



The Place To Be

Media release

From the Premier of Victoria

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NEW FRAMEWORK A JUST APPROACH TO NATIVE TITLE

Native title claims in Victoria will be resolved faster, fairer and in a less costly manner under a landmark framework that will resolve the backlog of claims from Traditional Owners, Premier John Brumby said today.

Mr Brumby said the Traditional Owner Settlement Bill was a fairer and more flexible way to resolve claims than under the Commonwealth's *Native Title Act*, which had proven to be too technical and costly to deliver justice to indigenous Victorian communities.

"Traditional Owner Settlements under the framework will deliver quicker outcomes, finality and certainly for all those involved in and affected by the native title process," Mr Brumby said.

"The process under the Commonwealth system is simply too costly and lengthy, and leaves Traditional Owners, business and industry mired in uncertainty.

"Under this new framework, outlined in Parliament today, Traditional Owners can enter into out-of-court settlements while withdrawing their native title claims and agreeing not to make future claims," he said.

"At its heart, this reform is about recognising the special relationship Aboriginal people in Victoria have with their land and in doing so recognises their rights in concrete and meaningful ways."

Deputy Premier and Attorney-General Rob Hulls said Victoria had resolved native title claims over just 15 per cent of Crown land under the Commonwealth Act. At the current rate, it will take more than 50 years to resolve native title in Victoria.

"This Government is determined to do things differently, to build an alternative approach that delivers the practical and symbolic recognition of traditional owners' rights in Crown lands, as well as certainty to land managers, industry and developers," Mr Hulls said.

The Commonwealth Government has made a financial contribution to assist Victoria to reach settlements under its new legislation.

Mr Hulls said the Commonwealth's contribution was an important development in driving national native title reform and resolving native title claims through negotiation rather than relying on lengthy and expensive court cases.

"The reforms ensure a reduction in overall cost of dealing with Native Title, with funds directed to Aboriginal people rather than being absorbed in process, which is what now occurs in the Native Title Act system," he said.

"In adopting a State-based approach, Victoria is leading the way in developing flexible and less technical approaches to the resolution of native title. This reform is long overdue and it will be a legacy of this Government if we are able to resolve outstanding claims.

"We will be leading the nation in taking a collaborative and consultative approach, in partnership with Victoria's first nations, to settle land claims in a just and fair way."

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Aboriginal Affairs Minister Richard Wynne said settlements under the framework could include a range of benefits tailored to local circumstances, such as options for the management and transfer of land, access to natural resources, and support for economic and cultural development opportunities.

“Framework agreements have the potential to provide a range of employment and economic development opportunities – for example, jobs in land and natural resource management, tourism ventures, and investment opportunities,” Mr Wynne said.

Minister for Environment and Climate Change Gavin Jennings said this new approach would be a simpler, more cost-effective approach to managing Victoria’s Crown land, whilst protecting third party rights and interests.

“Native title claims concern Crown land only, not private property. While public access will be protected and the land will continue to be used in the same way, the new system will enhance the management of Crown land through the greater involvement of Traditional Owners,” Mr Jennings said.