



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

NAIDOC STATE RECEPTION

Wednesday 10 July 2024

Acknowledgments

The Honourable Natalie Hutchins, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Women, *representing the Premier of Victoria*

The Honourable Vicki Ward, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment

Aunty Pam Pedersen and **Aunty Alice Kolasa**, Co-Chairs of the Victorian NAIDOC Committee, and **Committee Members**

The Honourable Justice Karin Emerton, President of the Court of Appeal and **The Honourable Justice Richard Niall**

The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Nicholas Reece

Professor Aunty Eleanor Bourke, Chair of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, and **Current and Former Commissioners**

Members of the Treaty Authority

Members of the First Peoples' Assembly

Adjunct Professor Aunty Muriel Bamblett, National NAIDOC Person of the Year and other **NAIDOC Award Recipients**.

Jenny Atta, Acting Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet and other **Heads of Victorian Public Service Departments**.

Distinguished Guests

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the unceded lands on which this House stands – the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

I'd also like to thank Uncle Andrew Gardiner and Uncle Mark Brown for their warm Welcomes to Country.

It's a pleasure to welcome you all to Government House for this year's NAIDOC State Reception.

The roots of NAIDOC week can be traced back many decades to the work of Aboriginal activists right here in Victoria.

Almost 90 years ago, Uncle William Cooper, a great man and an inspirational elder, drafted a petition that would become one of the first calls for Indigenous Australian self-determination and sovereignty.

He worked alongside elders and activists to collect nearly 2,000 signatures for this petition to King George VI.

However, in 1938, after years of organising and protesting, the Commonwealth formally refused to present the petition.

Later that year, Uncle William Cooper, a few weeks before his 78th birthday, led another march for justice.

His desire for justice was not confined to his own people.

On that day, he marched with activists through the streets of Melbourne to Germany's embassy in peaceful protest against the actions of the Nazi government against Jewish People - Kristallnacht. He was one of the first people in the world to do so.

In that difficult year of 1938, when Indigenous Australians faced injustices to their communities, their sense of justice brought them to the forefront of fighting the persecution of a people who did not share their language or their culture.

Aboriginal activists united around creating a fairer and more equal world.

William Cooper's petition and activism laid a path for what would become NAIDOC.

It is this spirit of solidarity and equality for all that lies at the heart of NAIDOC Week today.

It is important that we honour the truth of the past.

Contemporary efforts cannot erase past pain or injustice nor its ongoing effects.

But they can work to improve outcomes for Victoria's First Peoples.

In my inauguration speech last year, I spoke of the importance of many voices being heard, and how the work of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is helping to fully realise our State's democratic tradition.

Since beginning my term, I've had the pleasure of meeting with representatives of the First Peoples' Assembly, as well as the Treaty Authority, and the Yoorook Justice Commission.

Members have been generous with their time and perspectives, offering insight into their work and the pursuit of Truth, Treaty, and Voice in Victoria.

This year's NAIDOC theme, "*Keep the fire burning! Blak, Loud and Proud*" represents the determination at the heart of your work and the communities you represent.

Speaking in 2017, artist and Yorta Yorta man, Adam Briggs, stated that "*until we have true equality on all levels, on all facets of society, we're not going to be able to embrace what this country really could...be.*"

The success of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, the Yoorook Justice Commission, and the Treaty Authority gives me hope that we are closer towards realising that goal.

This evening, we are not only commemorating these significant milestones, but also recognising the individuals who have worked tirelessly to achieve them.

Among us tonight are recipients of the 2024 National and Victorian NAIDOC Awards.

Thank you for your invaluable contribution to the spirit of NAIDOC.

And I'd like to further extend my thanks to the NAIDOC Committee members for their significant work this year. Thank you.

I now invite the Minister Hutchins to address us.