

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission**From: Anne Elvey****Dated: November 2024****Submission:****What do you know about the colonisation of Victoria and its impacts on First Peoples?**

I have learnt a few things but there is much I don't know. In 1803 there was a short-lived settlement on Bunurong/Boonwurrung Country near Seaford. The diary of Irish-born British mariner James Hingston Tuckey mentions a number of things, including the resistance of First Peoples, visual evidence of the marks of smallpox, and the luxuriant grasslands on the Peninsula. This attempt at colonisation on Bunurong/Boonwurrung Country failed. Whalers landed in Victoria and Bunurong/Boonwurrung women were taken away from Country to Flinders Island and even as far as South and Western Australia. Some of these women's descendants have returned to Bunurong/Boonwurrung Country and are strong leaders today. During the nineteenth century, British colonisation of Victoria, at first the southern part of the colony of New South Wales, led to dispossession, dislocation and the health impacts of imported diseases. Missions were set up at Coranderrk, Lake Tyers, Framlingham and Cumeragunjah. I have listened to stories of Wurundjeri and Yorta Yorta advocacy and resistance in the face of colonial invasion, both for the return of children and land. I have met members of the Stolen Generation. I have read of the massacres especially on Gunaikurnai Country and the involvement there of Angus McMillan in this criminal activity. The churches are implicated in colonial invasion. On the whole they have failed to return land to traditional owners and have failed to honour First Peoples self determination. Another aspect of colonisation of Victoria has been the environmental damage that has accompanied the dispossession of First Peoples. This is a little of what I have learnt about the colonisation of Victoria and its impacts on First Peoples. I understand colonial invasion as an ongoing process that continues into the present through colonial institutions and attitudes.

What has been your experience learning about First Nations history and culture in Victoria's education system? Do you feel it was comprehensive?

I was born in 1956 and attended school in the 1960s and 1970s mostly on Bunurong/Boonwurrung Country in Chelsea and Mentone. I don't recall learning anything about First Nations history and culture at either primary or secondary school. While I would have been old enough to understand, I don't recall any discussion at school or at home about the 1967 referendum, although I recall that the death of US president Kennedy in 1963 and watching the moon landing live on television in 1969 were discussed widely. So, had it been discussed with the same level of engagement, I would likely have remembered the referendum. Our school education about First Nations was far from comprehensive. What I have learnt has been as an adult, from my engagements with First Peoples in Victoria, through Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Victoria and through the writing community, not through Higher Education itself, but through the generosity of First Nations teachers from the early 1990s onward and through reading, live performance and film by First Nations writers, and my limited research of early colonial documents.

What changes would you like to see in Victoria to promote better understanding and respect for First People?

I would like to see us all listening to the truth telling that the Yoorrook Justice Commission has undertaken. I hope that schools are doing a better job of teaching young people about First Nations history and culture. I feel that there is a lot of racism still in the wider Australian community, especially after the 2023 referendum, and it is hard to know what will work best. I would like to see religious institutions prioritising and properly funding First Peoples leadership. It would be good to have some television programmes in prime time about the findings of the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

In what ways do you think non-First Nations Victorians can contribute to the process of truth-telling and treaty?

I think we can listen to what First Nations are asking of us. I think we can point people to the Yoorrook Justice Commission website. I think we can talk with people we know and share what we have learnt. We can actively support the next steps in the truth-telling and treaty process in Victoria and encourage governments of the day to keep their commitments. I think we also need to be aware of what happens in custody and call our MPs to account on this.

In what ways could First Peoples history and culture be promoted in Victoria?

First Peoples history and culture can be promoted through the education system, the arts, and through local councils using language (with permission) on signage. Where languages are known or being recovered, Victorians could be invited to learn the local language. First Peoples understanding of seasons could become more widespread through incorporation into weather reports on radio and television. With First Peoples leadership, memorials and ceremonies to recall First Peoples history could be developed. Memorials, public ceremony and the arts are already promoting First Peoples history and culture and this needs to continue in ways that gather in more people

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