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john.pesutto@parliament.vic.gov.au

Leader of the Opposition
Victorian Liberal Party

2 April 2024

Dear Mr Pesutto MP,

I am writing on behalf of the Southern Women's Action Network (SWAN) comprising over 200 members who live in the southern metropolitan suburbs of Melbourne and across the Mornington Peninsula. Since 1996 we have provided a forum to enable women and self-identified gender diverse people to work actively within their communities to address social justice and equity concerns. As such, SWAN members want to convey our deep concern at the recent decision by the Liberal and National Parties (LNP) to withdraw their former support for the Victorian Treaty process.

The establishment of the First Peoples' Assembly, the Yoorrook Truth and Justice Commission and the subsequent Victorian Treaty process should be acknowledged as historic landmark developments in Victoria's journey towards healing and reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Victoria is the gold standard, leading all the other Australian states in this regard. Indeed, the LNP initially publicly lauded these developments in a bipartisan acknowledgement of the significance of First Nations led Truth and Treaty processes in this State.

Given the timing of your change of position, we can only conclude that it is a politically motivated response to the recent national vote against the Constitutional Enshrinement of a First Nations Voice. This is entirely unwarranted since the Victorian Treaty process does not involve Constitutional change. Further, it is unfair to justify your retraction of support with concern about cultural heritage plan delays. When adequately resourced, Traditional Owners are able to resolve these planning approvals promptly. A third LNP justification, that agreement making with one segment of society is divisive, is also unfair and confuses Indigeneity with race. There is only one Indigenous people in this country and thus the purported racial division is not relevant.

Treaty-making will forge mutually beneficial agreements which lay out shared responsibilities within a relationship. Such agreements can be beneficial for the general economy, as they create clarity and certainty. They can also contribute to greater social cohesion, as well as address some of the entrenched marginalisation and known gaps in socio-economic indicators between First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples.

The Treaty process will be vital in protecting Country and cultural heritage as well as in establishing culturally informed solutions, for example in education, health, justice, climate change and child protection. Victoria has a unique opportunity, through treaty making, to potentially resolve some of the impacts of colonisation suffered by First Nations people living in Victoria. The LNP has the chance to again be part of this significant opportunity.

We urge you to advocate strongly for a return to the Victorian LNP's original position on the historic Truth and Treaty processes taking place in this state.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Diane McDonald', with a stylized, cursive script.

Diane McDonald
Facilitator
Southern Women's Action Network

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SWAN acknowledges the Bunurong / Boon Wurrung people, the Traditional Custodians of these lands and waters where we meet. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present. In line with our commitment to social justice, SWAN unequivocally supports First Nations People in their campaigns for sovereignty, self-determination, treaties and truth-telling.

Website: <https://swanwomen.org.au/>

cc.

Peter Walsh, Leader of the National Party, Victoria and Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs: peter.walsh@parliament.vic.gov.au

Chris Crewther, MLA, Mornington: chris.crewther@parliament.vic.gov.au

Sam Groth, MLA, Nepean, sam.groth@parliament.vic.gov.au