



Monday 23 October, 2023

WE'RE GETTING ON WITH THE JOB, POST-REFERENDUM

DJAARA, the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, is very disappointed in the outcome of the referendum.

For decades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have been saying we want governments to listen to us before making decisions about us.

While many Australians agree this makes sense, the nation has voted not to make this change to the Constitution.

Unfortunately, the loudest voices in the debate were those who already have a voice within the system – and a means of amplification.

But, despite a bruising, negative campaign, 40 per cent of Australians – and 45 per cent of Victorians – voted to support an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

We are heartened by the incredible show of support for the Voice in the leadup to the referendum – both here on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, and across Australia. It's clear we have many friends and allies.

We know they will be heartbroken by the result too. We thank them for standing with us and working so passionately for change.

In particular, we acknowledge the unwavering support and hard work of the Bendigo for Yes group, and Member for Bendigo Lisa Chesters.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, debate around the referendum and the no result have opened wounds, leaving us raw and bereft. The true impact will become evident only in the coming weeks, months, years.

But we are strong. We are proud. We are resilient.

Indeed, since invasion, our history has been a journey of successes: we have survived so much. We take strength from our own fallen: those wonderful Ancestors who never could have imagined how their world would change in a way that did not value them.

We have shown those Ancestors that their struggles have not been in vain. The work Dja Dja Wurrung are leading – including through our strategies on climate change, renewable energy, forest gardening and water, and our natural resource management, arts and culture, and agriculture businesses – is building a better future for our People and all community.

When my own mother was bullied at school, her grandmother – my great grandmother – said to her: “Don't worry, one day they will see we are good people.”

For me, these words, in a story of my mother's life as a fringe dweller, were defining, simple and calming. They speak of a better future where the Australian people are accepting of us.

For now, we will continue to support our community. We're getting on with the job of healing Country and healing Dja Dja Wurrung People.

DJAARA's work is an example of how a voice can make life better for everyone.

Through DJAARA's 2013 Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA) with the State of Victoria, Dja Dja Wurrung People do have a voice here in Victoria.

Our RSA means we are, increasingly, at the table with government. After many years of persistence, patience, and innovative problem solving, DJAARA is, increasingly, leading work on Country through our philosophy of **ngaldurrong yana** (walking together).

Our work benefits not only Dja Dja Wurrung People, but also the wider community.

We have grown, over the past decade, from a small organisation to one of Bendigo's large employers, with more than 200 staff.

We create stable employment for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (in fact, people come to the region to work with us).

Dja Dja Wurrung People have more opportunities to heal Country, practise Culture, develop careers, build businesses, participate in community.

When Dja Dja Wurrung People are strong, Country is strong. When Traditional Owners are empowered, great things happen – not just for our own communities, but for all.

We are saddened that too many Australians did not see this bigger picture when they voted in the referendum.

But we will not let the referendum result distract us from our work.

This November, DJAARA will celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the signing of our Recognition and Settlement Agreement in 2013.

We will reflect on and celebrate our significant achievements and look ahead to how we will continue to make still greater contributions to our community.

We still have so much to do.

Rodney Carter.