



**Submission to the Yoorrook Justice Commission:**  
**The Role of Multicultural Communities in Addressing Injustice**  
**Experienced by First Nations Peoples**  
*By Shankar Kasynathan, Maria Dimopoulos, Andrew Gunstone and J.J. Fleay*

## **Introduction**

The "Roads to Reconciliation: Activating Multicultural Victoria" project was launched by the National Centre for Reconciliation, Truth and Justice in 2023, with the support of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. This important initiative has been a step forward in activating multicultural communities across Victoria to engage with, understand, and address the systemic injustices that First Nations peoples have faced since colonisation. The project, implemented across 25 local government areas in both regional and metropolitan settings, has aimed to foster deeper understanding, promote advocacy skills, and empower multicultural communities to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing work of reconciliation.

Multicultural communities in Australia are integral to the nation's social fabric, and as such, they have a unique role to play in confronting the historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Nations peoples. This submission outlines the key achievements and learnings of the project, explores the vital contributions of multicultural communities in the pursuit of justice, and highlights next steps in ensuring that reconciliation efforts remain ongoing and inclusive.

## **Project Overview and Leadership**

The "Roads to Reconciliation" project was led by two distinguished national multicultural leaders, Maria Dimopoulos AM and Shankar Kasynathan, and Professor Andrew Gunstone, a leading national authority on reconciliation and Co-Chair of Reconciliation Victoria. The project team also included First Nations academic Jesse Fleay and project officer Sara Jubran.

The primary aim of the project was to engage multicultural communities in meaningful conversations and activities that would increase their awareness of First Nations history, promote anti-racism advocacy, and empower these communities to contribute actively to the work of reconciliation. In doing so, the project sought to build a collective commitment to truth-telling and justice, acknowledging the responsibility of all Australians to support the rights and sovereignty of First Nations peoples.

## Community Engagement and Empowerment

One of the key elements of the project was the delivery of four Community Fellowship Workshops and four accompanying webinars, engaging fellowship recipients from both regional and metropolitan areas. The project offered participants a deep dive into First Nations history, culture, and the ongoing struggles for justice, including a field trip to the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape. This immersive experience was designed not only to educate but to build emotional connections, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for advancing reconciliation.

Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing how transformative the workshops have been in shaping their understanding of reconciliation and justice. The following are some of the insights shared by fellowship recipients:

- *"These workshops were transformative, offering us not only the knowledge but the emotional connection needed to approach reconciliation with true understanding. The wisdom shared by Indigenous leaders has deeply shaped our approach to justice within our own communities."*
- *"The lessons on truth and justice shared by Indigenous leaders have empowered us to foster meaningful dialogue and action within our multicultural communities. We now carry the responsibility of continuing this journey toward reconciliation with a stronger, unified voice."*
- *"The Community Fellowship Workshops have been a profound experience. Hearing firsthand from Indigenous leaders has illuminated the importance of truth in our pursuit of justice. This learning will resonate in every event we now plan across Victoria."*
- *"Being part of these workshops has been an eye-opening journey. The insights from Indigenous leaders on reconciliation have inspired us to incorporate these principles into our own cultural practices, making our communities more inclusive and aware."*
- *"These workshops have given us the tools and inspiration to lead our communities with a renewed commitment to truth and justice. The voices of Indigenous leaders have strengthened our resolve to contribute meaningfully to reconciliation efforts in Victoria."*

## Impact and Feedback: Raising Awareness and Building Action

The workshops and webinars were not only an opportunity for learning but also a space for participants to reflect on their roles in addressing racism and promoting social inclusion. Qualitative feedback gathered through surveys revealed significant shifts in participants' perspectives. Key outcomes from the feedback process include:

### 1. Increased Awareness of Indigenous Perspectives

Across the ten workshops and four webinars, participants reported a dramatic increase in awareness of First Nations perspectives on advocacy principles. Survey results showed that 80% to 100% of attendees felt they gained a deeper

understanding of First Nations history, culture, and contemporary issues.

2. **Commitment to Reconciliation and Self-Determination**

Attendees expressed a renewed and stronger commitment to reconciliation efforts, with 80% to 100% stating that they felt more empowered to advocate for self-determination and the recognition of First Nations peoples' rights.

3. **Empowerment to Tackle Racism**

The anti-racism framework, which was a central component of the workshops, was particularly well received. An overwhelming 100% of participants stated that they felt more equipped to tackle and address racism in their personal lives and communities. The advocacy tools provided in the workshops are now being implemented by participants in their work and daily interactions.

Some of the powerful feedback from regional workshops includes:

- *"These workshops have opened my eyes to the deep importance of Indigenous perspectives in our advocacy efforts. I now feel equipped and motivated to integrate these insights into my work and daily life."*
- *"The experience has strengthened my commitment to reconciliation. Learning from Indigenous leaders has profoundly impacted my understanding and dedication to supporting self-determination in our communities."*
- *"I never realised how crucial it was to actively engage with anti-racism until these workshops. The tools and frameworks provided have empowered me to take concrete actions against racism in my personal and community spaces."*
- *"The increase in my awareness of Indigenous advocacy principles has been life-changing. I am now more mindful and respectful of the need for intercultural learning in fostering social inclusion."*
- *"These sessions have reignited my passion for reconciliation. The knowledge and inspiration I gained here will drive me to advocate for meaningful change in my community."*
- *"I am leaving these workshops with a powerful sense of empowerment. The anti-racism framework we discussed has given me the confidence to stand up against racism and to support others in doing the same."*

### **Challenges and Next Steps: Strengthening Multicultural Contributions to Reconciliation**

The defeat of the 2023 Voice to Parliament Referendum underscored the ongoing challenges in addressing systemic injustice for First Nations peoples. However, it also reaffirmed the need for continued and collective action. Multicultural communities, having engaged with First Nations perspectives through this project, are now positioned to play a critical role in supporting the ongoing struggle for justice.

The "Roads to Reconciliation" project has made significant strides in building awareness, fostering social inclusion, and strengthening the commitment of multicultural communities to reconciliation. The next step is to ensure that this momentum continues, expanding the scope of these initiatives and ensuring that all multicultural communities have access to ongoing educational opportunities and platforms for action.

The project has already laid a strong foundation for future work, but we recognise that true reconciliation requires ongoing dialogue, education, and collaboration. Multicultural communities must continue to deepen their understanding of First Nations sovereignty, support the recognition of First Nations peoples' rights, and be vocal advocates for justice. This can only be achieved by embedding these principles into everyday practices, cultural exchanges, and public policies that affect all Australians.

### **Recommendation**

The "Roads to Reconciliation: Activating Multicultural Victoria" project has proven to be an essential step toward fostering a more inclusive, just, and reconciled Victoria. By engaging multicultural communities in conversations about First Nations rights and justice, the project has contributed to a broader understanding of the role that every community must play in confronting the legacy of colonisation and addressing ongoing systemic injustices.

As the project progresses, the work of genuine reconciliation must continue to engage with First Nations peoples, multicultural communities and all Australians. Together, we can work toward building a future in which the dignity, rights, and sovereignty of First Nations peoples are recognised and respected.