



30 July 2020

Media Release

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC) statement in response to Victorian Ombudsman's report into Western Highway duplication project.

EMAC acknowledges the release today of the Victorian Ombudsman's own motion investigation report into the planning and delivery of the Western Highway duplication project. We also note the report's account of our role in the detailed cultural heritage assessments and investigations that led to acknowledging and protecting Aboriginal cultural values.

Who we are and who we represent

Incorporated under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006, EMAC is a Registered Native Title Prescribed Body Corporate that protects and manages Native Title rights and interests for the collective Eastern Maar peoples. EMAC was formally established in 2011 by resolution of the Eastern Maar Full Group, at the same time positive Native Title consent determination was recognized for an area of land commonly referred to as PART B, broadly located between Dunkeld and Yambuk and shared alongside Gunditj Miring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.

EMAC, as agreed by the Eastern Maar Native Title Holders, is the rightful vehicle for representing the collective group in the advancement of cultural protection, cultural learning, and actively pursuing economic and social aspirations.

The Eastern Maar people identify as, Eastern Gunditjmara, Tjap Wurrung, Peek Whurrong, Kirrae Whurrung, Kuurn Kopan Noot, Yarro waetch (Tooram tribe), Gadubanud and/or Gulidjan amongst other names - who today collectively refer to themselves as the Eastern Maar People/Citizens. Our Ancestral Estate extends as far north as Ararat, encompassing the Warrnambool, Port Fairy and Great Ocean Road areas, and stretches 100m out to sea.

Eastern Maar peoples have asserted - and substantially maintained - identity and existence from generation to generation. Our citizens have observed traditional laws and customs, such that the acknowledgement and observance has continued 'substantially uninterrupted' since sovereignty.

EMAC is governed by a 12 member Board - each member represents a defined family grouping which is linked to a referenced ancestor who occupied territory at the time of European settlement. Up to 60% of our 12-member board is represented by proud Eastern Maar women, some of whom are senior Elders and applicants of our Native Title claim. We are proud to operate as a society that has a unique decision-making structure – one which is



committed to collectivism and inclusion, and which values common goals over individual pursuits.

The report

We acknowledge the Ombudsman's comprehensive report in reference to the planning and delivery of the Western Highway duplication project which formally commenced in early 2008. We also understand and appreciate the complexity inherent in both the Victorian Ombudsman's review and the road project itself, which impacts Aboriginal cultural heritage and values.

The report affirms that Eastern Maar representatives have consistently operated in good faith throughout our involvement in the project. Since our involvement in the project in 2017, representatives from our board - made up of the 12 Eastern Maar family groups including proud Eastern Maar women and Elders - have been on hand, consulted and involved in the cultural heritage assessments and investigations for the project.

Our contribution to the extensive assessment and review of culturally significant sites and trees within the project area resulted, through considered and principled negotiation, in the realignment of the roadway to avoid and protect those trees identified and assessed as culturally significant.

During the course of our involvement in the project, we became a formally recognised Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP). This meant we held primary responsibility for cultural heritage decisions within our RAP boundary, including the Western Highway. RAPs have formal functions in the management and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage, and serve as the principal contact for general enquiries relating to cultural heritage within their appointed area. Consequently, becoming a RAP formalised and legally protected our standing as cultural advocates and decision-makers.

We are strengthened by the voice of EMAC citizens who, like anybody, have the right to question any decision-making process. This underpins the foundations of Aboriginal governance in Victoria.

Eastern Maar strongly believes preserving our cultural heritage is crucial to the integrity and identity of our nation. This will always take priority in our decision-making processes.

As the Registered Aboriginal Party and Native Title holders representing the Traditional Owners and in the spirit of self-determination, we will continue to progress the heritage, culture, rights and aspirations of our People.



Eastern Maar
Aboriginal Corporation

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Relevant resources

<https://www.fvtoc.com.au/blog/easternmaarwesternhighway>

<https://www.fvtoc.com.au/blog/westernhighway>

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land we work on as the First People of this country

ENDS

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