

Inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Submission



1 May 2026



Photo: Our Country, Our Land – Yarra Ranges Shire Council

The voice for local
government

No one understands the challenges and opportunities facing Victoria in the 21st century better than local councils. From rapidly evolving technology to social changes, shifting economies to environmental pressures, our local communities and the governments that represent them—are at the forefront of multiple transformations happening simultaneously.

As the peak body for the Victorian local government sector, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) offers councils a one-stop shop of services and support to help them serve their communities.



Photo: Our Country, Our Land – Yarra Ranges Shire Council

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Municipal Association of Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria, and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters, and culture.

We pay our respect to Elders past and present who carry the stories, traditions, cultures, and aspirations of First Peoples, and who forged the path ahead for emerging leaders.

We support local government's commitment to strengthen relationships with Victoria's First Peoples communities and for it to encourage greater unity, knowledge, cultural awareness and respect for the first occupants of this land — through its strong community links and local representation

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1 Executive Summary

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As the legislated peak body for Victoria's 79 local councils, MAV is committed to strengthening respectful and enduring relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and local government, grounded in the principle of self-determination and guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This submission finds that racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remains widespread, deeply harmful and increasingly visible, with significant impacts on safety, wellbeing, cultural expression, civic participation and trust in public institutions. Recent public events since the 2023 referendum, demonstrate an escalation in racist incidents both online and in local community settings and the rise of subversive systemic racial bias in actions and operations as a result of the silent racism.

Local government is a critical setting where these harms are experienced, including in council services, public spaces, sporting and recreation facilities, civic events and online environments. Councils are often the first point of contact when incidents occur, yet face limitations in authority, resources, intelligence access and culturally safe reporting pathways to respond effectively. Online racism and ideologically motivated extremism further amplify harm and pose growing risks to community safety and local democracy, including deterring Aboriginal participation in local leadership.

The submission highlights the persistence of systemic racism across public institutions, fragmented and culturally unsafe reporting processes, the significant cultural load and burnout experienced by Aboriginal representative leaders, staff and community members, and the challenges within local government environments.

MAV calls for a coordinated, well-resourced national response led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and supported by the Australian Government, in partnership with both State and local governments and established Aboriginal advisory and governance forums (see Appendix 1) in coordination with the Victorian Treaty process. This includes strengthening prevention and accountability frameworks, improving online safety regulation, enhancing intelligence sharing and reporting systems, investing in Aboriginal-led services and data governance, and building the cultural safety capability of councils. Sustained leadership, long-term resourcing and genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are essential to support councils to act safely and effectively, uphold rights, and build inclusive local communities free from racism, hate and violence.

2 Introduction

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As the legislated peak representative and advocacy body for Victoria's 79 local councils MAV is committed to strengthening respectful and enduring relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island People and local government. MAV supports the principle of self-determination and advocates for councils to seek guidance and work collaboratively on matters that directly affect them.

MAV acknowledges the leadership of the Municipal Association of Victoria First Peoples Expert Advisory panel who advise and guide MAV on matters directly impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and local government in Victoria, this includes navigating, designing and developing approaches to address systemic racism.

This submission has been informed by some members of the MAVs First Peoples Expert Advisory Panel members and endorsed by the Panel's Cochairs.

MAV recognises the enduring strength, leadership and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria. Their ongoing work through established advisory bodies and governance structures continues to advance the wellbeing, health, safety and self-determination of their communities in coordination with the Victorian Treaty process, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the truth-telling work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

Racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples significantly undermine councils' efforts to promote social cohesion, safety, wellbeing and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the local level. MAV acknowledges that local government is both a setting where racism, hate and violence are experienced and a critical lever for preventing harm, addressing systemic inequity and strengthening inclusive communities.

This submission outlines the experiences of Victorian local government in responding to racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the impact on Aboriginal councillors, council staff and community members, and the practical reforms needed to enable a coordinated, well-resourced national response at the local level.

3 Response to the Terms of Reference

1. The nature, prevalence and impact of racism, hate and violence towards First Nations people, including trends over time

A substantial body of evidence demonstrates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to experience overt racism, hate and violence in deeply harmful and sustained ways. These impacts are often compounded through intersectionality, where discrimination is intensified by factors such as gender, age, disability, sexuality, gender orientation and socioeconomic status. Additionally, microaggressions and “Everyday Racism”, which is often under-recognised also has a commulative affect on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and significantly affects social, emotional and mental wellbeing.

Recent public events demonstrate a clear and escalating pattern in both the frequency and visibility of racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These acts profoundly undermine safety, wellbeing, cultural expression, civic participation and trust in public institutions. These impacts build and continue over time, harming social and emotional wellbeing and limiting people’s ability to exercise self-determination.

The 2024–25 Call It Out report found the 2023 referendum on a constitutional Voice to Parliament contributed to a rise in aggressive racism, including hate speech and violence. The report confirms racism across all localities, with many incidents systemic with an increasing online component.

There has been a documented rise in racist incidents directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both online and in person. This escalation has included serious public acts of violence and intimidation, such as the criminal attack on Camp Sovereignty in August 2025 by right-wing extremists and neo-Nazis as part of their March for Australia rally, the terrorist attack at a peaceful Survival/Invasion Day rally on 26 January this year in Western Australia, and most recently, the orchestrated and deeply racist act across Australia of booing Traditional Owners delivering Welcome to Country at ANZAC Day commemorations, instigated by organised hate groups. The orchestrators and perpetrators of acts of racism, hate and violence must be identified, investigated and held accountable under criminal, civil and regulatory frameworks.

Human rights and community research further indicates that systemic racism remains embedded within public institutions including all levels of government. This is reflected in policy development, how funding is allocated and operational decision making, including where decisions are made ‘on behalf of’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities without adequate or appropriate consultation. These practices continue to undermine trust, safety and the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to exercise leadership and self-determination in matters that directly affect them.

The recent Victorian Yoorrook Justice Commission enquiry has detailed the entrenched nature of racism across public institutions and mainstream services including policing, prisons, child protection, the criminal legal system, health systems, native title frameworks and land management practices, highlighting how these systems continue to reinforce inequities and cause ongoing harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

All levels of government have at times relied on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island staff to carry reconciliation and cultural responsibilities, reinforcing cultural load and systemic inequity, while many Aboriginal people still do not feel safe to identify. Cultural safety commitments are often experienced as tokenistic, contributing to ongoing harm, mistrust and barriers to participation over time, reflecting forms of systemic or “silent” racism.

Systemic racism continues to be experienced in some council-related settings, including public spaces and council-operated services. Significant investment is required from governments to transform the systems that continue to entrench racism across all levels of government and the community, including improved cultural competencies to deliver services, programs and initiatives to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In some mainstream Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services, culturally inappropriate assessment tools and gaps in cultural safety capability have contributed to inequitable experiences for Aboriginal families, including disproportionate child protection involvement and removal of Aboriginal children, with long term detrimental impacts on families and communities.

Council MCH services are taking deliberate steps to address these systemic issues through mandatory cultural safety training, Aboriginal-led and codesigned initiatives such as Whittlesea’s *Deadly Boorai, Deadly Families* program, and by sponsoring and employing Aboriginal MCH nurses within mainstream services. These efforts build on statewide commitments under the Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026, which emphasises culturally safe, community-led approaches across early childhood and education services. Currently the next iteration of the Plan is being codesigned and through this work will continue to address systemic racism. The MAV supports this work through sector stewardship, advocacy and partnership with Aboriginal communities and government to strengthen cultural safety and improve universal services to and deliver equitable outcomes.

Victorian Councils have witnessed marked increase in racism and hate targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people related initiatives and events since the 2023 referendum on a constitutional Voice to Parliament. Councils are increasingly witnessing and responding to an increase in incidents including disruption of Welcome to Country ceremonies, NAIDOC Week events, vandalism of Aboriginal art, signage and dual-named places, harassment of Aboriginal councillors and staff, and coordinated disinformation campaigns targeting the Victorian Treaty process, reconciliation initiatives, and significant Aboriginal events and activities.

Councils are also experiencing heightened racism and hostility from some members of the non-Aboriginal community in the lead-up to 26 January. All of the incidents are acutely harmful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the community and create a serious risk to the mental health and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people council officers and other frontline staff, who are frequently exposed to and tasked with responding to these incidents.

In addition, sporting clubs and community recreation settings are key environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience high levels of racism, including verbal abuse, exclusion, stereotyping and discriminatory behaviour from players, spectators and officials, which can discourage participation and impact wellbeing. As many sporting clubs operate in council-owned facilities and receive funding or support from local government, councils have an important role in setting clear standards and conditions to promote culturally safe, inclusive and respectful environments. For local government to effectively and fully implement this, leadership through policy change, funding and resources by State and Federal governments is required.

To address this mandated cultural safety and anti-racism standards in sporting and community recreation settings, and a policy setting that requires councils to apply clear, enforceable conditions to for the use of council-owned facilities and receiving local government funding, including consequences for racist behaviour needs to be implemented.

Recommendation:

The Australian Government must act urgently to address the escalating impacts of racism, hate and violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by enabling a coordinated, well-resourced and culturally safe national response that supports effective action at the local level. This requires through the leadership and guidance of diverse voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the Australian Government to:

- Provide strong national leadership, policy direction and sustained, long-term investment to prevent, respond to and hold to account acts of racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Resource, fund and build the capability of local government to deliver culturally safe services, workplaces and public spaces through mandatory cultural safety, anti-racism and trauma-informed training and practice.
- Establish a comprehensive national prevention framework, which includes a national database and reporting system that enables safety and accountability to be delivered across jurisdictions.
- Ensure responses uphold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' rights to safety, cultural expression, participation and self-determination, in line with human rights obligations and truth-telling and Treaty processes.
- Advocate to State Governments to mandate cultural safety and anti-racism standards in sporting and community recreation settings, and by requiring councils to apply clear, enforceable conditions to the use of council-owned facilities and local government funding, including consequences for racist behaviour.
- Fund and use policy levers to ensure MAV and established Aboriginal Advisory and Governance forums, councils and organisations receive Commonwealth funding that enable councils to enforce cultural safety and

2. The effect of online platforms on the reach, prominence and harm caused by racism and hate directed at First Nations people.

Online spaces have made racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people more visible and faster to spread in local communities which leads to harm in real life. This has included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing abuse at council buildings, events and meetings. Anonymous online behaviour has further enabled serious threats, harassment and the spread of misinformation about Aboriginal identity, culture and self-determination, creating unsafe environments that actively deter Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from participating in community life, consultation processes and local decision-making

Racism is often inadvertently shared through council social media, community forums and online consultations. Online platforms have amplified anti-Aboriginal racism in ways that overwhelm councils' moderation capacity. Coordinated misinformation and disinformation campaigns have specifically targeted council activities, including Welcome to Country ceremonies, Reconciliation Action Plan implementation, dual-naming initiatives, days of significance, and council recognition of Treaty processes. Far-right extremist networks use algorithmic amplification to sustain the attention of local council decisions, mobilising harassment from outside the local community.

In addition, some councils fail to keep people safe via social media moderation on account of systemic racism within the council/councillors etc; and/or council moderators' inability to even gauge that some comments are in fact highly offensive and racist. Staff Cultural Safety training and anti-racist training would assist.

Some council social media practices may unintentionally contribute to the marginalisation of Aboriginal events, where greater prominence is given to mainstream community celebrations such as Australia Day or long-weekend activities, while significant events including NAIDOC Week, Reconciliation Week, Sorry Day, Survival Day, and other Aboriginal-led gatherings receive less visibility.

Some councils are trying to respond to growing online harm without any anti-racism or cultural safety training, or reporting options that would ideally hold perpetrators of online racial violence to account. Stronger legislative measures are required to moderate, respond to and then hold those accountable so as to support local councils and reduce harm to keep communities safe.

In line with anti-racism and anti-discrimination legislation, councils require clear processes, systems, and guidance to identify, report, and take action against incidents of racism and hate.

Recommendation:

The Australian Government must strengthen legislative and regulatory measures to prevent, address and hold to account racism and hate in online environments, to support councils and reduce harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. With leadership from a diverse voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in partnership with local government, this should include:

- Developing clear, culturally appropriate National set of Standards for racism. Including implementation and sustainable culturally appropriate pathways that enable culturally safe reporting and escalation pathways with the eSafety Commissioner and established Aboriginal Advisory and Governance Forums.
- Developing clear, consistent processes, systems and guidance for local government to identify, report and respond to incidents of racism and hate, in alignment with anti-racism and anti-discrimination legislation.
- Resourcing councils to deliver proactive counter-messaging that affirms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people presence and cultures.
- Expanding culturally safe online safety education, wellbeing supports and referral pathways for those impacted.
- Strengthening council capability through practical training on online harm. identification, response and escalation, with tailored support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people staff.

3. Initiatives that are effective in combating racism targeted at First Nations people and reduce individual and collective harm.

The implementation of the Statewide Treaty legislation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria and the Victorian Government represents a significant step toward addressing racism and systemic inequity in Victoria. The establishment of Gellung Warl as an ongoing, deliberative body to represent the voices and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people provides a formal mechanism for sustained engagement, truth-telling and shared decision-making. Together with the establishment of Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna and the commitment to implement the recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, these reforms create the foundations for system-wide change and will directly combat racism and deliver long-term positive impacts and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the broader Victorian community.

Ongoing funding that is block funded not instalments or 'drip fed' as it is currently for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations is fundamental to enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people leadership and control of primary health care support, social emotional wellbeing support and prevention, and early intervention support in communities generally.

Consistent with the findings of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, stronger powers are needed for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's and Aged Care Commissioners to drive system-wide reform, strengthen protection for Aboriginal children, and ensure culturally appropriate and robust supports for Elders who are the custodians of culture and have been profoundly impacted by historic injustices.

In addition, the Australian eSafety Commissioner should be resourced with enhanced powers and work collaboratively with local government, guided by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal communities, to address online harms in culturally safe and effective ways.

Frameworks such as Cultural Heritage protections, Land Use Activity Agreements, the, Recognition and Settlement Agreements, Traditional Owner Settlement Act and Native Title are important initiatives that recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights and support self-determination. However, their complexity and inconsistent public understanding can contribute to community backlash, misinformation and, at times, increased expressions of racism in contested land use and heritage matters.

Improved data collection and reporting is critical to making racism visible, monitoring trends over time and informing effective responses. This must include a strong commitment to Indigenous data sovereignty, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have ownership, control and authority over how their data is collected, accessed, analysed and used. Victoria's Statewide Treaty will provide a critical pathway to enshrine these rights, establishing formal agreements that recognise and protect Aboriginal control over data governance, decision-making and accountability.

Strong legislative and regulatory action are also required to prevent harm, ensure accountability and uphold community safety. This includes imposing and rigorously enforcing statutory obligations on digital platforms to identify and remove racist and harmful content targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within strict, legislated timeframes, supported by robust compliance monitoring and significant penalties for non-compliance. It also requires establishing and enforcing meaningful

legal consequences for individuals and groups who perpetrate racism, hate and violence—both online and offline—to deter harmful behaviour and uphold the rights and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Lasting change depends on genuine partnerships between all tiers of government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, grounded in Aboriginal leadership, lived experience and community priorities

Recommendation:

The Australian Government has a critical role in enabling effective local responses to racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. From a local government perspective, this requires strong national leadership, sustained resourcing and coordinated action to support councils to act safely, effectively and in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the local level. It is recommended that the Australian Government:

- Impose and rigorously enforce statutory obligations on digital platforms to identify and remove racist and hate content directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within strict, legislated timeframes, supported by strong compliance monitoring and substantial penalties for breaches.
- Establish and enforce meaningful legal consequences for individuals and groups who perpetrate racism, hate and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including online and offline conduct, to deter harm, ensure accountability and uphold community safety.
- Strengthen the regulatory and decision-making powers of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care and Children's Commissioner, to protect Aboriginal Elders and children and support system-wide reform that directly impacts local government service delivery.
- Expand the authority and resourcing of the Australian eSafety Commissioner, and support meaningful collaboration with councils, guided by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal communities, to address online racism affecting local places and civic participation.
- Provide long-term, flexible funding for ACCOs, enabling sustained prevention, early intervention and wellbeing services that councils rely on and partner with locally.
- Support councils to keep Aboriginal Elders and children and young people safe, including from online racism and hate that flows into local spaces, services and events.
- Invest in truth-telling, public education and anti-racism initiatives, led by a diversity of voices across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community this would include improving understanding of land, heritage and recognition frameworks to reduce misinformation, disinformation, prevent racism and build respect.
- Improve national data collection and reporting on racism, supporting councils and all tiers of government to deliver consistent, evidence-based responses at the local level.

4. The threat posed by ideologically motivated extremism towards First Nations people and the role of intelligence and law enforcement agencies in protecting the community from that threat.

The threat of ideologically motivated extremism directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is an ongoing concern for local government in Victoria. Far-right extremist networks have explicitly targeted and disrupted council-led reconciliation activities, including Welcome to Country ceremonies, Treaty engagement, dual-naming decisions and changes to Australia Day events. Online extremist rhetoric and coordinated hate campaigns have intensified these risks, with spill-over impacts in local civic spaces, council meetings and community events.

Some media commentary has contributed to division through provocative polls and baiting articles, including questions such as whether Welcome to Country should occur at ANZAC Day ceremonies or whether the Aboriginal flag should be displayed in schools. There have also been articles amplifying extremist groups and encouraging disruptive behaviour, such as booing at ANZAC services. In parallel, some political figures have used opportunistic statements to fuel division and gain media attention. These dynamics raise concerns about risk, threat and response planning at civic events. In several instances, limited risk assessments and delayed responses have enabled organised booing and racist disruption to occur.

Councils report having limited access to intelligence about the individuals and networks involved in these activities, which constrains their ability to anticipate, prevent and manage incidents at the planning stage, rather than responding once incidents escalate into intimidation, threats and/or disruption.

Ideologically motivated extremism also poses a direct threat to local democracy. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people report feeling unsafe to nominate for local government elections or to publicly identify their cultural heritage when campaigning, with safety concerns influenced by experiences of racism and hostility. MAV acknowledges that these dynamics continue to discourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participation in local leadership and decision-making, undermining representative democracy and community trust. Aboriginal leadership at all levels of government has historically and continues to be impacted by racism.

Local government relies on effective intelligence sharing, monitoring and timely responses from State and Federal agencies to identify and manage extremist threats. Strong collaboration between councils, Victoria Police and relevant intelligence agencies is critical to protecting community safety and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate fully and safely in civic life.

Recommendation:

The Australian Government, with guidance from diversity of voices across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community, work with both the state and local government to address ideologically motivated extremism, racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. This includes:

- Strengthening State and Federal intelligence and law enforcement agencies information-sharing with local government to ensure timely, actionable intelligence is provided to support early risk assessment and prevention.
- Clear National Standards through Cultural Protocols be established for collaboration between councils, police and intelligence agencies to support safe planning and delivery of public events involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Responses prioritise early intervention and protection, while respecting councils' role as trusted community institutions and avoiding the framing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' civic and cultural participation as a security risk.
- Strengthen laws and enforcement mechanisms to ensure racism, hate and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are effectively investigated and prosecuted.
- Improve accountability through coordinated action by law enforcement and the justice system to deter harm and uphold community safety.

5. The effectiveness of avenues for reporting and responding to racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the consistency, timeliness and appropriateness of outcomes across jurisdictions and institutions.

Reporting pathways for racism, acts of hate and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are often inconsistent, fragmented and difficult to access. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not report incidents due to historical and ongoing distrust of institutions, fear of re-traumatisation, and low confidence that reporting will lead to meaningful or timely outcomes. Reporting mechanisms often require individuals to repeatedly recount incidents, provide evidence, and engage in formal investigation processes, which can be retraumatising and act as a barrier to reporting acts of racism and hate. In some cases, contemporary government, legal and regulatory systems are still experienced as culturally unsafe, creating concern that reporting may cause further harm rather than provide support.

Reporting pathways are often complex, fragmented and difficult to navigate, especially across different councils, police jurisdictions, agencies and online platforms. Online racism is particularly difficult to address, with limited clarity around responsibility, escalation and accountability and reporting processes that can require significant time, energy and technological capability.

There is a strong need for clear, culturally safe reporting options that prioritise the physical safety, health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Leadership and direction from a diverse voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations alongside strong coordination between councils, State and Federal agencies, local police and community organisations needs to occur to improve consistency, timeliness and trust in reporting processes. Strengthening Aboriginal-led reporting, support and accountability mechanisms is essential to ensure responses do not cause further harm and genuinely support community safety and wellbeing.

Councils often experience inconsistent responses and outcomes depending on where incidents occur and which system is responsible for follow-up. While councils are frequently a first point of contact, they do not always have the authority, resources, clear pathways or specialist capability required to deliver timely, coordinated and culturally appropriate responses. Online racism presents particular challenges, including unclear responsibility and escalation pathways, as well as concerns about how incident data is collected, shared and used without Aboriginal governance or consent. Clear, culturally safe, Aboriginal-led reporting and data governance mechanisms are needed to build trust, ensure safety and strengthen accountability.

'The Victorian Statewide Treaty and local Traditional Owner Treaties alongside the work of Maïam nayri Wingara in advancing Indigenous Data Sovereignty will have an impact on addressing these challenges by embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people governance, decision-making authority and accountability into the design and oversight of systems that respond to racism, hate and violence. This provides an important opportunity to embed Aboriginal governance, decision-making and accountability in responses to racism, hate and violence. Through Treaty and strengthened Aboriginal-led data governance, information can be managed in line with data sovereignty, consent and community control supporting more coordinated, trusted and community-led approaches focused on healing, safety and prevention.

Recommendation:

The Australian Government, in partnership with and guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, should take a national leadership role in reforming reporting and response systems for racism directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to ensure cultural safety, accessibility, timeliness and effectiveness across jurisdictions. This requires coordinated national action to support councils and rebuild trust in reporting processes, and should align with and support the implementation of the Victorian Statewide Treaty and Traditional Owner Treaty processes. This should include:

- Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' leadership in the design, governance and oversight of reporting, response and accountability systems, consistent with Treaty principles of self-determination and decision-making authority.
- Establishing nationally consistent, accessible and culturally safe frameworks for reporting and responding to racism that prioritise the safety, wellbeing and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Strengthening Aboriginal-led reporting and embed Indigenous Data Sovereignty practices and accountability mechanisms to ensure data is collected, shared and used with Aboriginal governance, consent and community control, in line with established Aboriginal Advisory and Governance forums and Treaty commitments.
- Developing clear, coordinated roles, escalation pathways and responsibilities across ACCO's, councils, police, State and Federal agencies, online platforms and community organisations to reduce fragmentation and delays.
- Establishing formal intelligence-sharing mechanisms to support early identification of targeted hate activity and enable coordinated, timely responses.
- Ensuring reporting and response processes are trauma-informed, minimise the need for repeated disclosure, and do not cause further harm.
- Resourcing and supporting local government as a key first point of contact, including funding, guidance and capability-building to deliver timely, culturally appropriate responses.
- Supporting the use of Treaty processes to establish long-term, Aboriginal-led standards, oversight and accountability for how racism, hate and violence are reported, addressed and prevented.

6. Other matters related to racism, hatred and violence directed at First Nations people.

Some Victorian councils face resource and capacity constraints to support First Nations initiatives, even where they serve communities with a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on Country. In these contexts, councils may also experience heightened exposure to online extremist influences within local communities. This highlights the need for mandatory, tailored cultural safety programs for councils, supported and funded by government, to strengthen capability and ensure culturally safe practice across all local government settings. Aboriginal staff and community members often experience significant cultural load and burnout, driven by over-reliance on a small number of individuals, expectations to educate others or represent all Aboriginal perspectives, and the emotional toll of responding to racism in professional settings.

Increasing community discourse on ways to recognise and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples has often been influenced by misinformation including online abuse directed at representative members, public servants and community members. This has influenced some councils approach to engaging visibly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues due to concerns about community safety, community conflict and escalating racism.

Ongoing leadership, resourcing, and policy and legislative reform across all tiers of government are essential to support councils to uphold Aboriginal inclusion, visibility and rights, without placing undue burden on individuals or exposing them to intimidation or harm.

Councils need tailored support and resources to uphold anti-racism commitments and reconciliation efforts, and to ensure decisions affecting Aboriginal community members are guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' voices, even in challenging or hostile environments.

Recommendation:

The Australian and State Governments must provide sustained leadership, resourcing and policy support to enable MAV and councils, particularly in regional and rural areas, to uphold Aboriginal inclusion, visibility and rights. This includes jointly funding mandatory, tailored cultural safety programs, addressing cultural load and burnout for Aboriginal staff and community members, and supporting councils to maintain reconciliation commitments in the face of hostility, misinformation and safety risks.

4 Conclusions/Findings

Racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain widespread and deeply harmful, with increasing visibility in recent years. These harms significantly affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people safety, wellbeing, civic participation and trust in public institutions. The impacts are also shaped by broader structural inequalities and will require systemic responses grounded in self determination

Local government is a key setting where racism is experienced and responded to, including in council services, public spaces and online environments. Councils are often the first point of contact but face limitations in authority, resources and clear pathways to respond effectively. Online racism and ideologically motivated extremism further amplify harm and undermine local democracy.

Systemic barriers, fragmented reporting pathways, cultural load and burnout for Aboriginal staff and community members continue to limit effective responses. Addressing these challenges requires sustained, coordinated action across all tiers of government, grounded in Aboriginal leadership from diverse voices from across Aboriginal communities, genuine partnership and long-term resourcing.

The Victorian Treaty Statewide Treaty and Traditional Owner Treaty processes present critical opportunity to address these challenges by embedding Aboriginal governance, decision making and accountability into systems that respond to racism, hate and violence. It will ensure Aboriginal-led approaches provide culturally safe, trusted and effective outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Victoria.

The MAV supports a coordinated, well-resourced national response that empowers councils to act safely and effectively with guidance and in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to uphold rights, strengthen trust and build genuinely inclusive local communities.

5 Recommendations

The following table outlines the complete list of the MAV recommendations to the Australian Parliamentary inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Recommendations

1. The nature, prevalence and impact of racism, hate and violence towards First Nations people, including trends over time

The Australian Government must act urgently to address the escalating impacts of racism, hate and violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by enabling a coordinated, well-resourced and culturally safe national response that supports effective action at the local level. This requires through the leadership and guidance of diverse voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the Australian Government to:

- Provide strong national leadership, policy direction and sustained, long-term investment to prevent, respond to and hold to account acts of racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Resource, fund and build the capability of local government to deliver culturally safe services, workplaces and public spaces through mandatory cultural safety, anti-racism and trauma-informed training and practice.
- Establish a comprehensive national prevention framework, which includes a national database and reporting system that enables safety and accountability to be delivered across jurisdictions.
- Ensure responses uphold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's rights to safety, cultural expression, participation and self-determination, in line with human rights obligations and truth-telling and Treaty processes.
- Advocate to State Governments to mandate cultural safety and anti-racism standards in sporting and community recreation settings, and by requiring councils to apply clear, enforceable conditions to the use of council-owned facilities and local government funding, including consequences for racist behaviour.
- Fund and use policy levers to ensure MAV and established Aboriginal Advisory and Governance forums, councils and organisations receive Commonwealth funding that enable councils to enforce cultural safety and anti-racism requirements in the use of council-owned facilities and community

2. The effect of online platforms on the reach, prominence and harm caused by racism and hate directed at First Nations people.

The Australian Government must strengthen legislative and regulatory measures to prevent, address and hold to account racism and hate in online environments, to support councils and reduce harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. With leadership from a diverse voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in partnership with local government, this should include:

- Developing clear, culturally appropriate National set of Standards for racism. Including implementation and sustainable culturally appropriate pathways that enable culturally safe reporting and escalation pathways with the eSafety Commissioner and established Aboriginal Advisory and Governance Forums.

- Developing clear, consistent processes, systems and guidance for local government to identify, report and respond to incidents of racism and hate, in alignment with anti-racism and anti-discrimination legislation.
- Resourcing councils to deliver proactive counter-messaging that affirms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people presence and cultures.
- Expanding culturally safe online safety education, wellbeing supports and referral pathways for those impacted.
- Strengthening council capability through practical training on online harm identification, response and escalation, with tailored support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people staff.

Recommendations

3. Initiatives that are effective in combating racism targeted at First Nations people and reduce individual and collective harm.

The Australian Government has a critical role in enabling effective local responses to racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. From a local government perspective, this requires strong national leadership, sustained resourcing and coordinated action to support councils to act safely, effectively and in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the local level. It is recommended that the Australian Government:

- Impose and rigorously enforce statutory obligations on digital platforms to identify and remove racist and hate content directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within strict, legislated timeframes, supported by strong compliance monitoring and substantial penalties for breaches.
- Establish and enforce meaningful legal consequences for individuals and groups who perpetrate racism, hate and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including online and offline conduct, to deter harm, ensure accountability and uphold community safety.
- Strengthen the regulatory and decision-making powers of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care and Children's Commissioner, to protect Aboriginal Elders and children and support system-wide reform that directly impacts local government service delivery.
- Expand the authority and resourcing of the Australian eSafety Commissioner, and support meaningful collaboration with councils, guided by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal communities, to address online racism affecting local places and civic participation.
- Provide long-term, flexible funding for ACCOs, enabling sustained prevention, early intervention and wellbeing services that councils rely on and partner with locally.
- Support councils to keep Aboriginal Elders and children and young people safe, including from online racism and hate that flows into local spaces, services and events.
- Invest in truth-telling, public education and anti-racism initiatives, led by a diversity of voices across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community this would include improving understanding of land, heritage and recognition frameworks to reduce misinformation, disinformation, prevent racism and build respect.
- Improve national data collection and reporting on racism, supporting councils and all tiers of government to deliver consistent, evidence-based responses at the local level.

4. The threat posed by ideologically motivated extremism towards First Nations people and the role of intelligence and law enforcement agencies in protecting the community from that threat.

The Australian Government, with guidance from diversity of voices across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community, work with both the state and local government to address ideologically motivated extremism, racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. This includes:

- Strengthening State and Federal intelligence and law enforcement agencies information-sharing with local government to ensure timely, actionable intelligence is provided to support early risk assessment and prevention.
- Clear National Standards through Cultural Protocols be established for collaboration between councils, police and intelligence agencies to support safe planning and delivery of public events involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Responses prioritise early intervention and protection, while respecting councils' role as trusted community institutions and avoiding the framing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' civic and cultural participation as a security risk.
- Strengthen laws and enforcement mechanisms to ensure racism, hate and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are effectively investigated and prosecuted.
- Improve accountability through coordinated action by law enforcement and the justice system to deter harm and uphold community safety.

5. The effectiveness of avenues for reporting and responding to racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the consistency, timeliness and appropriateness of outcomes across jurisdictions and institutions.

The Australian Government, in partnership with and guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, should take a national leadership role in reforming reporting and response systems for racism directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to ensure cultural safety, accessibility, timeliness and effectiveness across jurisdictions. This requires coordinated national action to support councils and rebuild trust in reporting processes, and should align with and support the implementation of the Victorian Statewide Treaty and Traditional Owner Treaty processes. This should include:

- Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples leadership in the design, governance and oversight of reporting, response and accountability systems, consistent with Treaty principles of self-determination and decision-making authority.
- Establishing nationally consistent, accessible and culturally safe frameworks for reporting and responding to racism that prioritise the safety, wellbeing and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Strengthening Aboriginal-led reporting and embed Indigenous Data Sovereignty practices and accountability mechanisms to ensure data is collected, shared and used with Aboriginal governance, consent and community control, in line with established Aboriginal Advisory and Governance forums and Treaty commitments.
- Developing clear, coordinated roles, escalation pathways and responsibilities across ACCO's, councils, police, State and Federal agencies, online platforms and community organisations to reduce fragmentation and delays.

- Establishing formal intelligence-sharing mechanisms to support early identification of targeted hate activity and enable coordinated, timely responses.
- Ensuring reporting and response processes are trauma-informed, minimise the need for repeated disclosure, and do not cause further harm.
- Resourcing and supporting local government as a key first point of contact, including funding, guidance and capability-building to deliver timely, culturally appropriate responses.
- Supporting the use of Treaty processes to establish long-term, Aboriginal-led standards, oversight and accountability for how racism, hate and violence are reported, addressed and prevented.

6. Other matters related to racism, hatred and violence directed at First Nations people.

The Australian and State Governments must provide sustained leadership, resourcing and policy support to enable MAV and councils to uphold Aboriginal inclusion, visibility and rights. This includes jointly funding mandatory, tailored cultural safety programs, addressing cultural load and burnout for Aboriginal staff and community members, and supporting councils to maintain reconciliation commitments in the face of hostility, misinformation and safety risks.

6 Appendix

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory and Governance Forums:
 - [Dhelk Dja Aboriginal family violence forum](#)
 - [Aboriginal Justice Forum](#)
 - [Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum](#)
 - [Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee](#)
 - [Local Aboriginal Justice Action Committees](#)
 - [Koorie Education Policy Supports](#)
 - [LAECGs \(Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups\)](#)
 - [Koorie Caucus](#)
 - [Aboriginal Children's forum](#)
 - [Koorie youth Summit](#)
 - [Ngaweeyan Maar-oo](#)

MAV would be pleased to provide clarification on any information in this submission. For further information, please contact, Kath Brackett, Director Community and Sector Development at Kath.brackett@mav.asn.au

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