

Welcome to the fourth edition of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council's (Council) newsletter, which outlines some of the Council's key work over the last six months.

A key milestone was the passing of the Aboriginal Heritage Amendment Act 2016 on 22 March 2016. While there is always more work to do, the Council's view is that the changes deliver significant reforms to strengthen the voice of Traditional Owners in the management and protection of their heritage. We believe the new Act will take us all to a new level of recognition of Traditional Owners' roles, rights and responsibilities. But we will always work to expand this further.

From 1 August 2016, the Council will take on several new functions and powers under the new legislation and has been working intensively to prepare for this transition. We very much look forward to walking with you in this next phase of our journey.

Mick Harding
Chairperson



Council's new powers and functions under the Aboriginal Heritage Amendment Act 2016

- Council will become the central coordinating body for Aboriginal Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred material
- An Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Fund will be established by Government and managed by the Council
- RAP decision-making will be simplified by giving the Council more flexibility
- Council's functions will be expanded to include:
 - providing an annual report to the Minister
 - making conditions on RAP appointments and operations
 - monitoring and reporting on the state of Victoria's Aboriginal cultural heritage every five years.

The Council had its first chance to look at the Aboriginal Heritage Amendment Bill in November 2015. Since then, we have focused on understanding these new powers and functions.

We have established a Transition Working Group and are recruiting a Transition Project Manager. We have started working with stakeholders and expect to be able to share more information in coming months about how Council will achieve its new responsibilities.

Talking about self-determination

Council members attended the statewide forum held by the Minister on 3 February and will attend the forum on 26 and 27 May which is intended to continue consultation with community. Council is hoping to work with all Traditional Owners to make the most of these important opportunities for discussions.

Council publishes its 2015 Annual Report

[Read the report](#)



Meetings with key stakeholders

The Council met with Heidi Victoria, Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Greg Barber, Victorian Greens Leader in December 2015.

Mick Harding, Chairperson, and Jennifer Beer, Deputy Chairperson, met with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP, in February. The Council will meet with the Minister in June to discuss various matters, including the implementation of Council's new functions and powers and its transition to greater independence as a Victorian statutory authority.

The Council also met with Jason Mifsud, the new Executive Director of Aboriginal Victoria, in March 2016.



From top left to bottom right: Rodney Carter, Mick Harding, Jason Mifsud, Jim Berg, Jill Gallagher, Jennifer Beer, Nellie Flagg and Eleanor Bourke. Not present: Tim Chatfield.

Victorian Parliament's protocol regarding the Acknowledgement of Country

On 9 February 2016, Mick Harding joined Traditional Owners, Elders and community members as guests in the Legislative Assembly chamber for the first official Acknowledgement of Country in Victorian Parliament. Previously reserved for special occasions, an Acknowledgement of Country will now take place on the first day of every sitting week of the Victorian Parliament for the first time in history. Following an unanimous resolution by the Legislative Assembly in December 2015, this practice has been built into the Legislative Assembly's sitting protocols from now on.

***We acknowledge the Traditional Aboriginal Owners of the land on which we are meeting.
We pay our respects to them, their culture, their Elders past, present and future, and Elders
from other communities who may be here today.***



Photo courtesy of Parliament of Victoria



Supporting the protection, management and return of Ancestral Remains

The Council has continued to work for the protection and management of Ancestral Remains. Some examples of this work include:

- Meeting with Museum Victoria in December 2015
- Receiving a presentation from Dr Michael Westaway and Mr Aaron Fogel about investigating historical cemeteries
- Making a presentation at the National Museum of Australia's *Encounters* conference in Canberra in March 2016.
Council members, Eleanor Bourke and Rodney Carter spoke about the Council's work regarding the return and protection of Ancestral Remains, the legal recognition of Victorian Traditional Owners' rights to manage their cultural heritage, and ways in which institutions, such as museums and universities, can work with Traditional Owners regarding their cultural materials.
- Working with Museum Victoria and Aboriginal Victoria to hold a repatriation forum in the second half of 2016
- Developing a website and education pack for release at the same time as Council's documentary on the return and protection of Ancestors in Victoria. The historic documentary is due for release in late 2016.

Promoting awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage

Council is determined to see that the cultural rights and responsibilities of Traditional Owners are realised and respected. Some of the ways in which Council has advocated this in the last six months include:

- Council met with the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations in December 2015 to discuss shared objectives and aspirations
- More than 80 stakeholders from diverse parts of Victoria and sectors involved in Aboriginal cultural heritage participated in Council's stakeholder meeting on 1 April 2016. After a brief presentation from the Council about its current work, participants joined roundtable discussions around the following five key themes:
 1. Promoting understanding and awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage
 2. Amendments to the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* and the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council's future functions
 3. Aboriginal cultural heritage and land management
 4. Engagement between local government and Traditional Owners
 5. The return and protection of Ancestral Remains

A summary report of the matters raised at this meeting and by stakeholders who could not attend will be published in coming weeks for distribution. Some of the photos taken on the day feature on the next page.



For more information about Council, visit <http://dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/victorian-aboriginal-heritage-council>

Contact the Council: Post: GPO Box 2392, Melbourne 3001 Email: vahc@dpc.vic.gov.au Phone: (03) 9208 3243