

The Hon. Daniel Andrews
Office of the Premier
1 Treasury Place
Melbourne
VIC 3002

10 September 2019

To the Hon. Daniel Andrews

We the undersigned are researchers, scholars and educators who work on questions of transport, policy, planning, climate, culture, ecology and Indigenous sovereignty. We work at institutions that have committed to the safeguarding of Indigenous cultural heritage.

We write to express our grave concern and disappointment about the Victorian Government's plans to bulldoze the sacred trees of the Djab Wurrung people of Western Victoria in order to construct a new alignment of the Western Highway.

The current plan involves destruction of 3000 trees, including many considered sacred by the Djab Wurrung people. This landscape and its natural and cultural values is important to all Victorians.

Victoria has entered into negotiations toward a Treaty with the First Peoples of Victoria. A project with this scale of impact on First Peoples and Country contradicts Treaty principles of a respectful relationship between sovereign peoples. It also contradicts the principle of free, prior and informed consent as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We call on the Victorian Government to:

- Halt works on the proposed Western Highway Alignment project;
- Withdraw the eviction notice for the Djab Wurrung Heritage Protection Embassy;
- Enter sincere and meaningful negotiations with the Djab Wurrung Heritage Protection Embassy as to the design of the Western Highway Alignment project so as avoid destruction of Djab Wurrung heritage;
- Undertake a review of Victorian heritage protection policy to ensure that it accords with the *Guiding Principles for the Treaty Process* as set out in Sections 22-26 of the *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018*, particularly in relation to self-determination, fairness, and equality; and
- In light of the decision making and design process for the Western Highway, in partnership with Victorian traditional owners, establish an Indigenous heritage awareness training program to be required for all staff employed in Victorian infrastructure policy, design and construction agencies and their contractors, including relevant Ministers and their advisers.

Signed,

Professor Jago Dodson, RMIT University
Professor Libby Porter, RMIT University
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