

## **EASTERN MAAR SETTLEMENT IN SIGHT**

FIRST Nations Legal and Research Services are confident a settlement can be reached between Eastern Maar Traditional Owners and the State of Victoria within the next twelve months.

This news comes after the commencement ceremony held in Framlingham on Friday to officially mark the beginning of settlement negotiations between Eastern Maar and the state government to formally recognise Eastern Maar's rights over Crown land in southwest Victoria.

The ceremony was a significant milestone for Eastern Maar as it means the state government is now recognising Eastern Maar as the Traditional Owners of their lands and waters.

First Nations' lawyer for Eastern Maar Daniel Kelly said that while this was an incredible breakthrough, it hadn't been without its trials and tribulations.

"It has been a long hard road for Eastern Maar, and they have lost many Elders along the way," Mr Kelly said.

"I think it is important to stop and recognise what has been achieved before we begin negotiations with the State.

"Overall I think the community is proud after a long fight for recognition, and hopeful that a fair and just settlement can be reached with the State," Mr Kelly said.

The settlement will be under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, which allows for out-of-court native title settlements recognising the rights of Victorian Traditional Owners. It was introduced as an alternative to litigation under the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993*.

Eastern Maar is one of four groups currently in negotiations under the Settlement Act.

Eastern Maar first lodged their native title claim with the Federal Court in 2012, and began discussions with the State under the Settlement Act shortly after that.

The area under negotiation stretches from near Port Fairy along the Great Ocean Road, up to Ararat in the north, and to Colac in the East.

Mr Kelly said the first part of the negotiation process requires Traditional Owners to provide evidence of their connection to the land, so that the state is satisfied it is negotiating with all of the right people.

"The Eastern Marr (or Eastern Gunditjmara people) have completed this part of the process, and are now ready to sit down with the State and reach a settlement with respect to their native title rights," he said.

**For further information or comment please contact Alexandra Sheehy on 0420 314 221.**

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*We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land we work on as the first people of this country.*