

MEDIA RELEASE

25 June 2025

Walking Together for Truth: A Shared Step Towards Justice and Healing in Victoria

“The silence ends here. The time of not knowing—of choosing not to know—is over.” These words from Commissioner Travis Lovett, Deputy Chair of the [Yoorrook Justice Commission](#), marked a defining moment at the conclusion of the historic Walk for Truth. On Wednesday 18 June 2025, more than 5,000 people gathered at Melbourne’s Shrine of Remembrance and walked together to the steps of Parliament House, completing the final leg of the 500-kilometre journey led by Commissioner Lovett over 25 days across Victoria.

The Walk for Truth was held to coincide with the close of the Yoorrook Justice Commission’s four-year inquiry—the first formal truth-telling process into the historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria. It provided a public opportunity for all Victorians to engage with the truth-telling process, show support for the Commission’s work, and call for the full implementation of its forthcoming recommendations.

Commissioner Lovett had commenced the journey in Portland, Gunditjmara Country, where he said the story of colonisation in Victoria “first took its first breath”. Along the way, the walk passed through communities, former missions, massacre sites, and towns across the state. “We have stopped at some of the darkest places,” he said. “We’ve never shied away from the truth. We walk not only through terrain, but through time. Each step collapsing distance between what was done and what must now be faced.”

At each stop, stories were shared, message sticks exchanged, and the lived experiences of Aboriginal people were acknowledged. Over 12,000 people engaged with the walk during its course. Commissioner Lovett explained, “We don’t stand here to talk about these things to shame everyday Australians. What we’re asking for is that institutions take responsibility for the institutional harm they’ve caused our people.”

Commissioner Lovett was also clear about the spirit behind the journey: “It’s not about guilt. It’s about responsibility. It’s not about blame. It’s about the truth. Our old people didn’t fight for sorrow. They fought so that we might live well, live long, live with love and meaning.” He reminded the crowd that the walk was for everyone. “Our people have always asked to walk together. We don’t need people to speak for us—but we need people to walk beside us. Not in front, not behind, but beside. We want to walk beside everyone for a more shared and equitable future, together.”

Addressing the crowd gathered on the steps of Parliament House, Commissioner Lovett declared: “Truth-telling is not a ritual, it’s not symbolic—it’s a reckoning. It’s a commitment to change—structural, cultural and legal.” These words captured the purpose and urgency of the day: to listen to the voices of First Peoples, acknowledge what has happened in this state, and commit to moving forward with truth and responsibility.

Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) was represented at the walk by staff, members and colleagues who joined the final leg to show support and stand in solidarity. Their participation reflected CSSV’s broader commitment to reconciliation, justice, and truth-telling—principles that align closely with Catholic Social Teaching.

CSSV Executive Director Joshua Lourensz said: “We believe that a close look at the Yoorrook Justice Commission’s final report recommendations will be an important part of a just and compassionate future for Victoria. Truth-telling is fundamental to reconciliation and justice broadly, and links well with what has been said by leadership at the national level—the Plenary Council decrees, the Australian Bishops’ social justice statements, and NATSICC’s endorsement of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.”

The Australian Catholic Bishops’ 2024–25 Social Justice Statement, *Truth and Peace*, speaks directly to the importance of truth-telling: “[the crisis of truth]...creates in turn the crisis of trust lying at the heart of the world’s current convulsions: because without trust there can be no peace and certainly not the reconciliation which lies a step beyond peace.” The 2023–24 statement, *Listen, Learn, Love*, similarly acknowledged the need for injustices to be recognised and for deep listening and change to occur: “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples need to be welcomed from the margins into the centre so that they can lead the discussions about change and implementation of actions to bring about healing and justice.”

Sr Joan Healy RSJ, who also took part in the walk (and who joined the Reconciliation Walks in 2000), described it as a meaningful public step: “This is such an important moment in Australia’s history. Victoria has always insisted that truth must come first, because so many people still don’t understand the real history of this place. The stories gathered—now held in the state’s archives—are a treasure and have come just in time. Events like this show that many people care deeply. We’re not just saying it—we’re showing it in symbol, and it won’t go away.”

Jenny Glare, Deputy Chair of CSSV, walked to help keep the focus on what comes next. “The Commission has opened a door to continue educating—for people to individually explore their own family story where there will be a history of colonisation, of massacres, of people being moved off the land. There’s still a lot of collective work to be done,” she said. “We just have to keep working.” Sr Stancea Vichie MSS, who walked and stood alongside the thousands of others at Parliament House for “this historical moment”, reflected: “Bringing truth into the light of day is the way to healing. As Commissioner Lovett said, ‘We can’t change the truth of our past, but by accepting and understanding it, we can walk forward together to a better shared future. For First Peoples and all Victorians. The true path forward starts here.’”

As the walk concluded, attention turned to what lies ahead. The Yoorrook Justice Commission has now delivered its two final reports to the Governor of Victoria, Margaret Gardner AC, and the Co-Chairs of the First People’s Assembly of Victoria, Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg. The Victorian Government is expected to table these reports in Parliament in the coming month, at which time they will become publicly available.

The first of these reports, *Yoorrook for Transformation*, is Yoorrook’s third and final report and contains 100 recommendations over five volumes. The second, *Yoorrook Truth Be Told*, is an Official Public Record – a formal documentation of the truth as told by First Peoples, including testimonies from Stolen Generations survivors, Elders, and others across the state. It is the first time in Victoria’s history that First Peoples have had the opportunity to document this truth in their own words, through a Commission led by Aboriginal Commissioners. Commissioner Lovett reminded the crowd: “This is not just a report of trauma. It is also a record of strength, leadership, and contribution.” And while the Commission’s formal role is concluding, he made clear: “The work of truth-telling, of treaty, of transformation—that belongs to us all now.”

At the conclusion of his speech on the steps of Parliament House, Commissioner Lovett, entered the chambers, joined by members of the First Peoples’ Assembly, Elders, fellow Commissioners including Yoorrook Justice Commission Chair Aunty Eleanor Bourke AM, and elected representatives. He presented message sticks, carved and smoked at each location throughout the walk as a gesture of ongoing cultural practice and responsibility. “We carried these through Country, smoked them at every stop, and we now

pass them on with our expectations engraved—continuing more than 60,000 years of culture here in Victoria,” he said. Commissioner Lovett issued one final call to action: “Justice is no longer a whisper. It is a road, and we are already on it. We ask you not just to turn up today, but to turn up every day.”

Catholic Social Services Victoria affirms its support for the Yoorrook Justice Commission and the work of truth-telling. We encourage all Victorians—especially those in the Catholic community—to engage deeply with the Commission’s findings, to reflect on what truth means in practice, and to walk alongside First Peoples toward a more just and reconciled Victoria.

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