to First Nations peoples, and to support their calls for justice. For us, reconciliation is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that requires courage, humility, and action.

As a takatāpui rōpū, we come together as queer, Māori individuals who carry the legacies of colonisation, both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and here in Naarm. We acknowledge that our own histories are shaped by the violent imposition of European colonial systems and the ongoing fight for Indigenous self-determination.

We are a community that lives at the intersection of Māori indigeneity and queer identities. This intersectionality informs our perspectives and actions, as we navigate both the complexities of takatāpui existence and the responsibilities we hold in the broader context of solidarity with First Nations peoples in this land.

As a takatāpui rōpū, we know that the fight for justice is not just an intellectual exercise—it is about action, responsibility, and an enduring commitment to stand with our First Nations siblings in Naarm and across this continent. We acknowledge the vital work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ongoing struggle for land rights, sovereignty, and the recognition of the harm caused by colonisation.

Our responsibility, as settlers on this land, is to support and amplify the voices of First Nations peoples, acknowledging that this is their land and their right to self-determination. We commit to listening to and learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and we pledge to support them in their work toward reparations and the restoration of cultural practices.

As takatāpui individuals, we also recognise the unique role of queer Indigenous people in this conversation. Just as Māori queer voices have long been silenced or marginalised, so too have Indigenous queer and two-spirit voices in Australia. We stand alongside our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander two-spirit, sistergirl, and brotherboy relatives in advocating for the recognition of diverse gender and sexual identities within Indigenous cultures, and we are committed to ensuring that these voices are heard and celebrated in the broader truth-telling process.

THE WHAKAPAPA (LINEAGE) OF COLONISATION

The Doctrine of Discovery is a set of laws called ‘papal bulls’ that were issued by the Catholic church in the 15th and 16th centuries. It provided religious authority for Christian empires to invade and subjugate non-Christian lands, peoples and sovereign nations, impose Christianity on these populations, and claim their resources. The Doctrine is what gave rise to the false notion of European superiority over other cultures, religions and races of the world and resulted in edicts to colonial forces to ‘invade, capture, vanquish and subdue’ Indigenous peoples and ‘to

take away all their possessions and property'.¹ Under this guidance, everywhere European colonising powers have gone, anti-Indigenous racism spread through coordinated disinformation campaigns by colonial institutions has been the formula for the acquisition of Indigenous lands and subjugation of Indigenous bodies.²

As is the case with Māori in Aotearoa, the colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and lands is driven by a foreign government's colonial and capitalist desire to acquire and extract wealth from Indigenous lands and lives. To enable this extraction and exploitation, Western governments, media, faith institutions and corporations have long participated in:

- Creating and perpetuating racist disinformation about Aboriginal peoples and lands³
- The mass incarceration and violent policing of Indigenous peoples⁴
- Land theft and forced displacement of Aboriginal communities⁵
- The extraction, exploitation and destruction of Aboriginal lands through mining, fracking, logging and failure to protect sites of cultural significance⁶
- The imposition of a foreign legal and political system which doesn't recognise Aboriginal sovereignty⁷
- The removal of Aboriginal children and babies from their families and communities⁸
- The forced assimilation of Aboriginal peoples into the English language through systematic and widespread attacks on Aboriginal people and Aboriginal languages⁹

As Māori people, we understand what it means to have foreign governments and militaries work to annihilate us through colonial violence and laws. The methods of destroying our lands, languages and lives have been very much the same.

¹ Miller, Robert J., Jacinta Ruru, Larissa Behrendt, and Tracey Lindberg. 2010. *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

² [The Doctrine of Discovery. He Tika Tangata](https://tikatangata.org.nz/our-work/the-doctrine-of-discovery-some-basic-facts-publication)

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³ [The killing times: the massacres of Aboriginal people Australia must confront, The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/mar/04/the-killing-times-the-massacres-of-aboriginal-people-australia-must-confront)

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⁴ [First Nations imprisonment is already at a record high. Unless government policy changes, it will only get worse](https://theconversation.com/first-nations-imprisonment-is-already-at-a-record-high-unless-government-policy-changes-it-will-only-get-worse-226612)

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⁵ Bringing them Home Report, chapter 4 <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/projects/bringing-them-home-chapter-4>

⁶ [The fight for Djab Wurrung continues https://indigenoux.com.au/the-fight-for-djab-wurrung-continues/](https://indigenoux.com.au/the-fight-for-djab-wurrung-continues/)

⁷ Nuther-mooyoop to the Yoorrook Justice Commission: Criminal Legal System, VALS November 2022 <https://vals73.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/VALS-Nuther-mooyoop-to-Yoorrook-criminal-legal-system-November-2022.pdf>

⁸ [The intergenerational effects of forced separation on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/ss%282%29_0.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/ss%282%29_0.pdf)

⁹ [Our Deadly Languages https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/articles/our-deadly-languages](https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/articles/our-deadly-languages)

Speaking Truth To Power, Speaking Power To Indigenous Truths

Prior to colonisation and the extractive capitalism that came with it, every Indigenous community had processes and protocols for living in harmony with each other and the land. Utilising knowledge passed down through generations, Indigenous people have long adhered to sophisticated systems of law, spirituality and science that centre reciprocity, responsibility and care for land, water and wildlife. Here on this continent, there is no evidence of imperialism prior to the arrival of British colonialism which means that First Nations peoples had designed and lived by comprehensive systems and laws that enabled hundreds of nations to live in relationship with community and Country for over 65,000 years.

Our greatest opportunity in the struggle for justice is learning from, and returning to, the values and systems that enabled this prosperity and relationality to occur.

Tautoko solidarity initiatives:

- 9) Our expression of support for Aboriginal communities & kaupapa;

Upon being made aware of the call out for final submissions to Yoorrook we began to discuss making a submission and decided that in addition to a written document, we wanted to write a waiata (song) to express our support as we are a collective grounded in the meeting of song, care and culture. This felt appropriate not only due to waiata being a collective method of Māori gathering and sharing, but also as it created a way for us to specifically tautoko (support) Aboriginal whānau and relationships between Aboriginal peoples and Indigenous manuhiri.

As a collective we have composed a waiata, He Rā Ki Tua, with the intention for it to exist as a shared waiata and gift to Aboriginal Peoples of Te Whenua Moemoea. And for it to be added to and sung as a way for us to stand with and see each other in our shared struggle and acknowledge the sovereignty that has never been ceded. Through this waiata we express our recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty, strength and sorrow without colonial language or ways of relating. Through He Rā Ki Tua we call to Aboriginal whānau and we do so as Māori, as how do we heal if we do not talk to and stand with each other in our intertwined journeys?

HE RĀ KI TUA ([listen link](#))

E ngā Mātua Tūpuna | **To the Elders past and present**
 Ngā Rangatira o te iwi taketake | **The leaders of the Indigenous people¹⁰**
 o Te Whenua Moemoeā | **of the Land of Dreaming**
 Ka mihi atu | **We pay our respects**

Ko mātou ngā Tāngata Whenua | **We are the Indigenous people**
 o Aotearoa e noho manuhiri | **of Aotearoa who live as guests**
 ana ki ō koutou whenua | **on your lands**

He Rā Ki Tua | A better day is coming
He Rā Ki Tua | A better day is coming
Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua | I walk backwards into the future with my eye on the past

Kia Kaha Tuākana | **Stay strong older siblings¹¹**

¹⁰ We acknowledge that 'leader' has a different connotation in English than in te ao Māori. The word 'rangaitira' denotes a chief (of any gender) or a person who has the ability to weave (ranga) a group (tira) together

¹¹ Tuākana can also mean older cousins, elders, relations

Ka mihi mātou ki tō mana motuhake | **We acknowledge your sovereignty¹²**
whakahokia te whenua ki tō iwi | **and the return of your lands**

Taringa whakarongo | **listening ears**
tō mātou tautoko me te aroha nui | **our solidarity is love in action**
Nā koutou i tangi, nā tatau katoa | **when you cry your tears are shed by us all**

He Rā Ki Tua | A better day is coming

He Rā Ki Tua | A better day is coming

Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua | I walk backwards into the future with my eye on the past x 2

One of our group members summed up our waiata [He Rā Ki Tua](#) as “a love song to Aboriginal land and peoples”. We are so grateful to live here as guests and we want to be good ones. That means learning how our gratitude can be expressed through love in the actions we commit to in our daily lives.

He Rā Ki Tua (A Better Day Is Coming) is a Māori whakataukī (proverb) to express the love of our Tūpuna (Ancestors) who made so many sacrifices with our futures in mind. The work of seeking justice, hearing the truth and grieving what has been lost is the work of healing. Our waiata is our way of saying we are here to tautoko our First Nations Tūakana (older siblings) in whatever ways we can.

Our Thanks to Elders Past and Present:

- 10) We acknowledge and thank the Aboriginal Elders passed and still present who have made it possible for us to live as we do, with a proud community, dignity, possibility, intergenerational care, a sense of being found when we feel lost and of continuing to relate to and find each other despite all forces that act against these things from happening for Indigenous Peoples interculturally and within our own communities.
- 11) We would like to acknowledge and thank Elders that we have known and whose legacy we are privileged to know, for showing us lessons to forever look to and for establishing examples for us to continue to follow. We thank them for embodying Indigenous resilience and for showing us that the actions of all of us are needed to create the present and the future we want and will have. And for demonstrating that no matter what,

¹² We acknowledge that ‘sovereignty’ is not an Indigenous concept and that Mana Motuhake is in reference to pre-colonial governance that operates at the clan or hapū level and which is intimately linked to the land. Mana is a recognition of the authority of Indigenous peoples over their own whenua (lands)

it is our world too. Thank you to the Elders and the younger generations following in their footsteps for always choosing to fight, listen, care, refuse stigma and discrimination, and leave no one behind in our shared community.

- 12) Thank you to our Queer Elders, and in particular Uncle Jack Charles and Uncle Havelock McCrae, for showing us what was possible. We want to state our gratitude for their commitment to calling out what's wrong, for refusing to engage in systems of violence, for enshrining gentleness as a strength, for creating spaces joyfully when individual struggles have and remain so hard for Indigenous Peoples, for expressing strength in so many forms of togetherness, patience, refusal, choice, and their commitment to truth. We thank them for their spirit which continues. Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua - We walk backwards into the future with our eyes on the past.

Waiata Takatāpui rōpū members involved in the making of this submission:

Aaneke Jade Fitzgerald / Ngāti Awa / Te Whakatōhea
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 Gerard Pol Ngāpuhi / Te Rarawa
 Aiva and Edith Avene / Ngāti Porou
 Leah Riwia Monk / Ngāpuhi / Ngāti Hau
 Chloe Ford / Ngāti Kahungunu
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 Jasmine Morrish / Ngāti Hauā / Ngāti Maniapoto / Waikato-Tainui / Ngāti Raukawa / Ngāti Tūwharetoa / Kāi Tahu
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 Nikki Baxter / Ngāti Te Ranginui
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