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Apology to the First Peoples of Victoria

This Parliament expresses our formal and sincere apology to First Peoples of Victoria for the harm inflicted upon them through the actions and inactions of the State, and the colony that came before it, in the following terms:

Decisions made in this Parliament over its history have long denied the First Peoples of this land their rights and their self-determination.

Today, this Parliament becomes a place of reckoning, and that reckoning has meaning for all of us who call Victoria home. We acknowledge the harm inflicted on generations of First Peoples — and mark the beginning of a new era, one that embraces truth, honours justice, and creates space for a shared future built in full view of the past.

We acknowledge that many of us did not know about the true extent of this harm until the work of the truth-telling Yoorrook Justice Commission. Whether we came here 174 years ago when the Colony of Victoria was formed, or the decades since, we came dreaming of a better future. The Commission has transformed the way we reckon with this State's history and face the truths shared by Elders, survivors, families and community leaders, that the better futures for many, came at the expense of others — making plain what was long buried beneath denial and shame.

The Yoorrook Justice Commission found that the sovereignty of First Peoples in Victoria was never ceded. This is what Traditional Owners have always maintained.

Colonisation of what is now called Victoria was not peaceful. It was rapid and violent. Lands and waters were taken without consent. Communities were displaced, languages silenced, children removed, lives lost.

The Yoorrook Justice Commission heard that the laws and policies of the colonial and Victorian governments, enabled these acts — not by accident, but by design. The actions and inactions of the State, and the colony that came before it, carried out through words spoken and laws passed in the chambers of Parliament, resulted in profound and undeniable harms — the effects of which we are still grappling with today. We can no longer look away.

Now that we have a Statewide Treaty — a negotiated agreement between equals — we can begin to say what should have been said long ago. To ensure that the wrongs of the past are never repeated, we say sorry. To all the First Peoples in the gallery today, and to every community across this State — we say, sorry.

For the laws, the policies and the decisions of this Parliament and those that came before it — laws that took land, removed children, broke families, and tried to erase culture — we say sorry.

For the tears shed in the dark, for the silence that shadowed their years, and for the childhood taken, never to return — for the Stolen Generations — we say sorry.

For the violence committed under the banner of the State, and the colony that came before it, and for the neglect that allowed it to continue without consequence — we say sorry.

For the laws that criminalised culture and punished survival — we say sorry.

For the wealth built on lands and waters taken without consent, while First Peoples were locked out of the prosperity it created — we say sorry.

For the silencing of language, and the erasure of words that carried knowledge older than the State itself — we say sorry. The loss of those languages is a loss for us all, for they held truths about this ancient land that we may now never fully understand.

For the forced removal of families to missions and reserves, where culture was controlled, movement restricted and identity denied — we say sorry.

For the policies that stripped First Peoples of the right to move freely, to marry without permission, to work for fair wages, or to live with dignity on their own land — we say sorry.

For the laws and policies which removed First Peoples from their lands and allowed the sale of sacred sites without consent — we say sorry.

For the laws that filled institutions disproportionately with First Peoples and made this seem ordinary — we say sorry.

For the harm that was done, and for the harm that continues — we say sorry with the resolve to work with you to address injustice in all its guises.

And to those who carried the truth all their lives but did not live to hear it spoken here — we say sorry. From today, our hope is that your descendants and all Victorians hear these truths and move forward together in the knowledge of your legacies.

We offer this apology with open minds, open eyes and open hearts. We know that words alone are not enough. This is why the State of Victoria has pursued Treaty, to create the enduring change that must follow.

So, let this be one act among many that honours the truth and upholds justice.

Through Treaty, we commit to building a future where the power taken is returned, where the voices silenced are heard, and where the relationship between First Peoples and the State is remade — not in the image of the past, but in a future of equality and respect for all our peoples.

If this apology is to carry more than words and the intention of Members today, then we must certify through what we do next that Treaty is not merely a gesture. It is a pathway to healing and change. It is how we begin to right the wrongs that apology alone cannot mend.

So, to those who held the truth close, both present and gone, and to those yet to carry its weight and wisdom, we offer this promise: Victoria will not look away.

Not from the truth. Not from the work.

Not from you.

Hon. Jacinta Allan MP
Premier of Victoria