**A Pathway to National Truth-telling**

**26 February 2025**

Transcript provided by AI-Media

**KATE RUSSELL:**
This is today's event. I will say (SPEAKS AN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE) Today we will be focusing on creating a pathway for national truth-telling. My name is Kate Russell. I'm a proud Awabakal woman. I'm the CEO of Supply Nation and the chair of the DCA Indigenous Advisory Panel. I'm joining today from Wangal country and pay my respects to Elders past, present, and the traditional custodians of the land. A particular respect to my indigenous brothers and sisters who are joining us today, both on the panel and who might be dialling in. I'll hand over to Uncle Brendan Kerin from Metro Lock to provide our welcome to country. Thanks Uncle.

**UNCLE BRENDAN KERIN:**
Thanks Kate, and good morning everyone. Can you hear me? Yes, I'm getting flash with this technology. Well, I'm a cultural representative and I'm the cultural educator from ML and under the Land Rights Act of 1993. We are the cultural authority. We are the guardians, custodians and caretakers of lands and waters within our boundaries and I'm here to perform a tradition and a ceremony of welcoming to country. Look, we all know, I'm sure, that the poor old welcome to country ceremony has taken a bit of a kicking over the last few years and there's a few urban myths that are out there and I tend to take this opportunity to just always take the opportunity to educate and have a yarn about our culture and our traditions and you know unfortunately, we're still having to do that in today's day and age and I feel we're in a worse position than in my lifetime, than we've ever been. So, the welcome to countries was not invented by Ernie Dingo. I'll get rid of that myth. We've never invented the welcome to country to cater for white people.

They'll put it into context where they can understand it's we talk about having a voice, but they never listen. It's like we speak a different language. And that's the understanding of a welcome to country is no different than welcoming strangers into your house. And when I welcome strangers into your house, they all have an expectation. That expectation is those strangers respect their property and everything that's in their house. Well, our expectation with being welcomed onto country and we know this as Aboriginal people. You walk respectfully on the lands. There are many layers and levels with the welcome to country. Each of us have each of our clans have a very deep connection to our lands. We have more Aboriginal nations in this country than anywhere else in the world. And each nation is uniquely different. We have different diet, different language. We even dress differently. So when I'm welcomed and walk onto my neighbour's lands, there are a few things I need to know traditionally, I need to know what food I can eat on your lands, I need to know where your sacred sites are that I can and cannot visit, I need to know where your sacred waters are that I'm allowed to drink from and not allowed to drink from.

These are just some of the levels and layers of when welcomed on to country. And again, you know, I mentioned it earlier, unfortunately, it's, I've still got to educate people around this ceremony and tradition. Our word for country, our reference to word country as most of us are aware, it's not a reference to Australia. It's the word country we reference to our homelands. And when I say I'm going home, I'm going back to country. This is our reference to the word country. It's always an honour for me to perform this ceremony as a representative of the Land Council. There's never been and there's not and has not been an ongoing continual connection to the lands and waters of where the custodians of. So being able to be that representative of lands and waters is always an honour for me. I'm currently beaming in from I'm up in the mountains of Gandangara country, but we land Council situated on gadigal land. Gadigal is the grass tree people and there's a songline I always like to share when I'm down there doing my welcome.

It's the songline and the creation of Sydney Harbour. Sydney Harbour is a flooded estuary. We have actually got carvings in the harbour. Burra the long-finned eel. Burra punished the local people for not following their law. He raised the waters, created the flood and when Burra moved around on the top of the lands, he created all the rivers and waterways that run off Sydney Harbour. Goat Island is Me-Mel. In Gadigal dialect, that's the head of the eel, Me-Mel. When Burra finished his journey, he Burra finished at a place called Burramatta, a place of many eels, and the songline starts from Burramatta. They swim all the way down the rivers and waterways into Sydney Harbour. From Sydney Harbour they go all the way to Vanuatu. They turn around and they come back. And this is our songline. Every clan that lived along the journey that the Songline was connected through that songline and responsible for looking after that songline. We were even connected to the mob in Vanuatu because of this songline.

And I always tell our non-Indigenous brothers and sisters as well, just because we lose our songlines doesn't mean it only affects Aboriginal people. We lose the songlines, we lose the animal that affects everyone. It should be everyone's responsibility to look after them and keep them alive. Prior to colonisation, the songlines were our songlines and our responsibility because we were the only ones here, but everyone lives here now. It should be everyone's responsibility to look after them and keep them alive. My connection to the lands I was born in 1971 at Crown Street Women's Hospital, Surry Hills, and that hospital in 1971, that's the last time I ever felt my mother's touch, 1971. Just over ten years ago, I found my mother's grave. And when I found my mom's grave, only then did I find out where my country was, only then did I find out I'm one of ten siblings. All of us taken. My mother, aunts and uncles, all taken, 31 first cousins all taken and you know, the only reason why we were taken was the colour of our skin, but no other reason.

And I remember a time when I was growing up, I used to hear about our Elders talking about this stuff. The stolen generation. I prefer to call it the kidnapped generation. And I remember hearing all the time society and community saying, oh, when are they going to get over it? When are they going to get over it? We never did. It had nothing to do with us. I beg to differ the laws that were passed through government to take us away from our families. No one ever stood up to say, stop it. That's not right. I'm sure there would have been a few people, but if you're not part of fixing the problem, may be you are a part of the problem. And how are we supposed to heal if it's not acknowledged? How are we supposed to heal if it's not acknowledged? Now, I grew up not black enough to play with the black kids and not white enough to play with the white kids, so I copped it from both sides of the fence. And it's ongoing. Like most of us are aware, this is ongoing. My children will never have a relationship with any member of my side of the family.

The only relationship they have is to country. That's one thing I never had. I make sure they've got that. So I thank you for having me here because again, it's an honour. It's an honour for me to perform a ceremony of welcoming the country. And by having me here, you become a part of the rejuvenation of our tradition and culture back on country. So I thank you for that. Just before I go off, I just would like to share something about the referendum. I was sucked into the city. Everywhere I went in the city, it was all yes, yes, yes, yes, and I was thinking oh, this might go through here, this is exciting. I was blindsided and totally forgot about country communities and everywhere else. As I said here with my family watching the numbers come in, there was one I always look for the positive side. There's one positive side coming out with the numbers come through and I looked at my wife and I said, well, not moving to Queensland. So those numbers came through strong, but the very next day, and it hit me the very next day, I had to do two welcome to countries, and one of them was for mental health.

And I remember everyone asking me, how are you feeling? How are you feeling? How are you feeling? And I said, look, I'd feel a lot better if you stopped asking me how I felt. The second ceremony I had to do the day after was a Para Olympics football. And normally I don't stay for when I'm finished doing my ceremony. I've got so many others to do. I was asked to stay, and I sat down and I watched these people in wheelchairs with the only body movement they had, most of them was just their chin and they were representing their countries, coming out playing this international sport and for me, that put everything into perspective. So look, I just thought I'd share that. And we just keep chipping away at the war. That's all we've got to do, just keep chipping away. It's frustrating sometimes. We've just got to keep them on it. Another day in the colony. So I thank you all for having me here and welcome to wherever you're beaming in from. I pay my respects to my Elders past, present and emerging, and I always extend that to my non-Indigenous brothers and sisters as well, and their Elders.

So I thank you. Thank you for having me, I am welcome.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Thank you Uncle. I think I can speak on behalf of everybody here and the honour is ours and thank you for sharing so openly and from the heart your story that is representative of so many indigenous people. I've had the pleasure of hearing you welcome us a number of times and you always speak from the heart and with such conviction. So, on behalf of all of us, I wanted to say thank you so much for sharing with us. We know that your time is precious, so thank you Uncle.

**UNCLE BRENDAN KERIN:**
Thank you.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
There's a lot of love coming through, I don't know if you can see those hearts, but you've evoked quite the response in our audience today, so I'm hoping you're feeling that love.

UNCLE BRENDAN KERIN:
Always feeling that love. That's why I keep fronting up and doing what I got to do and I always, when I finish, I say I'd love to stay, but I have to go and pay a white man by the name of Wilson for parking on my own land.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Thank you Uncle.

**UNCLE BRENDAN KERIN:**Thank you Kate.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Look, before we get underway today, I'll do a little bit more of housekeeping. I remind you all that you can view captions on your smart device or PC. Go to www.ai-live.com and enter the session ID that's on screen. That's AUDCAA2602A, or on your zoom window, you can select Hide and show captions via the icon at the bottom of the screen. The event is going to be recorded and so that will be available on the DCA website members area in the next few days. We will be spending some time on audience Q&A. So start getting your questions ready and please don't feel like you have to wait until we get to that section. You can submit a question at any point in time. To ask a question, you go to the Q&A at the bottom of your screen and submit your question through to the panel. You can also upvote an existing question by using the thumbs up icon. That will help us in triaging and concierge the number of questions that we always get. We never have time for them all. So you can always thumbs up and that will indicate to us that it's a common or popular question.

So I'm very proud to introduce our keynote speaker today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Katie Kiss. I think we're all a fan, and if we're not, we will be very soon. we're very excited to hear what you have to share with us today. So over to you, Katie.

**KATIE KISS:**
Thank you Kate, as Kate said, my name is Katie Kiss. I am the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. I'm also first and foremost a Kaantju and proud, Birri Widi woman from far north Queensland. I grew up on the lands of the Darumbal people in Central Queensland, Rockhampton, but I now live on the lands of the Yagara people here in Maganjin or Meanjin, which is where I'm speaking to you from today. I too pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging from all the lands we're coming from today and acknowledge all First Nations people and non-Indigenous allies who are participating or attending today's event, and I just want to share my appreciation for Uncle Brendan and you're welcome, you're warm and gracious welcome to country sharing your truth and your story with us. I thank the Diversity Council for Australia of Australia for inviting me to speak today as well. I'd also like to acknowledge my Co-panelists Commissioner Travis Lovett, deputy chair of the York Justice Commissioner Commission, and Shelley Cable, head of the First Nations strategy at ANZ.

I also want to note from the perspective of truth-telling and understanding our history and our advocacy, that last week we commemorated the 60th anniversary of the Freedom Rides, led by Charlie Perkins and the Students Against Racism and Injustice. And it's really important from a truth-telling perspective that we commemorate those significant events and significant people who have led the journey for us. First of all, a little bit about my role, to which I was appointed to in April last year. So I'm coming up to 12 months of my term as Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. I have three key functions that are outlined in the Australian Human Rights Commission Act, 1986. They are to monitor the exercise and enjoyment of human rights by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to promote discussion and awareness and respect for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to examine policy and legislation to make sure that they recognise and protect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I also have a responsibility under the Native Title Act 1993, to report to the Federal Attorney-General about the operation of the Native Title Act and its effect on the exercise and enjoyment of human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. So, the role of the Social Justice Commissioner was created in 1992, in response to the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the National Inquiry into Racist Violence to very significant truth telling undertakings. There have been six commissioners appointed since the role's inception and over the last three decades, all social justice commissioners have been involved in advocating for a better relationship between First Nations people and Australian governments. Between 1993 and 2017, social justice commissioners published annual Social Justice and native title reports. These are reports to the federal Attorney General which are tabled in Parliament. After 2017, the legislation was amended so that those annual reports were not required, but instead could be provided to the Parliament at the Commissioner's discretion.

The reports are significant in that they document the human rights and policy history of indigenous affairs over more than 30 years. They are informed by our people and they charter a course for a fair and just future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I commend these decades worth of social justice and native title reports to anyone wanting a history of advocacy around policy and legislation in this area, and to anyone who wants details on how certain policies have played out, the warnings that were given, the alternatives proposed, and the consequences of particular policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Many of the social justice and native title reports highlight specific ways we need to acknowledge and address the truths of our nation's past, and to address ongoing disadvantage. These reports address the nitty gritty of government policy and practice in terms of how to do this. And of course, the Bringing Them Home report, which Uncle spoke about this morning.

Report provide one of the most critical truth-telling publications in Australia's history. While social justice commissioners have played an important role advocating to government over the past three decades, this builds on the 237 years, which of course seen countless First Nations leaders across the country contribute their time and energy, some dedicating their lives to doing this work. Within the last century, we've seen advocacy such as the 1934 petition by Yorta Yorta Elder William Cooper, founder of the Australian Aborigines League in Victoria, for an advocate for First Australians in the Federal Parliament. The campaign preceding the 1967 referendum, which resulted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples being counted in the national census, landmark High Court challenges to secure land rights and native title. The Yirrkala bark petitions and the 1988 Barunga statement, which called for land rights, treaty and self-determination, the establishment of national representative bodies, the adoption of the declaration in 2009, the negotiation of the First National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in 2019 after decades of advocacy on indigenous health, decades of advocacy on constitutional recognition, culminating in the 2017 Uluru Statement from the heart and the campaign for a Constitutionally Enshrined Voice in 2023.

Awareness of this history of advocacy is part of the truth-telling of this country. The need for truth-telling and governance reforms, including treaty, has not been recently invented. We've always resisted colonisation and subjugation wherever and however we can. We've worked within the system to try and get fundamental structural reforms, including acknowledgement of our right to self-determination, and we continue to do that. But never in that work have we ceded our country or our sovereignty. This is an inconvenient political truth for the broader public to be aware of. A higher level of accurate knowledge of Australia's colonial history does impact the way the broader Australian public feel about our campaign for rights. In 2025, we undertake our work in unprecedented times. While more than ever before diversity initiatives have become a mainstream element within both public and private corporate structures, we're bearing witness to unparalleled attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion internationally.

And if our counter messaging files to cut through, this has the potential to spread the spot fires of racist discourse that have been lit around Australia amidst global economic uncertainty, international political conflict and a cost of living crisis. There are those who argue that measures to address the disadvantage of particular groups is divisive, and that experiences of racial discrimination are largely confined to the past. They demand unity in the form of sameness on the one hand, while causing division through a denial of difference on the other. There is no question in my mind that disadvantage amongst the general population should be alleviated. Neither have I have any doubt that the ongoing gulf between the human rights Australia has signed up to internationally, and the codification of those rights into federal, state and territory legislation impacts us all. There is an urgent need for a federal Human Rights Act to promote and protect the rights of every Australian, and this has been the subject of a significant amount of work by the Australian Human Rights Commission over the past five years through our free and equal project.

However, while growing inequality and lack of human rights protections affects us all, the reality is that the severity of their impacts chisels dark patterns. They are deepest around identity markers, which make some Australians more likely to experience inequality and discrimination than others. First Nations people, people of colour, women, LGBTQIA people, people with disability and older persons are all more likely to be subjected to discrimination and where these characteristics intersect with one another. For example, where a First Nations person has a disability, individual experiences of discrimination and inequality are likely to be heightened. As much as some people might want to believe otherwise, the evidence clearly shows that racial discrimination is not confined to the past, it is very much a contemporary phenomenon. Even within the current debates on race, the racism being experienced by First Nations people is ignored, accepted and unchallenged. Furthermore, disadvantage experienced today stems not only from contemporary prejudices, but from the historical discrimination experienced by the generations who've come before us.

In the case of First Nations Australians, this differential treatment, alongside a refusal to accept our differences, cultural, social, political and economic, has been profound and in certain important ways, unique. For First Nations people who are statistically the most disadvantaged population group in Australian society, there is a need for urgent action to address the particular circumstances we face. The dispossession of this continent and the subjection of our people to violence, forced migration, the removal of our children, the discriminatory treatment in a plethora of socio-economic and civil contexts has gone largely without remedy. We have not, in the language of justice, been restored, and this remains unfinished business. Restoration requires us to confront the truth of the state of our nation. Restoration in a sustainable form requires transformed institutional and societal structures. We need system level reforms that can deliver self-determination and cultural safety, and which acknowledges how enjoyment of the same rights will look different for different groups.

Without such reforms, we remain at risk of a system which perpetuates assimilation by default, a system which continues to cost our people their wellbeing and their lives, and which will cost Australian governments increasing sums of money on continually failing policies. This is an issue for all Australians, but it's an issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well. Since being appointed Social Justice Commissioner, I've identified six high-level focus areas to move us forward, and I'm currently moving around the country to test these with First Nations communities. The first focus area is access to justice for First Nations communities. The concept of justice in its traditional sense is supposed to be positive. It should be about delivering remedies for breaches of rights, about fairness and equity in the application of rules. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experience of justice mostly features the criminal justice or youth justice systems, and it is the opposite of fair and just.

In the justice space, I note the many outstanding unimplemented recommendations of key truth telling inquiries, such as the 1991 Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody, the 1997 Bringing Them Home report, various productivity commission reports, and the 30 years of Social Justice and Native Title reports penned by my predecessors. My second focus area is to promote the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Since the adoption of the declaration in 2009, the Australian Government has done little to embed the declaration into Australia's legal framework. Last year, the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs made six recommendations in its report on the inquiry into the application of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Australia. Among them is to develop and implement a national plan to progress the declaration. A response to the committee's report is expected after the next federal election.

In the context of truth telling and treaty, as in all areas of policy that affects First Nations people, I want to emphasise how critical the declaration can be to guiding our way. It doesn't introduce new rights. There are no rights included which non-Indigenous people don't already have. It simply explains how the same rights will look different in their enjoyment by Indigenous peoples. And it also provides guidance on how rights intersect in practice for individual human beings. For example, for an Aboriginal child to enjoy the right to education equally, they will require an educational environment that is culturally nurturing and safe. So, the right to culture and the right to education intersect. The third focus point that I've outlined is to support the realisation of First Nations health equality, and particularly to advocate for the need for the transformation of government as required by Priority Reform Three in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. In July 2020, Australian governments and the Coalition of Peaks signed the Closing the Gap partnership agreement, which contains 19 socioeconomic targets of which we know only five are on track.

It includes four priority reform areas. The Productivity Commission has found that Australian governments have not fully grasped the scale of change required to meet these commitments. Systems failures at government level affect everyone, but systemic racism and structural disadvantage exacerbate systemic failures for First Nations people. So, transforming government, and consequently the system is critical to Closing the Gap and achieving better outcomes for our people. My fourth focus area is land justice. Like previous social justice commissioners, I will be providing guidance on the reform of the native title system in accordance with my legislated responsibilities and connected regimes such as cultural heritage and environmental management. Relevant to this focus area is also my role engaging with the newly established or establishing treaty arrangements. I won't talk much on land justice specifically today, except to say that it's important to note that truth telling and treaty sit squarely in this context of land justice, from which all other rights emerge, and that significant, relevant governance work has already been done in this context as well.

The fifth focus area is building the capacity of First Nations human rights network. We know there is already significant leadership capability and expertise in First Nations communities across the country, and I'm listening to our communities and our elders about what role I can usefully play in building and supporting that. One aspect of this focus area is increasing our advocates' knowledge of human rights, so that we can effectively use the international human rights framework to progress and realise our rights here at home. Over the course of the consultations I've conducted so far, I've found huge commitment and enthusiasm to strengthening our national human rights networks, and I'm looking forward to helping this develop and networks flourish. Coming together to build futures re-establishes our villages that are necessary for our social cohesion. My sixth focus area is advocacy and guidance on the implementation of the three pillars of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, voice, treaty and truth.

Voice, treaty and truth are no less relevant today than they were before the Voice referendum in 2023. All three pillars are necessary to advance the rights and recognition of First Nations, and none of these have been addressed. Political and media narratives promoting mis and disinformation have created division and disunity amongst our people, and further strained the relationship between our people and the broader population. If we are to progress improved outcomes for First Nations people, we will need a reframed relationship with government that is grounded in truth, justice and healing. I believe that most Australians have a strong sense of justice, but how this manifests is shaped by their understanding of why a diversity of outcomes for groups and individuals within society exists. When people are desperately trying to keep afloat and feeling like they are struggling in ways that their parents didn't, recognition of others greater hardships may not come easily. The structural solutions required are complex and not conducive to short sound bites.

When superficial answers are put forward, they can garner appeal despite their lack of efficacy. In this regard, truth telling about our history is important because without it, there's a real and growing risk that ahistorical narratives that blinker Australians from the causes of our contemporary reality might prevail. Indeed, a clear and consistent theme that I'm hearing as I travel around the country is the critical importance of truth telling to moving forward, and that it is indispensable to shaping a First Nation's national agenda that delivers a fair and just future for our people. This country has a gaping wound that requires healing. The treatment must include confronting our collective historical and contemporary history, truth telling, respect and recognition of differences in lived experience, and a commitment to listen, accept, address and heal. Like rain after a drought, truth telling can renourish our political landscape and make our society whole. It has the power to isolate the spot fires of misinformation which have sparked division and hate across the country.

As the former executive director of the Queensland Interim Truth and Treaty Body, I am under no illusions that the path ahead will be easy or without setback. As you will be aware, the path to treaty process in Queensland was dismantled without consultation with First Nations people as the first point of business by the incoming Crisafulli government. This was a very concerning way to treat a genuine truth telling process, representing years of dedicated work, groundbreaking developments and community engagement, co-design and guidance on institutional and community readiness for truth telling. And the Northern Territory Government has also confirmed in the last couple of weeks that the NT treaty process is also now terminated, with that government also choosing to ignore the well considered input of community and subject matter experts. Around the country, truth and treaty developments are in varying stages of development. Leading the way the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria and the Treaty Authority have made significant progress with the path to treaty.

In November of 2024, a ceremony marked the opening of statewide treaty negotiations after significant work over the preceding decade. The Yoorrook Justice Commission in Victoria, where my co-panellist Travis Lovett serves as a commissioner, was the first formal truth telling process into historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria. It delivered an interim report in 2022, a second interim report focused on child protection and criminal justice systems in 2023, and is due to deliver its final report this year. Outside of Victoria, I note that both South Australia and New South Wales are also moving on truth and treaty. First speeches were delivered by the South Australian Voice to Parliament in November last year, and treaty commissioners have commenced their roles in New South Wales and are soon to start an intensive community consultation process. These achievements must be celebrated. They show what can be done and provide inspiration to those in other jurisdictions where truth and treaty processes have stalled or are yet to manifest.

Such is the case in Tasmania and Western Australia. At the national level, it's been disappointing that the commitment to begin work on the establishment of a Makarrata Commission has not been fulfilled. Some believe that post the Voice referendum, it now lacks the political capital to support its progress. But despite the weaponisation of issues by political and media actors and the spike in racism we have experienced since the failed referendum, I do not believe that the majority vote against a constitutionally enshrined voice represented a repudiation of truth telling, or an abandonment of the cause of First Nations rights more generally, and the evidence supports this. Polling conducted by UNSW and Reconciliation Australia, shows 94% of non-Indigenous Australians are highly motivated to participate in truth telling, to learn about the ongoing impacts of the past on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today. The ANU's detailed analysis of the Voice referendum also found overwhelming public support for constitutional recognition of First Nations Australians generally, and for measures to address disadvantage experienced by First Nations people and for reconciliation.

Determined to break the inertia at the national level, I am talking with key truth and treaty stakeholders about how we defend and advance the progress that has been made across the country, and how this important work can support the development of a national-level truth telling process. A national pathway to truth telling and treaty would involve a great deal of work and careful consideration, but I believe it would be an indispensable investment in our country's future to heal the gaping wound and to move our country forward in a way that truly supports unity, respect and reconciliation. Because of our experience in the jurisdictions, there are now First Nations leaders with detailed knowledge of the foundational principles and the critical steps required. We have the expertise. What we need is for governments to stop delaying the inevitable, to stop burying the truth of this country and its development, ancient and contemporary, warts and all, to establish a reframed relationship, one built on truth, justice, integrity and healing.

We need our national leadership to commit to funding the process in full and to a time frame that meets our needs to heal and reconcile within our communities, between our communities and within the broader Australian community. And we need our allies, like everyone here and the DCA, to stand with us. This is for all of Australia. Thank you for having me today. I hope that's been useful and look forward to working with you all on a path to truth, justice, and healing. Thank you.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Thank you so much, Commissioner Kiss. I'm sure for those of us who are familiar with your work and of the commission in general, it's been wonderful to hear what you've been up to. And I'm sure for those of us who weren't familiar, are now looking forward to see where you're going to take the commission in the years to come. I'll now introduce the other guest speakers who are going to join our yarn. As mentioned, we have Travis Lovett, who's the deputy chair and commissioner of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, and Shelley Cable, Head of First Nations Strategy Australia at ANZ. So, welcome to you all. I mean, it's an incredible panel. I'm very privileged to be here facilitating. We do have a number of questions that we've pre-prepared for the panel. I can see that the Q&A section is already getting quite a lot of attention, and I love that. So, please keep it up. We'll move through this. If I direct your question specifically to a panellist. Bear with me. But also please don't feel inhibited.

So, if there's something that you want to contribute even though it may not have been directly addressed to you, please jump in. Let's keep this a yarn. I think it's the most powerful kind of conversation that we can have. So, Travis, in saying that I'm coming to you. For those of us who may not be familiar with the truth telling and treaty process in Victoria, can you tell us a little bit about what the Yoorrook Justice Commission does and how it came about?

**TRAVIS LOVETT:**
Yeah, great. Well, I'll just acknowledge country. (SPEAKS IN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE). It's important just to also recognise the beautiful welcome that Uncle Brendan provided earlier. And it's always incredibly moving to be able to be a part of Welcoming the Countries as well. And so, that's really important. So, yeah, the Yoorrook Justice Commission and a hard act to follow, mind you, following commissioner as well. Just the power of work and the advocacy and the staunchness about how she goes about that work is incredibly important to our people as well. So, I shout out and also to other panel members. But as I was saying, it's unrelenting advocacy here from our ancestors. Many walk offs, many protests lining the streets and fighting for truth telling. We are the first truth telling process in the country. At this stage, the only one still. And unfortunately, it breaks our hearts to hear that other governments across the nation reneging on their processes. Because truth telling is not divisive, it's a way to actually come together and heal, as many of the other panel members have said already.

But Yoorrook Justice Commission is also a language word of Wamba Wamba, and it's the First Peoples led commission. And that was something that was really important to us, is that our people led the commission. We do have royal commission powers. And that we were set up by the Victorian state government, but also the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria. Again, another relentless advocacy unit for fighting for treaty here in Victoria as well. But important that a truth-telling commission was set up because you can't have treaty without the truth. And I think something that our people have fought really loud and clear for. Our mandate is to gather evidence on the historical and contemporary or persistent injustices. There's a lot of words used around justice, but injustices faced by our people here in Victoria. And also part of our mandate is to put the true history on the public record forever. And that's something for the first time a lot of historians respectfully have written about us or sometimes disrespectfully written about us.

Many of our people have written about us. But for the first time, we're able to gather evidence from many of those forums. And also, equally important, the Victorian state government, for them to come forward and recognise the true history around what really happened here as well. We've inquired into, as commissioner said, child protection and criminal justice. But we've also looked at land injustice, which encompasses water and the sky, education, health, housing and homelessness, as well as political life and economic prosperity. The four years will nearly end in June, and we'll hand over a final report and findings and recommendations. Some practical recommendations, but also some transformative recommendations to go to the First Peoples Assembly and the Victorian State Government on what we think needs to be changed at a systemic level, to be able to ensure that our people can thrive in more equitable society as well. We have lots of things in place to be able to also elevate our people's voices.

We've gone right across the state of Victoria. And that's incredibly important that we prioritise our people through this work. It's something that we don't have truth telling without our people's lived experience. This is not anecdotal mob coming forward and sharing their truths. This is an opportunity that our people have taken up and fought for, to come forward and share their truths with the Yoorrook Justice Commission, and we are able to document the true history and make sure that we provide meaningful recommendations for transformative change to the Victorian Government and again the First People's Assembly. And they can pick up these key areas of these recommendations and negotiate these processes through treaty as well.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Thank you so much. And picking up on what you and Commissioner Kiss have both said, I think we're in a very interesting time in our political cycle, both nationally and globally. So, my question for Katie is how do we embed truth telling and treaty processes so that they last beyond an election cycle and specific governments?

**KATIE KISS:**
Thanks, Kate. And of course, that's a $64 million question. Unfortunately, I don't have all the answers, but I do have some learnings from the work that we did in this area in Queensland. At a foundational level, I think that building readiness into the process to prepare our people and organisations for truth telling is critical. We need to ensure that the value of truth telling is understood and that it's not in any way a threat to the rights of others. And I don't think that that's the intent from our people, but that's how it's viewed by others in the population. The work we did in Queensland affirmed that a truth telling process requires an open and honest sharing of place-based history, stories and lived experience with the objective of raising awareness of our country's history and development, and building a shared understanding of the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. And like Travis was saying earlier, this is lived experience for us. This is every day for us.

It's our right to be able to be heard. So, it's an honour for people to sit in the presence of, particularly our elders, when they tell their stories about the history of this country. And they should all want to learn that. We need to enable and acknowledge our history so that the past wrongs are not repeated, and the future can be just, honest and respectful for our mob, our people, our cultures and our languages. But we also need to provide an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves to share their cultures, history, heritage with the broader community, demonstrating their strengths and achievements and contributions to building the state of Queensland. And so, I think when we've talked to the Queensland Government up here, there's a perspective that this is a negative thing, but it's not. It's actually a very positive thing, and it is about building unity. And the mis and disinformation that's been circulated in the community is about spreading division, which is never the case for us.

But in saying that, we want our difference respected because in the reality of our world, we are very different to the broader population. We need to acknowledge that. The responsibility for truth telling can't only sit on the shoulders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, because there's been a two-way process in this country since colonisation. So, that responsibility has to be borne by all. And we have institutions of memory, our libraries, our state archives, our museums, government organisations that hold records on our people, police stations that hold records on our people. So, there's a responsibility for both our people to share that for our future generations, but for those institutions of memory and the broader Australian population to participate in this process of truth telling. And I think the Yoorrook Justice Commission has done great justice to how that process can be undertaken more broadly across the country. I might leave it there. I think it's central to building a social fabric that's unified in the Australian community and population.

And I think truth telling is about us learning each other. We can't reconcile if we don't know who each other are. And truth telling is a central component of that. So, that is the intent that comes from our hearts in these conversations about truth telling. It is not about blame, it is not about holding anybody to ransom on the past wrongs that have been done to our people, despite the impact that that's had. It's about bringing our country together. And as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as Uncle said in his welcome to country, that is a cultural responsibility that we hold and we take that very seriously. Thank you.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
I love the point in that by shining a light on injustice and truth telling, we're not taking anything away from anybody else. It's not a deficit model. And Katie, you were talking specifically about telling the good, the bad and the ugly. This isn't just about the good stories. It's not just about the bad stories. It's about providing the truth. That's injustice. It's strength, and it's resistance and resilience of our people. Travis, how's the commission sought to centre the voices of First Nations people through your process.

**TRAVIS LOVETT:**
Yeah, it's a really good point. I think somewhat covered, but still really important that we don't have a truth-telling process without our people. So elevating our elders, their stories, their struggles, and again, their lived experience. So it's the heart and the principle of everything we do. We have a commissioner, deputy chair as well, Sue-Ann Hunter, who is an expert in social-emotional wellbeing and has really enshrined that as part of all the work that we do, going to the principle of making sure that we adhere to social-emotional wellbeing principles and that we also have counselling available for people to come forward. We're asking them to talk about some of their most traumatic times that they've ever been through in their life. And it's not just one hour with an elder or one hour with a person. It's sometimes eight hours. It's sometimes longer than that. So tailoring the need to the individual is incredibly important as well. We've held a series and we do that through a series of roundtables and meetings with elders to hear from them about their priorities for your look as well.

That's how we started this commission and about how we identified those priority areas, which I talked about earlier around education, health, housing, etc. Everything that we do is guided by our people's voice. Again, this is why we fought really hard as a people for our people to lead this process. First Nations-led Royal Commission. Really important also that we grapple with the point around truth-telling commission without Royal Commission powers. And we, as a people, landed on having a Royal Commission powers just in case we needed to compel witnesses. Fortunately enough, we haven't really had to do that too many times. A couple of times, we've had to have directions hearings with government to bring them to account for some of the delays. But most of the time they've been pretty responsive, but also the notice is to produce. Now it's legal, very technical, legal terms and so forth, but really important that we can extract the documents from government that our people need in order for us to seek justice for them as well.

Again, because of previous Royal Commissions and the lack of implementation from government, like the Royal Commission Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and also the Bringing Them Home report, which was referred to by Katie earlier, are very important and we can't forget about that work and those people's contributions and also the injustices, the continued injustice that our people have faced as well. So when we went to the mob and we said, you know, we're Royal Commission, we've got these powers, etc, people were a bit sort of, I guess, iffy at the start to kind of be like, well, what's gonna be different? And my point of view and what we've said to the mob is this time is that, and this is not to take away, particularly in Victoria, we've got a number of governance structures that our people come forward and sit down with government, but it's just advisory, unfortunately. There's no true self-determination and that's something that we've uncounted through the hearings and we've asked ministers questions.

So when our people come to the table to sit down thinking that it's a decision-making table, how much power and authority do they really have? And that's questions that, you know, we've asked them and they turn around and say, well, not really, because ultimately the power sits with us. So that's the key point around self-determination and again, going to Katie's point around, we got to know our rights, we've got to understand our rights. And if we, as the saying goes, if you don't know your rights, you've got no rights. So we've got to be really on point around understanding our rights and understanding the importance as well of sovereignty never being ceded. That's a really important point. But the commissioners as well have travelled across the state meeting, you know, having cups of tea with people in their house or sitting beside the river bank and so forth, encouraging people to come forward in different ways. You know, we have a transcript process as well, but also, you know, people have shared their truths via artwork or cultural artifacts and so forth as well.

So we've been really, not creative, we've been really flexible about how we take and accept people's truths as well. That also goes to our culture, our knowledge systems and how we go about things as well, which is incredibly important again, to bring our people and make them feel safe in this process as well. We've been into prisons as well to also get evidence from our mob who are over-incarcerated in the state. So whilst we are progressing really well with, you know, the Voice Treaty and truth elements of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and we have a relatively, an OK relationship with government. It always has its tension points because ultimately they have the power. But we have some of the worst statistics in the country around, you know, our kids in child protection, you know, and also homelessness and so forth as well. I'm not saying that to take away from any other parts of the nation, the struggle that our people going through across the state, but we do brand ourselves here in Victoria as, you know, leading the nation on a number of things, but we're also falling behind in those closing the gap measures as well.

So again, we prioritize getting out on country. So whilst we've established a commission in the city on Naarm or Wurundjeri country, as it's known, that we actually have jumped in the car and we've gone and we've held a number of, you know, sessions across the state and held 67 public hearings, but also, you know, in the regions as well on country, out on country, as I was saying, that's where you sit down with people, that's where they feel comfortable and we needed to be flexible. And we've also had some of our hearing days where we had the Minister for Water for the first time in history in Robinvale, so it's near the border of Victoria and New South Wales in a colonial context, where we wanted to have the Minister out on country right beside the water and the water quality up in country as well is absolutely terrible. So we talk about land rights, we talk about water rights and to see that river there looking incredibly unhealthy. And we all know in this space that our ancestors never would have allowed that.

So, you know, it comes down to mismanagement and our people not being at the forefront. We have ministers continually come and talk about, you know, the best innovators around how to manage and care for country, but yet we're not at a decision-making table and we don't have authority through the decisions that are made that ultimately affect our country and our rights as well. So we will make really strong recommendations to the state around how to transform the system, transform or decolonise whichever word you want to use the system to enable our rights to be upheld, but also to be respected as well. Thank you.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Thank you.

**TRAVIS LOVETT:**
Alright. People like to talk, so apologies. That was a long one.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
No, it's good yarns. I think everyone was on your every word. I know I was. Shelley, I'm conscious that a lot of our audience today is representatives of corporate or government or non-profit Australia. So I'm interested in getting your perspective on the role of workplaces and organisations when it comes to truth-telling.

**SHELLEY CABLE:**
Thanks, Kate. Before I jump into that, (SPEAKS AN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE) Wiilman Whadjuk Noongar. I'm Shelley Cable. I'm a proud Whadjuk and Wiilman Noongar and I'm dialing in today from Naarm on Wurundjeri country. So from Melbourne, but (UNKNOWN) Perth is where I come from and it is my home. And I just want to say what a privilege it is to be on this panel, particularly alongside commissioners, Katie Kiss and Travis Lovett. I guess I want to start also by saying that a lot of what we've heard today is so incredibly profound and so incredibly important for every Australian to hear that at the same time from a workplace perspective, it can feel very overwhelming because what is your workplace? What's the role of you as an individual or your workplace in this massive and significantly profound discussion? So I feel like today, my role on this panel is not necessarily to add any insights to truth telling per se when we've got experts here, but actually to try and translate that for the workplace experience.

And the way that I'm going to start that is by saying, we're talking about truth telling, and it implies a lot of talking. And I actually want to flip that on its head for workplaces. And I've noticed one of the comments come through already in Q&A from Bunja. I just want to absolutely get behind that comment. First Nations people do not have a problem telling the truth. Their problem is when other people don't listen. And the Europe Truth and Justice Commission, for example, while it seems relatively new in a Victorian and Australian context, truth-telling itself is not new. Having a forum to actually welcome that truth and to actually listen, that is the new part. And I think that's exactly what workplaces around Australia need to do. You don't have to be talking. There's enough talking going on. What we actually need is listening and deep listening. And I think that takes a bit of the onus and the pressure off the workplaces around Australia to say your role is not necessarily, you can host your own inquiry if you like, and if that's helpful, but we need to be really conscious of the onus that that puts and the pressure that puts on First Nations people who have never stopped telling the truth.

So I want to reiterate the importance of listening, but also put a caveat and an ANZ example in here. So my role, I'm very privileged to be in the role of Head of First Nations Strategy for Australia. That's my lights that have gone out. And so when I came into the role about 12 months ago, my first port of call, and it sounds like it's exactly the same first port of call for Katie and Travis, is listening, learning, not wanting to say what the answers are, but actually listening to our people first and foremost. And so we were about to embark on our national kind of listening tour for ANZ's First Nations Strategy. And we were actually challenged on that by a range of people, including some First Nations consultants that we engaged to help with that. And what they put to us was First Nations people have been asked what they want, and they've been very clear about what they want for a very long time. If there's one thing that First Nations people are, it's consistent in what they're asking for and what's important.

And so we were actually challenged as ANZ, and I'm so glad we were, to say do your homework first, do your research first, and look at what's already been said, what's already been shared, and come from a point of being informed and showing First Nations people that you've actually listened to what's already been said. So again, for the workplaces on this call, if you do want to engage in truth-telling, just be conscious of the load, that going out to First Nations people and saying, tell us everything you want us to know, is actually quite a lot of work on those First Nations people. And if every workplace on this call did that, that's a lot of tired mob out there having to share their truths over and over. So my recommendation would be to start with listening, rather than feeling like the onus is on the workplace, to do the truth-telling. Start by listening and actually start by doing your research and becoming informed before you actually start engaging.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Thanks Shelley. And picking up on what you and the commissioners have also said, it's do your homework, come prepared, but also if you're going to ask the question, consider what you're going to do about it. Because asking a question and not having a response or not being in a position to make a decision as a result of the response, nothing is more fatiguing to any group, let alone First Nations peoples. Make sure you're following up with action. And Katie, you've been in the midst of your nationwide listening tour, so what do you think a truth-telling process might look like on a national scale?

**KATIE KISS:**
Thanks for that Kate. And just following on from Shelley's commentary about corporate involvement, corporates have a lot of influence in the public space. And in an environment where there's a lot of negative commentary about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at this point in time, we need our allies, and we need those that have significant influence in the public debate coming out and having our backs on this stuff. And so, yes, by all means, listen, yes, by all means, do your homework, but be confident enough to be able to promote and advocate in the community about hearing the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, about fixing the relationship that's been so damaged in this country from the day of colonisation. We need our corporates, we need those with influence backing us in on that. And so I suppose in terms of a national truth-telling process, as we've said many times during this conversation today, this is everyone's responsibility. We need everybody doing their bit.

I made submissions to the parliamentary inquiry into the Truth and Justice Commission Bill proposed by Senator Dorinda Cox, and we draw on some of those lessons from Queensland and from also Victoria where we talked about a non-adversarial approach to this thing. We need a national conversation. As I said, we've got a gaping wound that needs to be healed. And the only way that we're going to do that is by learning each other, respecting each other, accepting each other's difference of lived experience to be able to move forward in a way that's respectful with each other. But in terms of what a national truth-telling body needs to do, first and foremost, it needs to promote the aims of self-determination and empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from its original design, its preparatory or readiness processes. And I spoke a little bit about that in my speech today. We did a lot of work in Queensland around getting our communities starting to talk about what does truth-telling look like for them because there's been so much damage done to our people through colonial systems, things like native title, which have torn families to pieces.

We have actually got a lot of work to do to be able to put our own people back together. And I talk a lot about rebuilding our villages. There's a significant amount of work from our end that we need to do, but we need the space to do that. And we need the support to do that. So again, corporate Australia, we're not going to get the support from government to do that work. We actually need to rely on our allies to give us a hand with some of that to create and facilitate the spaces for us to put our communities and our families back together after the impact of colonisation. But the readiness doesn't just stop with our communities. It also needs to be embedded in the corporate structures, within government structures. And that's why that transformation of government piece is so critical under the Closing the Gap Agreement because we need our organisations, our departments, our governments, our ministers ready to engage in these conversations. It needs to be informing the policy approach.

Otherwise, we continue to have policies which raise the statistics that Travis spoke about, where our children are in jail, 10-year-olds are committing suicide in detention centres. We have mothers being removed from their children in detention facilities. So, you know, the system is actually doing so much damage to our people, it didn't stop in the past, it continues today through those policies. And so that readiness piece, that research piece, that understanding piece is absolutely critical to a formal truth-telling process that kicks in, that enables us to do what the Victorian Europe Commission has been able to do in giving the space for our elders, our people from Stolen Generations, to tell their stories, have them heard in a trauma-informed and healing way that gives them peace of mind, and they can move on to the next part of their journey in peace, rather than carrying that with them into the spirit world, you know. They don't get to rest. Our people don't get to rest. And so that work is really important.

The readiness piece is really important. The space and the foundation needs to be built for us to do that in a safe way. Obviously, the terms of reference, functions and powers of a truth-telling body have to be designed to create a non-adversarial and culturally safe environment, but they also have to be designed by us. And I think, you know, Travis spoke to the way that the Victorian Commission has been designed in that, yes, it's a Royal Commission, but it's an Aboriginal-led Royal Commission, and it was designed by our people, and it's been run by our people, and our senior cultural authority members are leading that process. I think the design and implementation of a national truth-telling mechanism has to be focused on all parts and all stages of what truth-telling looks like. It needs to account for the readiness, but also then how do we document that history appropriately? And it's not just the stories of our old people. It's not just, you know, us sitting down and telling our yarns.

It's the full documented history of what's happened in this country, and that's where the Yoorook Commission has done great work in collecting and collating that documentation from official records that have been held by government departments in Victoria, but also bringing government representatives to the table to talk to their historical context around how they've delivered Indigenous affairs or the relationship between us and the broader population on a state-based level. Probably the final point that I want to make is that, you know, Uncle talked earlier in his welcome to country about Stolen Generations. We've just had Sorry Day, or the apology day, and we've seen the report that's come out from the Healing Foundation around, you know, making sure that we're giving space to Stolen Gens to do what they need to do, to have redress and justice for themselves as a result of the colonial policies that they've been subjected to. We need to make sure that any national truth-telling process prioritises the urgent and at risk evidence that comes from Stolen Generations people across the country that has to be prioritised, but also our senior elders that we're losing on a day-to-day basis.

Like, we're losing this cultural knowledge. We're losing the history of this country, and that doesn't just belong to us. It belongs to all Australians. They have the history of this country. And so, as I said, we're in an environment where we're not getting supported by governments around this. We have to be innovative in how we conduct those processes. And in Queensland, we're starting conversations about how we move truth-telling forward without government support. But as I said, we need everybody playing their part here. And in the absence of government funding these processes, we need philanthropic and corporate support to do that.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Thank you. Hearing from all of you about the important role that corporate organisations play in this, I've got a question for Shelley, but maybe I'd also like to open it up to the commissioners as well. What are some of the practical steps that people on this call who are representatives of more or less a corporate environment? What advice would you give them if they wanted to start their organisational truth-telling journey? Shelley, I might go to you first, if that's OK.

**KATIE KISS:**
Yeah, sure. Sure. Absolutely. I think there's probably a couple of things that people can do either as individuals or through their workplace. On a really basic individual level, I really want to, again, acknowledge Uncle Brendan's welcome and the amount of truth that he included in his welcome, like every welcome to country, every acknowledgement of country that anyone on this call can do is a chance to actually talk about truth-telling and to educate people through your acknowledgements of country. So I think on a very practical daily level, knowing your history and being able to share something that you've learnt when you give a meaningful acknowledgement of country is a really great way to do that. From a more corporate or workplace perspective, what I think is the most important or the most important starting point is helping, to Katie's point earlier, to that readiness. And it's about workplaces understanding why they would even want to start this journey. It's about making it relevant for your organisation and your workplace.

Often talking about like truth-telling is not language that you hear commonly in corporate Australia. And so I think being able to translate what that means, when we mean truth-telling, how that's relevant to your organisation. To take some examples, all of us in corporate Australia are always thinking about employment, about our customers. And so being able to link back to say, actually, if you take a First Nations employment example, we need to make that we need to understand the truths of our First Nations employees, if we want to be a better employer, and we want to attract top First Nations talent, and top talent more broadly across the country. If you're worried about customers, or not worried about them, but you're here to serve customers, you need to actually understand what your customers want, how many First Nations customers does your organisation have. And by understanding and I guess, removing the invisibility of First Nations in your organisation, actually spotlighting how they're relevant to your organisations, employees and customers are just two examples.

They could also be shareholders, for example, they obviously are traditional owners, there's so many links that you can draw between your organisation and First Nations. And if you don't have a good relationship with your First Nations people, or if you don't know anything about your First Nations customers or employees, it's going to make your job harder as an organisation. So being able to translate it into a business case around why First Nations are relevant to your organisation and therefore, why you need to understand their lived experience and their experience with your organisation, I think is a really helpful place to start.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
That's really practical. Thank you Shelly. Is there anything that you'd like to add to that? Katie or Travis?

**TRAVIS LOVETT:**
I mean, that was a pretty comprehensive answer. I mean, I'm not in the corporate world and I never have been, but I think one key point that probably just comes back to what I've said before about social emotional wellbeing and protecting our people as well, I mean, part of Yoorook mandate as well. And the strongest aspiration really is, I mean, we've had 191 years this year of colonization when the Hentys arrived here in Victoria. So, not as long as where uncle was talking about through Sydney and so forth as well, but still a long time. So, really trying to understand, I guess well protect our people, number one from them having to, you know, retell their truths. And that's the importance of Yoorook as well around establishing an official public record. So, you don't have to start from scratch, but I think also understanding from an organizational point of view around... I mean, this is quite a complex question because how do they come about? You know, like, I mean, each organization's very different.

So, understanding the true history around the wealth that's being generated of our lands, for instance, and I'll talk about a figure that we're able to identify through one of our hearings around land injustice. So, on Wadawurrung Country around 1851, I think the Gold rush started and Wadawurrung Country and also Djadjawurrung Country here. $267 billion was extracted from these lands here in Victoria, and $0 went to mob. So, again many of these organizations and so forth are founded on pretty wealthy areas of country. And also understanding some of the things that happen to our people and working with them to also look to identify opportunities. You know, some of these, obviously corporate companies are national companies now, but they started somewhere. So, understanding their journey, understanding what's they can do to contribute to strengthening our ability to be self-determining and also so we can, you know, live in a more equitable society. And it could be through scholarships, it could be through employment opportunities and stuff, but there's a number of place-based opportunities that each location can unpack and go in to identify the truth and accept the truth as well.

And that's how we move forward as well. I think many times this is truth telling is not about, you know, divisiveness. It's actually about being open and actually talking about how we move forward together. That's our people have fought for. We didn't fought to be treated different. We fought for equity. That's what we want. We don't want legs up. We don't want handouts, we want equity. And that comes through making sure that we have systemic inclusion, not exclusion as to what we've uncovered here in Victoria. We've trailed through 10,000 documents from the state government of Victoria 10,000. And our team and commissioners have read them all. We've read every document that government's given to us about the ongoing injustices that our people have faced. So, but again, encouraging people and organizations to really you know, rip the bandaid off, so to speak, and actually have the dialogue about, you know, the true history of how their institutions were set up and how they were founded on where they were founded and what are they doing to ultimately enable our people to flourish and thrive.

Sorry, I'm not in the corporate will, but I think that's kind of some principles there.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Great advice, Katie.

**KATIE KISS:**
Kate. Probably the only thing to build on Travis and Shelly's comments is it has to come from the leadership of the organization and not just the CEO, but the board has to back that work in. It's about understanding the impact of the activities on of which they're undertaking. And to go to Travis's point, you know, do no harm in the work that you are undertaking. Understand the contracts that you are taking on board. You know, review them in the context of what harm does this cause to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? What impact is going to be had here? If you're working in the consultation space, for example, when you're given a contract to do work or research that looks at a policy approach that is going to impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Have you got Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people contracted to do that work? Or are you taking that money and having an impact that is actually harmful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? So, I think to build on what the conversation has been today the corporate conversation, there's a lot of people working in our spaces that don't conduct an analysis of the contracts they take on of the activities that they undertake.

They don't look at the impact on the communities that they're having an effect on. And it all becomes about the money. You know I've worked in spaces where in child safety, for example, reviews have been conducted on child safety safe houses, and I've had comments come back to me where they've taken on a contract to run a safe house. And when I've questioned them about, so how do you facilitate reunification of those children with their families? The response to me was, I've got a 12 bed facility that I have to run. If I can't fill 12 beds, I can't get my invoice paid. So, when I can't get my invoice paid, I ring child safety and I get them to send me more children. These are the impacts that are being had on our populations that contribute to truth telling. This directly links back to the stolen generations, bringing them home report. So, this is the historical to the contemporary, but also the impact that corporates and people working in our spaces have on the lives of our people when they're not actually analysed or looked at through the prism of impact and effect.

So, I would probably just say that, do no harm in the work that you do and seek to conduct yourselves with integrity that builds, empowers and creates self-determination and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**TRAVIS LOVETT:**
Well said. Really good. It's a really good point. Really good point. And also deliver on your wraps or you...

**KATIE KISS:**
Yes.

**TRAVIS LOVETT:**
Deliver on accountability and making sure that organizationally you're actually delivering on what you said you would do.

**KATIE KISS:**
Yeah.

**TRAVIS LOVETT:**
You know, everyone's got KPIs, so, you know, we always have to meet KPIs across the board, but when our people's KPIs and stuff that we've signed up through, through the wraps aren't implemented, it's like, oh, hopefully we'll do better next year. So, strengthening the accountability as well. And just picking up on the point, that's a very common thread today, which is stolen gens. This was government policy in 1886 Alfred Deakin, through legislation implemented policy around that started of the stolen generation. And it's still happening today, 1886, everybody, not again to ram it down, but it's just important point that this is government policy, this is how the system works.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
I can see a lot of questions coming through from our audience, so please keep that up. And you can also give it a thumbs up to bump it up the list, which helps me know where are shared questions or a popular question, one of which I'd like to open up to all three panelists, do you have any tips for opening the hearts and minds of people to hearing and meaningfully engaging with the truth in an era of denial and polarization? Such a good question, Shelly. I might start with you.

**SHELLEY CABLE:**
That's a tough one. (LAUGHS)

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Sorry.

**SHELLEY CABLE:**
I mean, first of all, you need to find people who already have open hearts and minds and get them to work on the others. I think, you know, bashing your head against a brick wall doesn't always work, doesn't get you to the other side all the time. So, I think finding the people who share the empathy is really, really helpful. And build an army rather than trying to do it all by yourself. I mean, sometimes people don't know enough to be empathetic or to have that that feeling towards the First Nations history of this country. As I can share one example about what we've done at ANZ we have implemented mandatory cultural awareness training for all of our Australian and some more but Australian based staff at ANZ. We actually designed that cultural awareness training with very close input from our First Nations employees. And we also had a First Nations business actually create that cultural awareness training from scratch. And in that training, we made sure to call out to do truth telling, to call out the history of First Nations people that is relevant to a bank at as ANZ relevant to our industry.

To say, actually First Nations people have been trading for longer than other civilizations have existed on planet Earth. The Songlines and the trade routes that we have, not only within Australia, but also internationally is something to be very proud of and to know about to talk about the fact that it has a different meaning when it comes to First Nations communities and the way that a bank views profit and success doesn't always relate in First Nations communities. And one other example, we, we also talk about things like stolen wages. So, a lot of people in this country do not know that our... Let's just say a lot of people in this country do know that First Nations people typically don't earn as much as other Australians. We typically have lower wealth, lower rates of home ownership, et cetera, et cetera. All that deficit discourse. Everyone knows super well, unfortunately. But when you try and unpack why is that, and one of those, I mean, a very clear reason is land dispossession.

If you remove the land and the asset base of an economy, good luck creating your economic wealth. But secondly, things like stolen wages, when First Nations people are some of the hardest workers that I've ever met in my life and we get that work ethic from our ancestors and our mob have always worked incredibly hard. The difference was that they just didn't get paid for it. And actually their wages were often paid to governments to manage on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and magically that money went missing. And so, for decades of work that our people have done, we never earned, so never actually received a dollar for it. And that gives a very different perspective about why First Nations people have higher rates of unemployment, lower wealth. It's not because we're lazy or because we can't contribute to workplaces like other Australians. It's because we've been discriminated against. And sometimes having to let people know that history by way of mandatory cultural awareness training is a way to open that door.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Lovely said Shelly. Katie, or Travis, anything you'd like to add?

**KATIE KISS:**
I'm keen to jump in here, commissioner Lovett. I think when I was at the commission previously, we had a conversation about domestic and family violence where we looked at the bystander effect, and it connected in with the racism discussion. And I think that applies here as well. I spoke in my presentation today about the burden that we carry as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people trying to educate the broader Australian population about the history and about our lived experience in this country, including the effects of those policies that we've been talking about this afternoon on our previous generations, our past generations, but also our future and our current generations. So, I think one thing I want to say here is that we need to combat the bystander effect. We need our non-Aboriginal brothers and sisters who are sitting in public spaces with us when they're hearing those comments or challenges to us about our position in this country. We need our non-indigenous people backing us in taking that burden from us in those moments to reduce the amount of harm and ongoing trauma that we experience by having to constantly respond to those challenges in public ways.

So, I am not saying speak on our behalf. I'm saying back us in on those conversations. Don't be a bystander. Stand up and stand with us. You know, show up for us. We need you standing there. The second point I want to make is knowledge is power. Now, on the back of the referendum, ANU did a comprehensive analysis on the way people voted and why they voted the way they did. It found that the majority of people that voted no were uneducated, resettled males. So, people who haven't been educated in the history of Australia, people who have got very little understanding of the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this country, but also people who don't speak English as a first language, mostly males. And they've got a low level of education and a low level of social and economic standing in the community. So, knowledge is power if we can lift people's understanding and awareness of the history of this country in a very practical way. And like I said, not just our people doing that, the bystanders need to step in here and give us a hand to educate the broader population.

We can actually create change. We can actually inform people. Part of the problem around the referendum is that people would not informed. And some people say, well, you know, they know, they just choose not to. Well, we know Aboriginal people on this panel know that when we went to school, we weren't taught about our people. We were taught about Captain Cook. Our people were running around in lap Labs. We weren't taught about our innovation, our history, our pride in our culture, our leaders, our cultural chiefs, you know we weren't taught about those things. So, if we weren't in our school institutions, the mainstream Australia weren't taught that either. So, we've gotta start from that point. We've got to give people knowledge and awareness of what that looks like for us, and we need our allies standing with us in those processes because it's draining. The final point I want to make is we need to break the algorithms. So, I'm active on social media only Facebook and LinkedIn. I can't do the other things so.

(LAUGHS) But I'm active on those things and I know that sharing information helps people to engage in a safe way and learn about some of the issues and challenges and the hard conversations that are being had across the country. Now, when I share things, it goes to the converted because the people who are my friends on Facebook are the people who know my narrative. They know the conversation I'm having. So, they connect with me to learn more, to be engaged in that conversation. They're not the rednecks, they're not the people that are, you know, causing harm to our people. So, how do we infiltrate through the algorithms around making sure that these conversations are coming up on their feeds? And so this is why we need the bystanders, the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians engaging in these conversations on platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn, so that the spread of information is happening in a much wider, quicker, more efficient way for us to be able to engage these conversations more effectively.

You know, us as commissioners can run around the country and try and educate as many people as we can find, but we can do it much more efficiently by using platforms and breaking those algorithms that keep narratives happening the way the mainstream population wants them to happen.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Thank you. And before we close, I'll pass to you Commissioner Lovett.

**TRAVIS LOVETT:**Well, that's, I mean, both incredibly articulate and really clear direction there for everybody, to be honest. We in the commission here have received 16 apologies from politicians and bureaucrats. And one point I wanted to highlight there was, this is institutional apologies. We haven't asked everyday Australians walking around to say sorry to us. I've heard it thousands of times, or why we got to say sorry to you, mob. Well, we never asked people to say sorry, but we've asked for the institutions who have created the institutional harm. You know, since before, you know, I said 1834, we've had 49 massacres that are recorded here in the state of Victoria. Again, I know it sounds really harsh, but this is just facts. So, you know, we are, again, we want to ensure that the institutions are recognized, the harm that they've caused our people. But also it's an opportunity to educate people. And I think that's the thing. If you are walking around and you, you know, your rights and you understand your rights, but also we're dealing with facts.

I think this is an important point that I'd made before about this, is not just anecdotally mob walking around going, oh yeah, we think this kind of happened to us. 'Cause we have heard through multiple media platforms that, oh, it's just, you know, a bit of a gamut or a bit of a, you know, kangaroo process. You know, what's all this stuff? Well, you know, the fact of the matter is, is that everyone who's come forward, you know we've had lawyers involved. We've had you obviously counsels that I mentioned before, but this is facts. So, just encouraging people to stick to the facts, the true history of what really happened. And also, we are documenting, you know, the true history around Victoria. And we'll establish an official public record that we would expect to be used to also educate not only school students in the future, but also, you know, universities and society more broadly around the true history, because history has been written about us. But always in a negative context. There's plenty of, you know, you go to every single town across Australia, there's colonial monuments everywhere, colonial monuments everywhere, talking about the innovation that they've brought and how deadly and amazing they are, but not about our people's story around how we live prior to, but also how we've navigated this system, very complex system that's continually shut us out, the leaders that we were talking about before.

So,, empower yourself with the education and the knowledge to be able to hold firm in your conversations as well. And you know, and obviously naturally do it with kindness and so forth as well. But I mean, there's some people you're just not going to be able to convert. But try to, you know, prioritize your time and your efforts on people who are actually persuadable, who are open to at least hearing what has happened here, but also celebrate our successes you mob, and this is not Aboriginal people celebrate how deadly we are. You know, this is something that, you know, we've adopted this colonial mindset of shame job, shame job. You know, I was talking to someone earlier at a thing that I was at, and this lad come up to me, said, oh, I'm just, you know, I'm doing a bit of data sovereignty stuff. And I'm like, you're not just doing a bit of data sovereignty. You're leading, you know, you're leading in data sovereignty. That's incredibly important skill to have. So, see ourselves as professional, smart, articulate, because we are, let's not downplay it because it's shame job and it's, oh, you know, culturally shame job to talk about how deadly we are.

But you got to get over that. Tell them how deadly we are. We show 'em how deadly we are, and we keep smiling. We keep pushing on like our ancestors did. We are not resilient people. We are resistant. Because resilience implies that people can continually do harm to us, and we'll just roll over and say, we'll forgive you and we'll move on. No, no, no. We are resistant. We've been resistant for the 200 plus years of colonization. And we'll continue to be resistant in a defiant way to make sure that we can live in a world that re not only recognizes our rights, but respect our rights as well. Thanks everyone.

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Thank you. It brings us to the end of today's event. I want to thank all of our panellists Commissioner Katie Kiss, Commissioner Travis Lovett, Shelley Cable, and of course, uncle Brendan for his warm welcome to country. I have to say, it's been a personal privilege to be a part of this conversation. And speaking about pride, I'm really proud of the work that you're all doing on behalf of our mob, but also on behalf of Australia. We need this. I want to thank you for making time today. Thank you for such an engaged audience putting through some wonderful questions. I hope we can see all of our guests today at DCAs. Next session, which is going to be a case study conversation on 17 March with Telstra on how they're using innovative communication strategies to embed D and I change and improve their racial literacy. We'll also be having a DCA member key contact event on the 31st of March to share challenges and questions when it comes to D and I resistance and how to make positive change every day.

Thank you everybody for joining us. I hope you have a wonderful afternoon. Thank you.

**TRAVIS LOVETT:**
Can I say one more thing?

**KATE RUSSELL:**
Yeah.

**TRAVIS LOVETT:**
Well, sorry everybody. A bit of a plug here for the work we're doing at Yoorook, but as our history tells us as well, we are always, you know, we are protestors, we are resistance fighters, we're freedom fighters, and we also stage a number of walk offs. So, just letting people know that I'll be walking 370 kilometers from Portland, where colonization started, where the Hentys illegally arrived on our country. And I'll be walking 370 Ks all the way through to Parliament, where the transformation needs to happen as well to highlight the systemic and ongoing injustice, but also to talk about how deadly and amazing we are and the contributions that we've continually made in that 191 year. So, we'll get some information to you through your channels and stuff, but if you are in Melbourne during late May and June, we'll confirm the details. Please come along. And it'll be 370 Ks and you can do two Ks, you can do one K, you can turn up for the photo and just smile and that's OK. But look forward to seeing you mob there.

And again appreciate the time and effort and energy and look after yourselves. Safe travels. And as an said, we tread lightly on country Yoorook in my language, means for now, Yoorook.

End of transcript.