



Yoorrook Justice Commission Newsletter Issue 3, November 2022

Welcome to the latest edition of the Yoorrook Justice Commission newsletter.

Yoorrook will commence its next round of public hearings on 5 December 2022, focused on injustice experienced by First Peoples in Victoria's criminal justice and child protection systems. You can find out more about Yoorrook's investigation of these two critical issues along with other updates below.

You can also follow Yoorrook on social media ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#)) or check the [website](#) for more information.

Focus on the Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems

From Yoorrook's inception, First Peoples' Elders and community leaders have called on the Commission to focus attention on injustices within the child protection and criminal justice systems.

Yoorrook will look into the ongoing injustice experienced by First Peoples in these systems in the next phase of its inquiry.

Yoorrook will continue accepting submissions and hearing truths about all other injustices affecting First Peoples in parallel with this work but will use public hearings, responses to issues papers, roundtable discussions and other truth telling tools to highlight historic and ongoing failures within the child protection and criminal justice systems over the next few months.

Public Hearings

From 5-16 December 2022, Yoorrook will hold the first of three rounds of public hearings focused on the harm done to First Peoples by unjust laws and practices within the criminal justice and child protection systems and how to address it.

The December hearings will feature evidence from approximately 30 witnesses from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and service providers. Hearings in February will feature community voices, while the hearings in March will provide the Commission with an opportunity to examine evidence from State and institutional witnesses.

The hearings are open to the public and will be livestreamed on Yoorrook's website www.yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au.

Issues Papers

In October, Yoorrook released two Issues Papers on [Systemic Injustice in the Child Protection System](#) and [Systemic Injustice in the Criminal Justice System](#).

Yoorrook is receiving responses to the Issues Papers from a range of Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations, community groups, government and legal services, experts and affected individuals.

Responses will be published on the Yoorrook website shortly.

Roundtables

In September, Yoorrook Commissioners convened roundtable discussions with a small group of stakeholders to discuss key issues facing the child protection and criminal justice systems. The roundtables were attended by representatives of ACCOs, the Aboriginal Justice Caucus Co-Chairs and a number of researchers.

Truth Telling Submissions Open to all First Peoples

The Yoorrook Justice Commission is calling on all Victorian First Peoples to tell their truth about any ongoing or historic systemic injustice through a newly launched [online submission portal](#).

Until recently, Yoorrook focused on truth telling from First Peoples' Elders only, to ensure the Commission's work was grounded in and guided by their experience and cultural authority.

All First Peoples are now encouraged to make submissions in any form they wish via the [online portal](#). This may include audio or video recorded submissions, artwork, or recordings of song or dance in addition to written submissions.

Submissions can be made about any kind of systemic injustice experienced by First Peoples. This may include truths about:

- individual or family experiences of injustice and racism
- forced removal from home and land
- massacres, forced labour, cultural loss, intergenerational trauma
- economic disadvantage and stolen wealth
- or anything else

Submissions can also share the truth about the strength, survival, and resistance of First Peoples.

Yoorrook will use the truths and experiences shared with the Commission to make recommendations for systemic reform and create a new public record of the impacts of colonisation.

Supports Available

Yoorrook has a range of supports available to people wanting to tell their truth.

[Yoorrook's truth receivers](#) can help First Peoples complete the submission form. They can also help you to take a photo, video or audio recording of the submission. Yoorrook's truth receivers are all trusted community members.



The Yoorrook truth receiver team includes (L-R), Joseph Saunders, Tara Fry, Shayne Morrall and Lisa Thorpe

Free, confidential and safe [social and emotional wellbeing support](#) is available to people who want to tell their truth to Yoorrook.

Support might be a one-off yarn, ongoing counselling or linking you with other services in your community.

This is completely led by you. You can get support before, during and after you make your submission.

Yoorrook also has a [free and confidential legal service](#) that can give you information and advice about sharing your story safely with us.

The service is separate from Yoorrook and run by Victoria Legal Aid and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service. Legal support is optional, and you can choose which provider you want to work with.

To get support or find out more information about any of these services, please visit the [Yoorrook website](#) or call 1800 YOO RRK.

Gathering Truths

In addition to submissions and hearings, Yoorrook Commissioners are gathering truths by visiting sites of significance and meeting with organisations and agencies that hold important archives.

Yarning at Coranderrk

Yoorrook Chair Eleanor Bourke, Deputy-Chair Sue-Anne Hunter and Commissioner Maggie Walter visited Wandoon Estate in September to yarn with Traditional Owners Brooke Wandin, Uncle Dave Wandin and Jacqui Wandin.

Wandoon Estate sits on land formally known as Coranderrk. Commissioners yarned with the Wandins about the current work being undertaken at the Estate including Caring for Coranderrk Country, which has been ongoing for more than six years. The Wandins are focused on restoring Wandoon Estate as a working farm, an important habitat for native fauna, and as a place to bring Wurundjeri people together on Country.



Yoorrook Commissioners with Traditional Owners Brooke Wandin, Uncle Dave Wandin and Jacqui Wandin

Visit to the Cemetery located at Queen Victoria Market

In October, Chair Bourke and Deputy-Chair Hunter visited the Queen Victoria Market, which was constructed on top of the old Melbourne Cemetery.

Divided into religious denominations, First Peoples' graves were sectioned off outside the cemetery's walls. This section of the cemetery was established just three days before the execution of a group of First Peoples resistance fighters by the government. One of the cemetery walls still exists today, as seen in the photos below.

As the market expanded over the years, around 1,000 bodies were exhumed and reburied at the new Melbourne Cemetery. Other graves were disturbed and treated with disrespect during construction activity. As the market expanded over the years, around 1,000 bodies were exhumed and reburied at the new Melbourne Cemetery. Other graves were disturbed and treated with disrespect during construction activity.

More than 9,000 people including those of First Peoples remain, to this day, buried beneath the market.



L: a photo of the old cemetery walls; R: Deputy-Chair Hunter in front of the same wall today

The Public Records Office of Victoria

Commissioners met with the Keeper of Public Records in Victoria, Justine Heazlewood and her team about the depth and breadth of records held by the Public Records Office of Victoria (PROV).

PROV holds records dating to the first days of the invasion by British colonists. Commissioners were shown a display of valuable archival material held by the Koorie Records Unit at PROV including the petition presented by Chief William Barak in 1886 to Victorian Premier Graham Berry.



Commissioners and Justine Haezlewood viewing some of the PROV holdings

[26] -

18th December 1918

Dear Mr Ferguson,

Kindly allow the residents of the Station a little extra in the way of rations in order that they may make Christmas puddings or cakes, if they so desire. Extras usually granted in the past have been - Flour, Currants, Raisins, and a little flavouring such as Lemon Peel.

Yours faithfully,

The Manager

Lake Tyers

Secretary.

Secretary

The Local Guardian Aborigines

One of the extraordinary records in the PROV archive that highlights the impact of colonisation

Treaty Negotiation Framework and Self-Determination Fund Agreement Signing

Just a few weeks ago, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and State Government signed an agreement on the Treaty Negotiation Framework and Self-Determination Fund. This agreement paves the way for Treaty negotiations to begin in 2023.

The agreement was signed by First Peoples' Co-Chairs Marcus Stewart and Aunty Geraldine Atkinson and the Acting Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Colin Brooks at Yarra Bend. It was witnessed by many First Peoples' Assembly members, staff from the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Minister's Office and Chair Bourke representing Yoorrook.

Chair Bourke, who was previously Chairperson of the Working Group to the Victorian Treaty Advancement Commission, publicly welcomed the signing of the agreement and sent congratulations to the Assembly.



Yoorrook Chair Eleanor Bourke holding the signed agreement with First Peoples' Assembly Co-Chairs Marcus Stewart and Aunty Geraldine Atkinson

Yoorrook Operations

Awarding of an Honorary Doctorate to Yoorrook Chair Prof Eleanor Bourke AM

Monash University recently honoured Yoorrook Chair Prof Eleanor Bourke with an honorary doctorate in recognition of her many years of service to First Peoples in Australia.



Chair Bourke addresses graduates

Chair Bourke used her address to urge fellow graduates at the ceremony to learn about Australia's true history and its impacts on all our lives today:

"As Australia again, embarks upon a national conversation about our history and our national identity, please use the lessons you have learnt at Monash. Engage in that debate with curiosity. Always look to see who is speaking, and for whom. Which voices are absent and why. What assumptions are made in the telling or hearing of different perspectives.

But mostly, seek out opportunities to learn about the history of our country and of its First Peoples – because the history is in every place, every Aboriginal name. Near where you live. Look for the story. It exists, and it is extraordinary."

Commissioner Engagements

Yoorrook Commissioners are promoting the truth telling process at a range of public events. Notable occasions include:

- Yoorrook Chair Eleanor Bourke giving the annual Narrm Oration at the University of Melbourne
- Deputy Chair Sue-Anne Hunter presenting the Swinburne University Annual Reconciliation Lecture and appearing as a guest speaker at the NewKind Conference and Reconciliation Victoria AGM forum
- Commissioner Maggie Walter speaking at the Japanangka Errol West lecture on truth-telling and silence in lutruwita
- Commissioner Kevin Bell presenting alongside Yoorrook Expert Advisory Committee Member Dr Michael Maquire at the Queens University Belfast Congress of Nations and States Academic Conference 2022

New Office and Hearing Room

In September, Yoorrook Commissioners and staff were honoured to welcome Elders and special guests to the official opening of our new office space and hearing room in Collingwood. Auntie Jill Gallagher AO addressed those present at the opening with a stirring speech about the importance of Truth Telling and Treaty.



Auntie Jill Gallagher AO (middle) with Yoorrook Chair Eleanor Bourke and Senior Counsel Tony McAvoy at the opening of Yoorrook's Collingwood office and hearing room.

Get Involved

Yoorrook is actively encouraging First Peoples to make a truth telling submission. You can help by sharing a link to the submission portal with your friends, family and networks: <https://yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au/have-your-say/make-a-submission/>

You can also follow Yoorrook on social media for updates and more shareable content.

Follow us on social media:



We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and pay our respect to them, their culture and their Elders past and present.

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