



Media Statement

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Australian Indigenous languages represent 9% of the world's critically endangered languages. We must do better.

Paul Paton, CEO of the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations

Most people wouldn't have cause to stop and think about speaking their own language. Because they are.

For centuries, language has been used to form communities, create social cohesion and to mark outsiders. For Aboriginal people it has marked us as outsiders on our own Country and its removal has been used as a way to colonize us.

This is because language is more than communication, it is cultural identity. It enables you to share and be known to one another.

Passed through generations, language connects us to our land, culture and ancestors. It is through our language that we see and describe the world around us. Each language has a unique way to see the world, when a language is no longer spoken, we aren't just losing the language we are losing a way to see the world through that language.

Today we mark International Mother Language Day during the second year of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Indigenous languages in Australia comprise only 2% of languages spoken in the world but represent 9% of the world's critically endangered languages. We must do better.

The Albanese Government's recent launch of a new National Cultural Policy, *Revive*, is a step in the right direction. The policy not only supports providing \$11 million to establish a First Nations Languages Policy Partnership between First Nations representatives and Australian governments but commits to introducing legislation to protect First Nations knowledge and cultural expressions.

As a cultural lynchpin, it is essential that Traditional Owners are supported to reclaim, protect and share their languages. Culture is collectively owned and decision about cultural care and use are shared ones. Each community is different, with different needs and different expectations.

The right of Indigenous people to use our own languages has been asserted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders since time immemorial. These rights are also enshrined in the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP).

Aboriginal Languages have so much to contribute to modern Australian society through song, dance, education and land management just to name a few.

If you want to hear Aboriginal Languages spoken on the street and shown on street signs, respect the Traditional Owners of that language, support our efforts to revive them and our right to determine their future.

But we also need more than just government support, we need each and every one of us to understand the importance of our languages, respect the custodians and value their place as part of the social and cultural fabric of this great land.

Reconciliation is a word we must speak in many languages.

-- ENDS --

About Paul Paton

Paul is a Gunnai and Monaro man with a long involvement in reconnecting individuals and communities with language, culture and identity. He has held several executive roles and directorships including as the Executive Officer at the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages and as a Director on the Board of First Nations Legal & Research Services.

Paul is committed to building on the Federation's success as a key organisation that strengthens the voice of Traditional Owners in Victoria. He brings his knowledge, skills and networks to work closely with Traditional Owners across the State to support their aspirations for community and Country whilst taking up the challenge for self-determination and Treaty.

About the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is the Victorian state-wide body that convenes and advocates for the rights of Traditional Owners while progressing wider social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives. We support the progress of agreement-making and participation in decision-making to enhance the authority of Traditional Owner Corporations on behalf of their communities.

The Federation was established in 2013 by Traditional Owner Corporations who recognised that through a path of working together Traditional Owner Groups could be stronger and could advance their shared interests in policy engagement, and in creating economic opportunities and caring for Country.

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