

# **Acknowledgment of Country**

The diverse landscapes of Victoria have been the home of, and of significance to, diverse Nations for more than 60,000 years. The First Peoples in Victoria have cared for and nurtured Country throughout this time. The lands and waters on which Victorians and visitors draw enjoyment and inspiration continue to be a living cultural landscape.

We proudly acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters throughout Victoria, and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We recognise the rights and aspirations of Victorian First Peoples and acknowledge that First Peoples' Self-Determination is a human right as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Building on this and guided by the 11 principles of First Peoples' Self-Determination, we are working together to enable true self-determination for Victoria's First Peoples. We have been on a path to Treaty for almost 8 years to give First Peoples a say on the policies that impact their lives. Through Treaty, we can bring Victorians together and feel shared pride in Aboriginal heritage, history and culture.

The First People's Tourism Plan for Victoria recognises the growing demand for experiences that celebrate Victoria's rich and diverse First Peoples culture. It encourages greater dialogue with Traditional Owners and First Peoples in Victoria to ensure actions are self-determined and reflect their aspirations and priorities.

## Language statement

We recognise the diversity of First Peoples living throughout Victoria. While the terms 'Koorie' or 'Koori' are commonly used to describe First Peoples of South-East Australia, we have used the term 'First Peoples' to include all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria.

## About the artwork Bridging Cultures

#### Artist

#### Talitha Podger, Wemba Wemba and Mutthi Mutthi

This piece celebrates meaningful connections between cultures, fostering understanding, respect and inclusivity. Within the context of Victoria's tourism sector, it represents the creation of pathways for dialogue and interaction between visitors and First Peoples, emphasising shared experiences and mutual learning.

#### **Colour Symbolism**

- The **green** background represents growth, harmony, and the natural environment, reflecting the importance of connection to Country and shared sustainability.
- Yellow represent warmth and sunlight, embodying optimism and the vibrancy of cultural exchange and shared experiences.
- **White** (connections) represents clarity, peace, and unity, highlighting mutual respect and understanding between cultures.

#### Themes

- Promoting Cultural Competency.
- Meeting Places: Depict First Peoples teaching and sharing stories with individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Bridges: Illustrate the essence of the artwork– creating connections between cultures to promote understanding and respect in tourism.

# **Foreword**

# Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events

The Victorian tourism sector delivers world-class tourism attractions while offering visitors experiences that feel unique, and authentically reflect the Victorian character – who we are, and what we value.

The First Peoples Tourism Plan for Victoria highlights the vital role that First Peoples play in shaping the unique character of our state's visitor economy. By centring the culture, history, and practices of Victoria's Traditional Custodians, the plan recognises the significant contributions of First Peoples to the \$39.2 billion tourism sector. We are fortunate to live in an incredible state and country, one that we can rightfully take pride in. This pride is even greater knowing we are home to the world's longest continuing culture. I want to celebrate, promote, and share this with the world.

Experience Victoria 2033 – Victoria's 10-year visitor economy strategic plan – identified First Peoples-led experiences as a key pillar of our visitor economy. The First Peoples Tourism Plan for Victoria creates a framework to support the growth of Victoria's First Peoples tourism sector and further embed the principles of self-determination to ensure it's an authentic representation of our state's cultural richness.

As part of Victoria's commitment to First Peoples self-determination, this Plan has been envisioned and developed alongside First Peoples. We thank Traditional Owner Corporations, Registered Aboriginal Parties, business owners, thought leaders, entrepreneurs and tourism industry stakeholders for their contributions to this Plan.

Their candid insights into the opportunities for growth in First Peoples tourism have played an integral role in the construction of this Plan and will ultimately help boost economic opportunities and participation for First Peoples in Victoria's thriving tourism sector.

#### Steve Dimopoulos Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events



#### **Koori Caucus**

As demand for First Peoples-led tourism experiences continues to grow throughout Victoria's tourism sector, the *First Peoples Tourism Plan for Victoria* represents the next stage of the Victorian Government's work to elevate First Peoples throughout the tourism sector.

The Plan builds on work previously carried out under *Victoria's Aboriginal Tourism Development Strategy 2013–2023* and reflects the overarching principles outlined in the *Yuma Yirramboi: Invest in Tomorrow* strategy – specifically addressing how the state's thriving tourism sector – which is projected to be worth \$58 billion by 2033 – can be a driver of greater economic participation and wealth creation for First Peoples in Victoria.

Importantly, the First Peoples Plan for Victoria also reflects Victoria's progress towards Truth and Treaty. It prioritises First Peoples self-determination and supports practical frameworks that the Victorian Government can put in place to support better policies, and embed First Peoples in decisions that impact how they can participate in the state's tourism sector.

And that – as employees and employers, consumers and suppliers, creators and contributors – can shape the economic identity of a tourism sector that is striving to establish itself as a global leader in First Peoples tourism experiences.

#### **Koori Caucus**

# **Foreword**

# **Minister for Treaty and First Peoples**

First Peoples have cared for Victoria's lands, waters and skies for many thousands of years.

The First Peoples Tourism Plan for Victoria 2025–2030 for Victoria identifies opportunities for our state's tourism industry to embrace First Peoples custodianship, heritage and knowledge. In doing so, we will enrich Victoria's tourism sector by enabling operators and experiences to meaningfully engage with First Peoples cultures and heritage.

The plan rightly recognises that First Peoples should not only be acknowledged for this important custodianship, but also the important role First Peoples play in Victoria's tourism sector, which is projected to grow to \$58 billion by 2033.

The plan identifies ways to increase First Peoples involvement in the tourism industry in a way that benefits First Peoples businesses, Traditional Owners, and Victoria's visitor economy.

Victoria is home to the world's oldest living cultural heritage. This deserves to be celebrated.

First Peoples cultures live on today through key tourist attractions including vibrant spaces like the Koorie Heritage Trust and World Heritage Listings like Budj Bim – a key part of celebrating First Peoples cultures with more tourists is ensuring what we do is embedded in self-determination, and that's what this plan is about, and what Victoria's first Statewide Treaty will deliver.

I'd like to thank Registered Aboriginal Parties, Traditional Owners Corporations and First Peoples businesses who engaged in the development of this plan. Their input has been pivotal in setting out a roadmap for amplifying, celebrating and empowering First Peoples in the tourism industry.

I look forward to seeing operators in Victoria's tourism sector use this plan to drive investment and attract more visitors to Victoria, together with First Peoples.

The Hon. Natalie Hutchins Minister for Treaty and First Peoples





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All tourism in Victoria happens on Country, where First Peoples connection to land, waterways, and living beings offers an unmatched opportunity to share meaningful, immersive experiences.

These opportunities invite visitors to engage deeply with First Peoples ways of knowing and being, fostering understanding while supporting the preservation and promotion of culture for future generations and supporting economic growth opportunities for First Peoples communities.

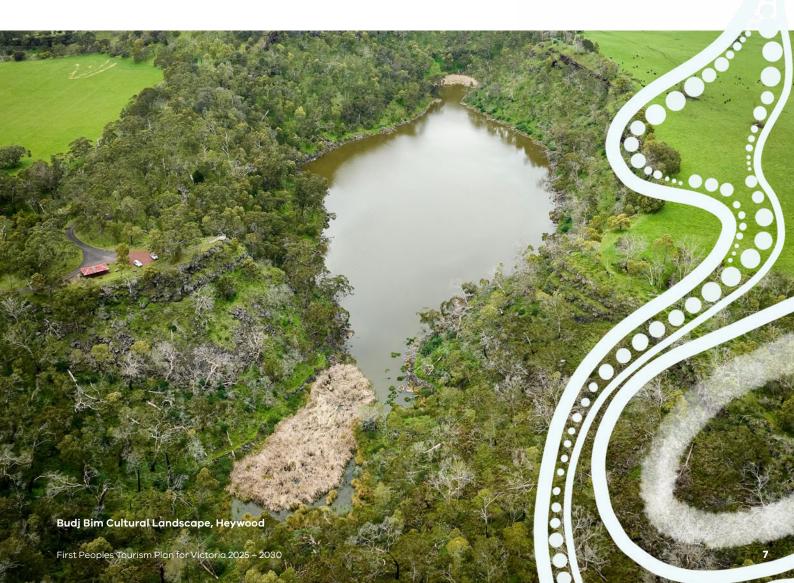
The First Peoples Tourism Plan for Victoria 2025 – 2030 (Plan) envisions a tourism sector that authentically reflects Victoria's cultural richness, with First Peoples at the forefront. It positions First Peoples-led tourism as a hallmark of any visit to Victoria – a key commitment of Experience Victoria 2033, the state's 10-year visitor economy strategy. This Plan replaces Victoria's Aboriginal tourism development strategy 2013–2023, the previous strategy to support First People's tourism in Victoria. This Plan is a critical step in supporting First Peoples self-determination and building economic prosperity for communities, meeting the rising demand for tourism experiences and partnerships that respect and empower First Peoples.

### What is First Peoples tourism?

First Peoples tourism includes a wide variety of experiences that celebrate First Peoples culture, heritage, and enduring connection to Country through art, performances, guided experiences, and more.

This covers a diverse spectrum from Jala Jala Treats – a First Peoples owned and operated business on a mission to highlight First Peoples culture and food with the world – to the Bangerang Cultural Centre in Kanny-goopna / Shepparton, preserving First Peoples identity, telling the history and maintaining cultural heritage.

Whether run by First Peoples or incorporated into other tourism offerings, First Peoples tourism provides an authentic viewpoint on heritage and culture, with respect and acknowledgement for the rights of First Peoples and provides an avenue for economic uplift of First Peoples communities.



#### Who this Plan is for

The Plan has been developed with and for Victoria's First Peoples to support tourism operators – from entrepreneurs and small business owners to Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) and Traditional Owner Corporations (TOCs) – encompassing the full range of First Peoples businesses. It aims to build intergenerational wealth, strengthen cultural pride, and create a sustainable ecosystem for First Peoples tourism. Victoria's rich cultural heritage is a source of pride for all who call this place home. If we do not embrace and showcase the world's longest continuing culture, we miss the opportunity to offer something truly unique on the global stage - an authentic connection to Country, culture, and the stories that have shaped this land for over 60,000 years. These businesses include, but are not limited to, tour operators who share stories on Country, transport companies that shuttle visitors across Victoria, shop owners that feature First Peoples creative wares, and so many more that make up the rich tapestry of First Peoples businesses that helped to shape and will benefit from this Plan. By working together, we can both honour the past and create opportunities for all visitors and Victorians – ensuring that this extraordinary legacy continues to inspire and thrive.

This Plan seeks to:

- enable economic empowerment by fostering tourism enterprises and partnerships that drive prosperity for First Peoples.
- preserve and celebrate cultural heritage by integrating authentic First Peoples narratives and practices into existing tourism experiences.
- enhance community pride and wellbeing through sharing cultural stories, knowledge, and traditions.

The overarching goal is to achieve these outcomes in a way that supports economic parity for First Peoples, fostering equity and inclusion in Victoria's tourism landscape, in line with Victorian Government and First Peoples **Yuma Yirramboi Strategy**.

First Peoples should not shoulder this work alone; the broader tourism industry plays a vital role in elevating and expanding First Peoples tourism. This includes everyone from small tour operators to large tourism peak bodies, Visitor Economy Partnerships, and the businesses that make up the rich tapestry of our visitor economy – hotels, caravan parks, wineries, galleries, local retail shops – all have a role to play in supporting First Peoples tourism. This Plan provides pathways for the tourism industry to forge respectful, mutually beneficial partnerships with First Peoples to enhance the depth and diversity of Victoria's tourism offerings.

By prioritising partnerships with First Peoples, the tourism industry can celebrate and elevate the richness of First Peoples heritage and knowledge while supporting their self-determined aspirations. First Peoples-owned, led, and driven businesses are key drivers of economic empowerment, fostering sustainability and innovation across the sector. This approach ensures that Victorian tourism is not only enriched by but authentically represents the diversity and depth of First Peoples stories and cultural heritage while providing economic opportunity for First Peoples and communities.

# How this Plan was developed

The Plan has been developed with, and driven by, the aspirations and assertions of First Peoples. It has evolved through iterative engagement to ensure the Plan authentically reflects their aspirations for First Peoples-led tourism. It has been informed by meaningful on-the-ground discussions with TOCs, RAPs, business owners, thought leaders, and entrepreneurs. Tourism industry leaders also offered crucial insights, emphasising their role in fostering a sustainable and equitable tourism ecosystem that supports and enables self-determination.

Statewide engagements, both online and in-person, included workshops, interviews, and surveys, ensuring the Plan encompassed a wide range of perspectives.

This Plan outlines a roadmap for success, including clear objectives, a compelling vision, and commitments to action to achieve meaningful outcomes. The actions detailed within aim to provide practical, scalable pathways for implementation, emphasising partnerships and co-designed initiatives. By aligning resources, fostering accountability, and advocating for investment, we aim to support First Peoples tourism in a way that honours cultural integrity and promotes economic growth. This represents our commitment to nurturing a narrative of authenticity, empowerment, and shared prosperity in First Peoples tourism.

This Plan is a starting point, not an endpoint. True self-determination is an ongoing journey, and we are committed to continued partnership with First Peoples, the tourism industry, and all levels of government to bring this Plan to life.



# The First Peoples Tourism Plan for Victoria sits alongside other Victorian Government commitments to First Peoples' economic empowerment and self-determination

#### Yuma Yirramboi Strategy

Yuma Yirramboi is the Victorian Government and Aboriginal Victorians' shared vision to generate greater individual and collective wealth for Aboriginal Victorians.

This Plan provides a sector-specific lens to achieving *Yuma Yirramboi's* vision to create economic growth and prosperity for First Peoples.

# Experience Victoria 2033 Experience Victoria 2033 is the state's

strategic plan to shape the future of Victoria's visitor economy over the next 10 years.

The plan will strengthen Victoria's enviable tourism offering by leveraging the state's competitive advantages – including supporting the growth and development of First Peoples-led experiences.

#### **Treaty for Victoria**

Victoria has been on the Truth and Treaty path for more than eight years. We have passed legislation twice, developed policies, and made commitments across every level of government.

Victoria's Treaty is about putting practical frameworks in place to implement better policies and make sure First People have a say in decisions that impact First Peoples' lives.

This Plan prioritises
First Peoples selfdetermination, on the
journey towards Treaty.

#### **Yoorrook Justice Commission**

The Yoorrook Justice Commission is the first formal truth-telling process into historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria. Yoorrook will:

- Establish an official record of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples in Victoria.
- Develop a shared understanding among all Victorians of the impact of colonisation, as well as the diversity, strength and resilience of First Peoples' cultures.
- Make recommendations for healing, system reform and practical changes to laws, policy and education, as well as to matters to be included in future treaties.

Yoorrook will deliver a final report in 2025.





#### **Tourism trends**

Victoria's visitor economy is growing: nearly 90 million visitors spent \$37.8 billion in the state in 2023 – projected to grow to \$58 billion by 2033.

These visitors are no longer solely drawn to 'flagship' attractions but are increasingly seeking authentic experiences rooted in nature, history, and culture. This shift highlights a significant market opportunity for expanding and integrating First Peoples tourism across the state and expanding economic opportunity for First Peoples.

**Experience Victoria 2033** identified key trends that further underscore the potential for First Peoples tourism:

- Conscious consumers: Visitors are prioritising authentic, inclusive, and meaningful experiences that connect them with diverse cultural narratives.
- **Nature-based tourism:** As interest in nature-based tourism grows, there is an opportunity to integrate a First Peoples lens, emphasising traditional ecological knowledge, sustainable practices, and cultural connections to the land.
- Regional Victoria's offerings: With regional
  Victoria as the most popular destination for short
  stay intra-state travellers, there is a clear avenue
  to leverage First Peoples businesses in these
  areas, aligning with local and visitor demand
  for immersive cultural experiences.

The convergence of these trends and the state's growing visitor economy sets Victoria up to be a leader in centring First Peoples tourism as a core part of its cultural and economic identity.

# The opportunity for First Peoples tourism

# Tapping into interest in cultural tourism

In 2023, more than half a million visitors to Victoria participated in First Peoples activities during their overnight trip.<sup>2</sup>

While in line with most other states across Australia, this is just a fraction of visitors to our state. Further, international visitors report choosing Australia for its First Peoples tourism appeal, yet 42% of those visitors did not engage in First Peoples activities while in Victoria.<sup>3</sup>

This highlights a clear untapped demand and significant potential for growth in First Peoples tourism experiences. Capitalising on this opportunity will require developing culturally immersive experiences that prioritise the protection of culture through sustainable tourism. This approach should respect First Peoples culture, uphold their decision-making autonomy and foster economic prosperity, while elevating these offerings through strategic marketing and promotion to attract visitors.

<sup>1.</sup> Experience Victoria 2033: Our strategic plan for a thriving visitor economy, Victoria Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, 2023.

<sup>2.</sup> International Visitor Survey and National Visitor Survey, Tourism Research Australia, 2023.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid

# Harnessing the entrepreneurial spirit of First Peoples

First Peoples have a long and proud history of innovation – the earliest living example of aquaculture in the world is here in Victoria at **Budj Bim**, where Gunditjmara people husbanded and harvested eels to ensure a year-round supply.<sup>4</sup>

First Peoples businesses are intrinsically linked to values rooted in Caring for Country, employing sustainable land management and cultural education programs. These businesses emphasise that profitability is not always the only goal or the priority.

# "What we do on Country doesn't always come back to a dollar amount"

First Peoples community member

These values create pathways for cultural preservation and build meaningful connections with visitors. They offer authentic experiences that not only showcase cultural heritage but also prioritise environmental stewardship, community well-being and economic prosperity alongside creating financially sustainable businesses.

Today, there is energy and enthusiasm in community for wealth creation through business development, evidenced by 30% growth in the number of First Peoples startups in Australia between 2011 and 2016.<sup>5</sup>

There are opportunities for new and established business alike. Launching smaller-scale ventures, like pop-up experiences, allows new businesses to test markets and mitigate risks before scaling up to larger operations. Diversifying offerings by developing niche tours like wildlife photography during breeding seasons can attract tourists with specific interests and create new revenue streams.

But developing and growing these businesses is not without challenges. Historic and structural factors have limited First Peoples access to capital to grow their businesses, often due to restricted collateral and lack of generational wealth. Even once established, businesses face significant challenges, including managing fluctuating cash flow, accessing appropriate technology to sustain operations, navigating complex legal and regulatory requirements, and addressing staffing and retention issues exacerbated by inadequate transport and accommodation for workers, particularly in regional areas. Addressing these challenges cannot rely on entrepreneurial spirit alone. Government and industry support is crucial in building the necessary skills, providing resources, and implementing targeted actions to break down barriers and pave the way for the long-term sustainability of First Peoples businesses.

# Leveraging existing attractions

Victoria's vibrant tourism landscape is already rich with attractions. But many do not yet acknowledge Traditional Owners, Country or the inherent connection to First Peoples history and culture at tourism sites.

Victoria can do more to recognise and uplift First Peoples experiences within existing attractions and with First Peoples-led tourism products, creating captivating, culturally immersive offerings that differentiate Victoria on a global stage.

The integration of First Peoples history into Victoria's attractions is exemplified by initiatives like the Silo Art Trail, featuring works at Sheep Hills, as well as urban sites such as Hosier Lane in Naarm / Melbourne. These projects incorporate First Peoples stories into their design and highlight their importance in being told.

# "There's an authenticity that can't be faked in telling [First Peoples] stories"

Industry representative

The inclusion of these elements within broader attractions highlights the richness of First Peoples heritage and their connection to the land and fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation among visitors.

This approach not only elevates the cultural significance of these attractions but also demonstrates the tangible ways of integrating First Peoples voices in Victoria's broader tourism landscape –weaving cultural tourism more deeply into the fabric of Victoria's travel destinations and fostering growth among First Peoples enterprises.

<sup>4.</sup> Budj Bim Cultural Landscape, World Heritage Listing, accessed December 2024.

<sup>5.</sup> Ongoing growth in the number of Indigenous Australians in business, Australian National University Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2018.

# Partnering with local businesses

Collaboration with local businesses large and small, as well as tapping into networks and peak bodies, is a powerful approach to support First Peoples tourism and keep visitor spending within Victoria. By working together, local businesses and First Peoples tourism operators can create authentic, First Peoples experiences that deliver economic benefits to the region.

Furthermore, fostering strong partnerships between mainstream tourism businesses and First Peoples businesses is critical to elevate and expand authentic and genuine First Peoples experiences while creating robust linkages across the spectrum of tourism offerings. Such partnerships will not only connect visitors to culturally rich experiences but also enhance the visibility and reach of First Peoples tourism in Victoria.

These partnerships also promote First Peoples entrepreneurship, foster self-determination, promote community-wide prosperity and enable the tourism sector to diversify, offering mutual benefits to businesses, visitors, and First Peoples communities alike.

This could include promoting and directing visitors to First Peoples-owned businesses and cultural hubs within the region, like the Murran Hub in Djilang / Geelong to showcase locally made products, artwork and participate in events; or partnering with local tourism operators to include First Peoples businesses and experiences in travel packages and itineraries.

Such initiatives ensure that First Peoples experiences become integral to and intertwined with the broader tourism ecosystem, enhancing visibility, cultural education, and economic outcomes. But as these partnerships grow, it is critical that First Peoples receive an equitable share of the economic benefits to prevent the exploitation of First Peoples culture and heritage for financial gains that do not benefit First Peoples communities.

# Building the Victorian First Peoples tourism brand

This Plan will pave the way for Victoria to become a hub for authentic First Peoples tourism experiences, not just in Australia but across the globe.

The Victorian First Peoples tourism brand will be led by First Peoples voices, setting priorities for how their stories are promoted and marketed to the wider public. These efforts will dispel the perception of First Peoples tourism as purely 'red dirt' experiences and showcase the expansiveness of First Peoples culture – from a history spanning thousands of years to the present and into the future.



# Cultivating a thriving sector

#### **Our vision**

To support a thriving tourism industry that uplifts First Peoples experiences, drives sustainable economic opportunities, and fosters partnerships to strengthen communities and Victoria's visitor economy.

# How we will get there

The First Peoples Tourism Plan for Victoria identifies how we work together across First Peoples, government and industry to create a thriving First Peoples tourism sector driven by the voices and aspirations of First Peoples.

# Our objectives



**Protect** and respect First Peoples culture and autonomy in determining priorities for tourism development.



**Promote** First Peoples experiences, heritage and history as central to Victoria's unique cultural and natural tourism offerings.



**Strengthen** connections and equitable partnerships to grow First Peoples tourism offerings and support sustainable business growth.



**Invest** in the long-term sustainability of First Peoples tourism and build careers to foster economic prosperity and strengthen communities.

# How we'll do it



**Support businesses** to diversify First Peoples tourism offerings that promote the preservation of culture, economic sustainability and community wellbeing.



**Boost visibility** of First Peoples experiences as core to Victorian tourism offerings.



Facilitate and invest in partnerships between First Peoples businesses, the tourism industry and government.



**Develop capacity** and capability of First Peoples businesses and employees to thrive while supporting the industry to engage with First Peoples in culturally safe ways that respect self-determination.

# What we'll achieve



**Empowered First Peoples** that deliver impactful visitor experiences which showcase the power of culture and Country, while driving economic prosperity and sustainable growth.



Connected sector that shares knowledge that supports the growth and resiliency of First Peoples tourism businesses and experiences.



Culturally competent tourism industry equipped with the knowledge and skills to work alongside First Peoples to integrate First Peoples experiences into the Victorian tourism landscape.



Victoria as global leader for First Peoples tourism and attracting visitors from across Australia around the world to experience the breadth and depth of First Peoples experiences.

First Peoples Tourism Plan for Victoria 2025 – 2030



Achieving our vision will require bold action to meaningfully elevate First Peoples tourism in Victoria. Our actions are guided by the voices of First Peoples to set the direction and priorities consistent with the principles of self-determination.

#### What we heard

The voices of First Peoples will guide our path to strengthen the sector and ensure that all actions across First Peoples, government and industry are anchored to what we've heard from community.

We heard that this Plan must:

- protect and preserve Country, culture and history across all Victorian tourism experiences while safeguarding First Peoples authenticity and autonomy to set tourism priorities.
- raise the level of cultural competency across the tourism industry and visitors to respect and reflect First Peoples culture and history across all tourism experiences.
- facilitate connections and partnerships across
  First Peoples tourism enterprises and with the
  broader tourism industry to learn from one
  another and create linked experiences that
  strengthen First Peoples tourism businesses
  and the broader visitor economy.
- empower First Peoples businesses to create
  a sustainable First Peoples tourism ecosystem
  that provides employment opportunities and
  career pathways in the sector to build economic
  prosperity and community wellbeing.

#### What we'll do

What we heard from community underpins everything in this Plan, informing what we aim to achieve (objectives), how we will do it (actions) and what success looks like (vision and outcomes).

We are building on a rich and continuing legacy. With more than 65,000 years of continuous history, a range of vibrant First Peoples tourism experiences, a robust tourism ecosystem and actions underway across government to support the sector, we have a solid foundation to build on.

But this Plan's success hinges on collective commitment to action. We all have a role to play in strengthening First Peoples tourism – government, industry, and First Peoples. No one entity bears sole responsibility; together, we can uplift First Peoples tourism and embed self-determination across the tourism ecosystem.





# **OBJECTIVE 1: PROTECT**

Protect and respect First Peoples culture and autonomy in determining priorities for tourism development

Victoria's First Peoples cultural heritage offers unique, immersive tourism experiences that are deeply connected to Country and cannot be replicated anywhere else. As the sector expands, it is essential to uphold the authenticity of these offerings, ensuring that all tourism experiences respect and protect cultural traditions and Country.

Centring First Peoples voices and knowledge in Victoria's tourism will ensure visitors leave with greater knowledge and reverence for Victoria's First Peoples and that culture is preserved for future generations.

While First Peoples must set the priorities and direction for protection of Country and cultural assets, government and the tourism industry each have a critical role in creating the settings for protections to be respected by visitors, locals and tourism operators. This will require growing the capacity of the sector to engage in practices that honour and protect Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP).

# What's happening now

On 21 November 2024, the Victorian Government and the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria – the independent and democratically elected body to represent Traditional Owners and First Peoples in Victoria – took the historic step to commence Treaty negotiations. Treaty will create a better shared future for all Victorians and ensure that First Peoples have the freedom to make decisions that impact community, culture, and Country. Treaty will enable First Peoples to protect culture and Country while deciding how it they want it to be shared with visitors to Victoria.

Victoria is working to ensure that First Peoples voices are at the forefront of shaping tourism priorities while this important work is undertaken. Traditional Owners are driving self-determined initiatives that reflect their aspirations and inherent rights, with government support playing a collaborative role. For instance, Parks Victoria works in partnership with Traditional Owners through seven co-operative and joint management agreements with Registered Aboriginal Parties. These agreements honour Traditional Owners' enduring connection to Country and their leadership in protecting and stewarding land. At sites such as Tower Hill and Budj Bim, Traditional Owners are leading efforts to protect cultural heritage whilst unlocking tourism opportunities that celebrate and share their cultural knowledge and stories.

As we progress toward Treaty, it remains essential to ensure that First Peoples voices continue to guide the direction of First Peoples tourism experiences across Victoria. This Plan will remain adaptable and open to review, ensuring future actions align with Treaty negotiations, the delivery of Treaties in Victoria, and the findings and recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

# What we're going to do

#### **KEY ACTIONS**







Investigate options to increase advocacy and representation for First Peoples businesses operating in the visitor economy.





Embrace storytelling and facilitate truth telling in new and existing tourism experiences.





Build capacity of the tourism sector to respect and protect Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP).

#### **OUTCOMES**



First Peoples have autonomy over visitors' experiences of Country, heritage, stories, and culture.





There is a shared sense of responsibility for the protection of Country and cultural assets across First Peoples, government, tourism operators, the broader public and visitors.



### Case study

#### Eastern Maar Cultural Tourism Plan

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC) represents the Eastern Maar Native Title Holders. Through its business entity, Mana Developments, EMAC drives initiatives to promote societal prosperity and economic independence for Eastern Maar Peoples. EMAC is leading the development of a Cultural Tourism and Visitor Economy Plan, focused on creating Culturally rich tourism experiences across Eastern Maar Country to foster community sustainability and visitor economy growth.

The First Peoples Tourism Pilot funded by DJSIR has been instrumental in advancing EMAC's Country Plan goals of economic independence and self-sufficiency. The Plan will guide the development of tourism experiences to showcase Eastern Maar Traditional Knowledges and connections to Country. Experiences tailored to national and international visitor markets will be progressively rolled out over the next 5 years.

These ventures will not only generate revenue for Community investment but also strengthen cultural identity.

Looking ahead, EMAC will launch a range of experiences such as walking tours, multi-day itineraries and a prospective accreditation program to support community members to develop cultural experiences or serve as a tour guide. With Eastern Maar Country being one of the state's primary tourism destinations, these new initiatives will further elevate the profile of Victorian First Peoples tourism on a global scale.



# **OBJECTIVE 2: PROMOTE**

Promote First Peoples experiences, heritage and history as central to Victoria's unique cultural and natural tourism offerings

The diversity of Victoria's First Peoples provides a myriad of ways visitors can connect with genuine experiences that go beyond the preconceived ideas often associated with First Peoples tourism. But Victoria needs to boost awareness of these enriching experiences and how to access them, guided by the voices of First People to set the direction for how these experiences are publicised and shared with the world.

There is also work to do to acknowledge First Peoples connections and history across all Victorian visitor experiences. Whether taking in the grandeur of the Twelve Apostles, visiting the National Gallery of Victoria, hiking in the Grampians, attending the Port Fairy Folk Festival or enjoying the vineyards of the Yarra Valley, every visitor should know the Country they are visiting and the ongoing connection of First Peoples to the land, waters, stars and skies and how that influences visitors' experiences.

#### What's happening now

Victoria promotes First Peoples tourism experiences alongside Victoria's most prominent attractions.

Visit Victoria's consumer website visitvictoria.com, the Official Visitor Guide and guide to Aboriginal Victoria showcase opportunities for visitors to experience First Peoples culture, art and history throughout the state.

Visit Victoria also supports First Peoples businesses through capability building and mentorship programs and connecting with distribution partners and tourism operators in international markets to help grow and sustain First Peoples tourism businesses.

Victoria has also invested in new events and experiences to highlight First Peoples and raise the profile of First Peoples tourism. Events like the **St Kilda Festival** have included a dedicated First Peoples First Day, showcasing the rich culture and talent of First Peoples. These events and experiences are part of the fabric of First Peoples tourism and serve as a platform to raise the visibility and prominence of the sector.

Beyond marketing and events, Victorian Government is also coordinating work across the state to encourage naming authorities to coordinate with Traditional Owners to include language names for roads, sports centres and other built infrastructure. These names honour the historic roots of First Peoples in Victoria and make the ongoing connection to Country visible to locals and visitors alike. A recent example is the Bundha Sports Centre in Fitzroy, named by Wurundjeri Elders Aunty Diane Kerr, Aunty Gail Smith, and Aunty Julieanne Axford, with support from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation. The name 'Bundha,' meaning 'unity,' reflects how the centre will bring the community together and highlights the incorporation of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung cultural elements within the precinct.

First Peoples traditions of storytelling and integration of First Peoples across the spectrum of tourism experiences will elevate our collective promotion to make First Peoples tourism experiences a fundamental part of any visit to Victoria.

# What we're going to do

#### **KEY ACTIONS**



Deliver marketing and strategic communications using storytelling and culturally relevant practices to showcase Victoria's unique cultural identity to amplify the profile of First Peoples tourism in the state.







Enrich Victorian tourism attractions and key experiences with First Peoples culture and history, including multilingual and site-specific experiences and educational information.

#### **OUTCOMES**



First Peoples stories are more widely known, giving First Peoples a sense of pride and visibility.



First Peoples experiences are a leading attraction for visitors in Victoria.







First Peoples businesses are prominently featured and marketed as a core part of Victoria's visitor experience.



### Case study

#### **Koorie Heritage Trust**

Koorie Heritage Trust (KHT) is located at the heart of Naarm / Melbourne in Federation Square and offers an immersive and engaging space to experience the rich cultures of First Peoples in Victoria. Open seven days a week, the centre invites visitors to connect with history through curated art exhibitions, access to permanent cultural heritage collections, and First Peoples-led walking tours.

KHT walking tours not only promote cultural exchange but also support the employment and personal growth of young First Peoples community members. These tours provide valuable experience in the tourism industry while empowering young people to learn, express, and strengthen their cultural identity in meaningful ways.

KHT also supports community artists, producers, and small businesses through its exhibitions and retail shopfront, offering a platform for those without permanent spaces to showcase and sell their products.

Its engaging cultural experiences have earned it a spot among the top 60 attractions in Melbourne on Trip Advisor, offering visitors an opportunity to learn, appreciate, and celebrate First Peoples culture while contributing to their economic and cultural vitality.



# **OBJECTIVE 3: STRENGTHEN**

Strengthen connections and equitable partnerships to grow First Peoples tourism offerings and support sustainable business growth

There is power and strength in networks – leveraging the skills of those that have navigated the path a new business is walking, and in learning and benefiting from one another's expertise and perspective.

Achieving our vision will require a shared commitment to collective action with First Peoples, Government and the tourism industry to unlock new, and support existing, opportunities for First Peoples tourism.

Each player in the First Peoples tourism ecosystem has an essential role in creating a vibrant, sustainable sector.

- First Peoples across Victoria are creating thriving tourism businesses, but so much of this work is done in isolation. There is power in connectedness across First Peoples to create a stronger, more linked sector.
- The tourism industry plays a critical role in promoting and incorporating First Peoples experiences within Victoria's broader visitor economy to broaden the reach to local and international audiences and make First Peoples a visible and powerful part of any visit to Victoria.
- Government can be a springboard that helps set the sector on its growth trajectory through capacity building, infrastructure support, and cooperative management of Country and cultural heritage sites.

# What's happening now

In October 2024, the Australian Government announced a historic new First Nations Visitor Economy Partnership (Partnership) to support greater participation and economic opportunities for First Nations communities and businesses in Australia's tourism industry. The Partnership, including First Nations tourism industry representatives from every state and territory, will provide leadership and guidance on respectfully embedding Australia's rich cultural heritage in our tourism offerings. This Partnership will provide an exchange of ideas, allowing us to learn what works in other states while sharing our own best practices from across the many Countries in Victoria.

Closer to home, Victoria's regional Visitor Economy Partnerships (VEPs) are working with RAPs to grow First Peoples tourism in their regions. Some VEPs have a Traditional Owner as a member of their Board, supported attendance at various conferences to build the capacity of First Peoples businesses, and engaged with First Peoples to understand opportunities to collaborate to grow First Peoples tourism experiences in their communities.

We have seen mutually beneficial partnerships help First Peoples and the broader visitor economy flourish, but we need to translate these pockets of success to propel the sector forward and ensure all can benefit from partnerships that uplift First Peoples tourism experiences as part of our broader visitor economy.

# What we're going to do

#### **KEY ACTIONS**



Facilitate bespoke opportunities for collaboration and mentorship between First Peoples businesses.



Promote co-investment and partnership opportunities with tourism businesses and peak bodies.



Enhance cultural competency within the broader tourism sector.

#### **OUTCOMES**





First Peoples culture and perspective are reflected across a broad array of Victorian tourism experiences.





The tourism industry engages in culturally safe, mutually beneficial partnerships to uplift First Peoples tourism experiences.



Strengthened business networks through mentorship and capacity-building initiatives, fostering knowledge exchange and partnerships that drive innovation and resilience.



### Case study

#### wawa biik and Tahbilk Winery

wawa biik translates to 'hello Country' in Taungurung language and is the Taungurung Nations proud acknowledgement of biik (Country) as the keeper of their living culture and stories. Owned and operated by Taungurung Land and Waters

Council, wawa biik offers on-Country, cultural learning experiences that honour and regenerate Taungurung stories and contribute to the positive future of the Taungurung Nation and biik.

**Tahbilk**, Victoria's oldest family-owned winery, is situated on Taungurung Country, alongside the waring (Goulburn River) and its flourishing ecosystem of billabongs. As a carbon neutral winery Tahbilk has been at the forefront of sustainable wine tourism since the 1990s. The Taungurung community had previously worked in partnership with Tahbilk to install cultural interpretation along the wetlands walking trail.

When wawa biik was established, a genuine partnership was formed enabling visitors to Tahbilk to not only enjoy its wine, wetlands and food offerings but also engage with the Taungurung community to forge deeper connections with the rich cultural stories of this place.

Importantly, this partnership was built on mutual respect for the self-determination of the Taungurung Nation, underpinned by shared values of caring for bilk and a commitment to grow respect and understanding of Taungurung Culture.

For wawa biik, this partnership means it can expand its cultural and commercial activities to benefit the Taungurung community, while also providing visitors with access to personalised and immersive experiences that celebrate Taungurung Culture and Country.



# **OBJECTIVE 4: INVEST**

Invest in the long-term sustainability of First Peoples tourism and careers to foster economic prosperity and strengthen communities

We must strengthen the skills and abilities of First Peoples and their businesses so that they are prepared to adapt and thrive, including supporting them to:

- Navigate complex regulation and reporting, which can discourage entrepreneurship.
- Build digital capabilities to market their opportunities and lean into the digital age.
- Develop sustainable businesses that can manage hidden costs and maintain steady cash flow.

Additionally, training and upskilling are essential across the tourism industry to ensure everyone can support with delivering authentic, culturally respectful experiences. From entrepreneurs in Dja Dja Wurrung / Bendigo to businesses in Naarm / Melbourne, all tourism partners can play a role in supporting and respecting First Peoples culture.

But training and capacity building will be insufficient without bolstering First Peoples access to capital to grow and sustain their businesses and workforces. Without access to the generational wealth and collateral that many rely on to start businesses, First Peoples may be locked out of access to private capital to sustain businesses.

## What's happening now

The Victorian Government and Aboriginal Victorians' Yuma Yirramboi Strategy (Invest in Tomorrow) sets out the shared vision to generate greater individual and collective wealth for First Peoples in Victoria. Through this strategy, the Victorian Government has stood up grant programs to support the growth and financial sustainability of First Peoples businesses and worked with First Peoples business support organisations across the state to develop programs to support the longevity of First Peoples-led businesses.

The Victorian Government has also supported Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) to explore tourism possibilities in their communities. The **Enabling Tourism Fund** has provided funding to RAPs to explore opportunities in the tourism sector including:

- Taungurung Land and Waters Council exploring the feasibility of a Taungurung Cultural Centre to enhance tourism opportunities on Country.
- Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation to facilitate the development of a Tourism Business Case development strategy.

Victoria is also building the tourism workforce of tomorrow through investments in TAFE to deliver fee-free certificate III in tourism and First Peoples language courses to build a workforce that can provide an authentic, culturally rooted tourism experience for visitors on Country.

These programs – among others – provide critical support to First Peoples businesses and workers of all types, but to see the First Peoples tourism sector develop and sustain itself, we will need to ensure supports are contextualised to the sector and support the needs of tourism businesses now and for the future as we advance toward Treaty.

## What we're going to do

#### **KEY ACTIONS**



Invest in initiatives to boost the long-term capacity of First Peoples organisations and businesses to foster a robust, sustainable industry.



Support capability building, training, and business development programs to cultivate sustainability, resilience, and growth in First Peoples tourism businesses.



Develop viable career pathways and mentorship opportunities in the tourism industry.



Pioneer and help facilitate new First Peoples tourism experiences.

#### **OUTCOMES**





Increased representation and leadership of First Peoples in tourism, fostering cultural and operational change while creating clear career pathways.

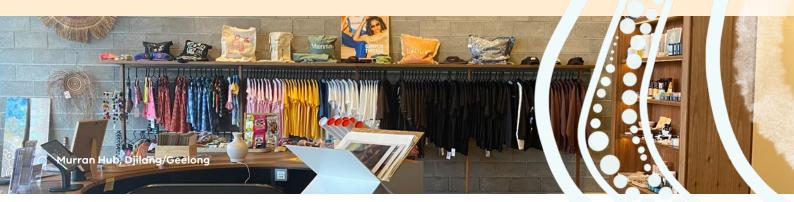


Strengthened economic participation and profitability of First Peoples tourism businesses, driving long-term wealth generation and reducing disparities.





Enhanced access to capital, workforce development, and skilled professionals delivering authentic and culturally respectful tourism experiences.



### Case study

#### Ngarrimili and Murran

**Murran** is an award-winning First Peoples business initiative led by **Ngarrimili**, a not-for-profit empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurship. Situated in Djilang / Geelong's CBD on Wadawurrung Country, Murran is a vibrant hub that significantly contributes to Victoria's tourism and visitor economy.

Showcasing over 80 First Peoples brands, Murran integrates a retail store, art gallery, café, event spaces, coworking areas, and meeting rooms. Its name, "Murran," meaning Eucalypt Leaf in Wadawurrung language, symbolises connection, peace, and healing-values central to its mission of self-determination and intergenerational wealth creation.

Visitors can enjoy authentic cultural experiences, including locally sourced food and beverages, First Peoples art, and engaging events.

Murran also champions inclusive employment, with ten young First Peoples staff trained in retail, barista, and customer service roles, creating a welcoming and enriching environment.

Supported by over \$1 million in funding from the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry, and Regions (DJSIR), Ngarrimili delivers programs like the Empowering First Nations Women in Business Incubator, which provides tailored mentoring and workshops to support female entrepreneurs including businesses that service the visitor economy.

As a beacon of cultural tourism, Murran fosters deeper connections with First Peoples heritage while enhancing Victoria's visitor economy. Through its innovative approach, Murran celebrates culture, empowers communities, and is ensuring First Peoples businesses thrive for generations to come.

# What success looks like

This Plan establishes the aspirations for a stronger First Peoples tourism sector – as defined by First Peoples – and lays out the path to get there. The Plan marks a transformative shift for Victoria's tourism industry, positioning First Peoples to create a thriving tourism sector where success is shared, sustainable, and aligned with the aspirations of First Peoples.



### **Empowered First Peoples**

- Self-determination is prioritised, empowering First Peoples to define how their culture and Country are shared with visitors, balancing cultural protection with tourism facilitation.
- Country and culture are safeguarded, protecting heritage and natural assets to ensure their sustainability for future generations.
- First Peoples are consistently recognised across Victoria's tourism attractions and key experiences, fostering pride, enhancing community well-being, and promoting shared responsibility for preserving First Peoples culture.



#### Connected sector

- First Peoples businesses support and empower one another to sustain and grow their businesses while creating a linked journey for visitors to experience the breadth of First Peoples experiences across the state.
- Ties with the tourism industry are strengthened to build a unified tourism sector that integrates First Peoples culture, knowledge and experiences across attractions.
- Business capability is uplifted by facilitating the exchange of best practices and investing in tools, resources and infrastructure to drive capability, growth, and innovation across the sector.
- People nurture fulfilling careers in First Peoples tourism.



#### Culturally competent industry

- Industry has the tools to work with First Peoples to present culture and stories in ways that align with the needs and aspirations of First Peoples.
- Visitors are educated on First Peoples connection to the land, water, stars and skies in the place we now call Victoria, cultivating a shared sense of responsibility among visitors to respect and preserve culture and Country.



# Victoria as global leader

- First Peoples experiences is a core feature of Victoria's tourism identity, celebrating the unique offerings and the diversity of Victorian First Peoples experiences.
- First Peoples tourism is a leading attraction, increasing visitation and boosting the visitor economy.



# **A Continuing Journey**

This Plan is not the end but the beginning of a journey toward a thriving First Peoples tourism sector. Guided by First Peoples self-determination, it requires ongoing engagement, collaboration, and commitment to build a stronger, more inclusive tourism sector for the future.

The next steps in our journey focus on driving tangible action: building stronger industry partnerships, growing the visibility of First Peoples businesses, investing in capacity-building, and embedding cultural competency across the sector. It calls on government, industry, and First Peoples communities to work together to take proactive steps to ensure the Plan's success. This is an opportunity to celebrate and empower First Peoples while shaping Victoria's tourism identity for the future.





Victoria can model how meaningful cultural interactions not only enhance the visitor experience but support First Peoples-led economic growth, setting the standard for inclusive tourism.

Partnerships to support First Peoples tourism require key elements to grow and flourish:

- Respect for First Peoples self-determination:
  Acknowledging the fundamental rights of First
  Peoples to make decisions and set priorities
  for their communities.
- Protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP): Ensuring that First Peoples culture is protected, and First Peoples have stewardship over how their cultural assets and how their practices are shared and used.
- **Cultural competency:** Creating an environment that is safe for First Peoples that validates history, values, culture, and respects lived experiences.

## A guide for collaboration

Groups looking to partner and collaborate with First Peoples to enrich the tourism landscape may not know where to begin. This guide will support the tourism industry and stakeholders to embark on meaningful partnerships with First Peoples, ensuring respect, sustainability, and shared success in the growth of Victoria's tourism sector.

#### 1. Build genuine relationships

- Engage early: Start conversations with First Peoples communities at the start of a project to ensure their voices shape the vision and direction.
- Listen and learn: Approach engagement with an open mind, prioritising deep listening over speaking. Be guided by First Peoples priorities, values, and aspirations.
- Create trust: Commit to transparency, consistency, and follow-through to build trust over time.

#### 2. Protect cultural heritage and intellectual property

- Prioritise First Peoples stewardship: Ensure First Peoples maintain control over how their stories, art, and cultural practices are shared, avoiding exploitation or misrepresentation.
- Develop clear guidelines: Work with First Peoples to create frameworks for the appropriate use and representation of cultural assets, ensuring authenticity and protection.

#### 3. Embed cultural safety

- Educate staff and visitors: Train staff and visitors alike on cultural protocols, appropriate behaviour, and the importance of respecting Country and ICIP.
- Create culturally safe spaces: Ensure spaces, activities, and policies respect and reflect First Peoples culture, heritage, and values.

#### 4. Respect and uphold First Peoples leadership

- Formalise partnerships: Develop agreements that enshrine First Peoples' self-determination, cultural protection, and shared goals.
- Support capability building: Provide resources, training, and opportunities to strengthen the skills and capabilities of First Peoples businesses and communities to engage in tourism.

#### 5. Foster collaboration across the sector

- Encourage co-creation: Partner with First
  Peoples to co-design experiences and products,
  ensuring authenticity and shared ownership
  of outcomes.
- Streamline engagement: The industry should work collaboratively across networks to reduce the burden of over consultation by combining efforts and avoiding duplication. This approach should respect the fact that First Peoples cultural boundaries and connections do not align with government-defined geographic borders.
- Facilitate knowledge sharing: Host forums, workshops, and collaborative projects that encourage sharing of best practices, innovations, and experiences.
- Link stakeholders: Create opportunities for First Peoples businesses to connect with the broader tourism industry, government bodies, and other operators in the tourism ecosystem.

#### 6. Monitor, evaluate, and adapt

- Adapt based on feedback: Regularly consult First Peoples partners to refine and improve engagement strategies and outcomes.
- Set shared goals: Establish clear objectives and outcomes for partnerships, ensuring alignment with First Peoples aspirations and capacity.
- Measure impact: Develop evaluation metrics to track progress, including economic, cultural, environmental and community well-being indicators.



