

r e c o n c i l i a t i o n



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Aboriginal Community Open Meeting with Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Minister Natalie Hutchins, ZINC Federation Square. February 3, 2016

Summary:

Aboriginal Victoria formally known as Office of Aboriginal Affairs held an open community meeting at ZINC Federation Square on Wednesday the 3rd of February. The meeting attended by a diverse and large audience of 200+ of Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and leaders and government bureaucrats, including a staff and Council member of Reconciliation Victoria. This also included 11 regional sites streaming in; they were able to engage in the discussion. Observers were also able to live stream.

Attendees were invited to discuss:

- What does self-determination mean to you?
- What do you want to get out of this meeting?
- How can we work together to establish the engagement meetings?
- What does the Victorian approach to constitutional recognition look like?

The meeting involved wide ranging discussions, as such a meeting had not been held in many years. Debate centred on Constitutional Recognition and Treaty. Some people argued that Constitutional Recognition was both a distraction and irrelevant to achieving true self-determination through treaty.

Three motions were passed at the meeting:

1. We as Sovereign People reject Constitutional Recognition. Unanimous
2. We demand the state resources a treaty process, including a framework for treaties, with complete collaboration with all Sovereign Peoples and Nations, and treaties are finalised and agreed upon by December 2016. 1 vote against
3. Resource an Elders Council of South Eastern Australia, which is comprised of all Sovereign Peoples. 1 vote against

Minister Hutchins responded to the motions reiterating that opposition to Constitutional Recognition was a message she had commonly heard from Victorian Aboriginal communities, and she would represent those views to Cabinet who would determine a Victorian government position. The Minister also responded with calls to advancing treaty stating that progressing treaty was an Andrew's government pre-election commitment that they intend to deliver. Minister Hutchins promised to take the motions to Cabinet and report back. The meeting was filmed and the footage can be watched [here](#).

Reconciliation Victoria's Position:

Reconciliation Victoria has been involved in raising awareness about the Constitutional Recognition reform agenda for over three years. As an organisation we have held a [position](#) that supports the scope and intent of the [recommendations made by the Expert Panel](#) in 2012.

Reconciliation Victoria sees Constitutional change as part of the unfinished business of reconciliation - one of the recommendations made by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in their final report in 2000. We views Constitutional change as a piece in the puzzle of a reconciled nation, along with addressing sovereignty and treaty, closing the gaps, accepting history and delivering justice.

Reconciliation Victoria has helped facilitate over 170 events across Victoria since May 2013. We have held over 11,800 conversations with people about Constitutional Recognition through forums, stalls at festivals, school talks and community/organisational briefing sessions across the State during this period. We have been aware throughout this process of the diversity of opinions on this issue, including among Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and we have worked to respectfully engage across this spectrum. We understand the scepticism with which some people view the Constitutional reform agenda, which comes at a time when funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services is being cut, and government commitments to close the gaps have been heavy on rhetoric but at best slow on achieving outcomes. We understand and share the frustration that symbolic actions such as the National Apology have not been met with substantial actions, and our failure as a nation to make amends for past injustices seems to be leading to a repeat of the past in some areas.

We have regularly reported to both Recognise and the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition about the diversity of Victorian perspectives on this issue. As an organisation we believe that work to negotiate and establish treaties and agreements is central to moving reconciliation forward and that this can occur in parallel and continue beyond constitutional recognition.

As an organisation it is important to be clear that we reserve the right to review our support for this reform agenda if a model is proposed that does not address these issues appropriately and does not have the support of the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Following the discussions at the Aboriginal Victoria Open Community Meeting, Reconciliation Victoria will review our work in the Constitutional Recognition space. We respectfully acknowledge the views expressed at this meeting, along with the feedback through our engagement in the awareness raising campaign over the past 3 years. We understand that the views expressed at the meeting on the 3rd of February do not represent that of all Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members. The meeting does however reflect a significant occasion with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community Elders and members in attendance and unanimously voted in agreement to reject constitutional recognition and demand treaties. A meeting like this, with the Aboriginal Affairs Minister had not happened in Victoria for 20 years. Minister Hutchins promised that this would be the first of many such occasions.

The Referendum Council on Constitutional Recognition will oversee a series of Indigenous Constitutional Conventions across the country during the first half of 2016, which will provide opportunities for Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to learn about, discuss and share views on the proposed Constitutional changes. We will continue to update our networks. We encourage the State Government of Victoria to report on the outcomes of this meeting and to keep those who attended, and other key stakeholders informed of developments from the motions put forward. There has been some coverage of last week's meeting, [Chris Graham](#) has published an article in the New Matilda and [Celeste Liddle](#) also had a commentary published in Daily Life. Significantly on the release of the Close the Gap Report for 2016, [Prime Minister Turnbull](#) has announced that holding a referendum in 2017 is achievable.

Please contact the RecVic team if you have any questions or queries.