



The Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP

Minister for Jobs and Industry
Minister for Treaty and First Peoples
Minister for Women

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Robert McDonald
Clerk of the Legislative Council
Legislative Council
council@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr McDonald,

Thank you for your letter of 15 October 2024, regarding a petition presented to the Legislative Council by Joe McCracken, Member for the Western Victoria Region.

The Victorian Government and the Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC), acting on behalf of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk People (WJJWJ People), signed a Recognition and Settlement Agreement (the WJJWJ Agreement) under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (Vic) (TOS Act) in October 2022. The WJJWJ Agreement is the fourth Recognition and Settlement Agreement signed by the Victorian Government and Traditional Owners since 2010.

The WJJWJ Agreement is benefiting all Victorians by promoting reconciliation and improving the cultural and economic wellbeing of the WJJWJ People. In the WJJWJ Agreement, the State acknowledges that the resources flowing from WJJWJ Country over the past 200 years have helped make Victoria one of the most prosperous States in Australia. The State acknowledges that WJJWJ People did not share in this prosperity, due to historical State laws that prevented their involvement. It therefore includes State-owned land and State funding as redress by mutual agreement, avoiding costly litigation and compensation claims against the State under the Native Title Act.

Local councils are not a party to the WJJWJ Agreement, which is between the BGLC and the State of Victoria. The Agreement does not impact current council laws and regulations. Local governments are independent of the Victorian Government and will determine their own relationships with the WJJWJ People. The WJJWJ Agreement does not create any additional costs for rate payers.

This petition relates primarily to concerns about a Local Government Engagement Strategy (the Strategy) which is part of the WJJWJ Agreement. The Strategy lists the aspirations of the WJJWJ People about priority areas for engagement with local councils in the Agreement Area. The Strategy commits the State to facilitate the development of relationships between the BGLC (representing the WJJWJ People) and the local councils of the Agreement Area. While the State Government encourages local governments to consider how they might give effect to the Strategy, councils retain discretion about what financial and other commitments they decide to make.

The WJJWJ Agreement, including the Local Government Engagement Strategy, is available online at <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/wotjobaluk-jaadwa-jadawadjali-wergaia-and-jupagulk-people-wotjobaluk-nations-recognition-settlement-agreement>. Western Victorian community members have the opportunity to share their views about the actions in the Strategy with their local councillors. I encourage them to continue to do so.

As part of any future negotiations that may affect local governments, the Department of Premier and Cabinet will engage with local councils in the Agreement Area to ensure accurate information is provided to Councils, and that Council's views continue to be provided to the Government before decisions are made.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Natalie Hutchins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Treaty and First Peoples

20 / 11 / 2024