



MEDIA RELEASE – WEDNESDAY 28 JULY 2010

Land Justice Within Reach

The Victorian Traditional Owner Land Justice Group welcomes the introduction of the Traditional Owner Settlement Bill. Land Justice Group Co-Chair, Mr Graham Atkinson says “This is a ground-breaking reform for the traditional owners of Victoria. New settlement options are about to become available and land justice is at last, within reach”.

The Traditional Owner Settlement Bill is the result of a collaborative undertaking between the State Government and the Land Justice Group to find an alternative way to resolve native title claims in Victoria. Mr Atkinson says native title resolution in Victoria is not working. It is too complex, costly and uncertain and has only delivered ad hoc and limited outcomes.

“This Bill is essential to deal with unfinished business. It will go some way to redressing past injustice. It is an honourable compromise in the interests of all traditional land owner groups in Victoria,” Mr Atkinson says.

“The Land Justice Group commends the State government on this initiative, which has come about because of the commitment by both parties to work together, to achieve greater understanding of each other’s positions, and make considerable compromises to reach agreement about how traditional owner settlements will operate.”

This Bill sets up a process of reaching negotiated outcomes between the Victorian public and traditional owners which recognise and respect traditional owners’ rights and acknowledge first nations’ connections to land.

“In practical terms, it will facilitate improvements for land management and the environment in Victoria through joint management arrangements. It will also help educate the wider Victorian public about Indigenous cultural heritage.”

“There will also be an economic development benefit to Indigenous communities which will flow through to regional communities, with the development of jobs and business opportunities,” Mr Atkinson says.

This Bill offers wider choice for traditional owners in Victoria and will enhance reconciliation by providing land justice.

Mr Atkinson says this is a historic achievement for the Land Justice Group and is leading the way for alternative native title resolution in Australia.

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About the Victorian Traditional Owner Land Justice Group:

The Land Justice Group is continuing a long history of traditional owner advocacy and working together for land justice in Victoria. Victorian Traditional owners hold many aspirations in common such as recognition of traditional owners and their boundaries and rights to speak for their country, access to land for traditional owner groups, ranging from management of national parks as well as having land for economic development or cultural purposes; access to natural resources including customary use of resources such as animals, plants and fisheries, strengthening culture, and improved native title claims resolution including sustainable governance.

In 2006, it was decided that the primary purpose of the LJG was to negotiate a new policy framework with the State Government, so that native title agreements can better meet the real aspirations of traditional owners for community and economic development. After two years of lobbying, the State Government announced the formation of a Steering Committee, to be chaired by Mick Dodson, whose role was to recommend a new policy framework for native title and land justice.

The Victorian Native Title Settlement Framework aims to provide a more streamlined approach to settling native title claims by setting out what could be included in a settlement package, how negotiations could be conducted and what conditions the State would require to be met by groups to enter into negotiations about a package.

This new Bill will also provide an alternative way to resolve native title claims in Victoria that will deliver better outcomes in relation to traditional owner use, management and ownership of State land in Victoria.

For more information, visit www.landjustice.com.au

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