



**Victorian
Aboriginal
Legal Service**



14 May 2024

Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
By email: JSCATSIA@aph.gov.au

To the Committee Members,

**Re: Economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nations
Australians.**

I am writing to provide feedback on the Committee's inquiry into economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nations Australians.

I commend the Committee for seeking to understand the opportunities and barriers relating to accessing training, employment and business development, the impediments to building economic and social infrastructure, the options to unlock capital and leverage intellectual property and the international and intergenerational experiences of fostering economic independence for First Nations communities.

This country's first truth telling inquiry, the Yoorrook Justice Commission, is currently investigating systemic injustice experienced by Aboriginal peoples in economic life, including economic development and prosperity in Victoria.

I've attached VALS' response to this inquiry as there are strong overlaps between the Terms of Reference for this inquiry and the one you are undertaking. Our Yoorrook submission on economic prosperity covers reparations, how VALS supports economic prosperity for our people and how colonial systems tax Aboriginal people.

Improving the economic prosperity of our people is essential to Treaty making. Colonialism impoverished our people by taking our land, committing acts of genocide against our people, enslaving us, and denying us access to the colonial economy.

Preston Head Office

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Colonialism has maintained the impoverishment of our people. At VALS, we see every day how the criminal legal system criminalises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how that criminalisation strips them of opportunities to get employment, build wealth, and pass on that wealth to their family and community.

Our people have persisted despite the colonial systems that have impoverished them. Our people created community-controlled organisations to provide healthcare and childcare supports, to offer food and clothing, and to provide legal services. We are a self-reliant people that have survived even when the deck is stacked against us – and we will thrive once again when the colonial boot is taken off our neck.

I have also attached our response to Yoorrook's inquiry on education (schooling and tertiary), as this is relevant to the Committee's inquiry.

We have also provided responses to Yoorrook's issues papers on the [criminal legal system](#), [child protection](#), [family violence](#), [health and healthcare](#), [housing and homelessness](#). We encourage committee members to review these submissions alongside the Yoorrook for Justice report, which provided recommendations for reform regarding the criminal legal and child protection systems

I have linked each of these submissions in the above paragraph. All of our submissions to Yoorrook can be found under a dedicated section of our [publications webpage](#), under the title of Nuther-mooyoops to the Yoorrook Justice Commission. I encourage the inquiry to utilise all other policy publications available via our publications page.

If VALS can be of any further assistance, please let me know. I look forward to reading the final report of the inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Nerita Waight
Chief Executive Officer

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