

Victoria's landmark truth-telling commission needs to run for up to 10 years, First Peoples leader says

Marcus Stewart says current timeframe of Yoorrook Justice Commission not enough to 'unpack 200-plus years of colonisation'



First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria co-chair Marcus Stewart believes the Yoorrook Justice Commission's timeframe should run between five and 10 years, similar to processes in Canada and South Africa.

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Victoria's truth-telling commission needs up to a decade of inquiry before delivering its final report – which is slated for 2024 – a leader of the state's elected First Nations body says.

Marcus Stewart, co-chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, wants the Victorian government to extend the timeframe for the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

"Conversations amongst our elected members are that it needed to run longer," he told the inquiry on Thursday.

Yoorrook has been tasked with establishing an official public record of Indigenous experiences since the start of colonisation, and began public hearings with Indigenous elders last week.

It will recommend reform and redress by June 2024, with the findings to guide Victoria's treaty negotiations.

However, Stewart believes it should run between five and 10 years, similar to processes in Canada and South Africa.

Counsel assisting the commission, Tony McAvoy SC, asked whether further reports to inform the path to treaty would be needed if the inquiry, which has the powers of a royal commission, were to run longer.

“How, in a three-year period, do you unpack 200-plus years of colonisation and its contemporary effects that it’s still having today, and will have tomorrow?” Stewart replied.

“I struggle to understand how that is possible, and I think the treaty journey will continue for a number of years.”

There will be no treaty without truth, he said, and the commission was helping lift the “collective amnesia or denial about what is actually happening in the state of Victoria”.

Victoria’s Aboriginal affairs minister, Gabrielle Williams, is scheduled to front the commission on Friday.