



## **Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation**

**Media Release  
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### **Native title agreement for South West Victoria**

After eleven years of struggle, the Gunditjmara people have today been recognised as the native title holders for far South West Victoria following an agreement between the State, the Gunditjmara people and 99 other parties.

At a special sitting in Mt Eccles National Park today, the Federal Court ordered that the Gunditjmara people hold native title to more than 2000 parcels of Crown land.

“We are proud to have finally been recognised as the native title holders of this country,” said Damein Bell, Chairman of the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation which holds the title on trust for the Gunditjmara people.

“We have always known that we are the traditional owners and carers of this country. But it is important that our young people know that the broader community accepts and supports our culture, our law and our important connection to this area,” said Mr Bell.

As part of the agreement, the State of Victoria will enter into a cooperative management agreement with the Gunditjmara people over Mt Eccles National Park and funding will be provided for a Keeping Place for the storage of important artefacts by the Gunditjmara people.

“This type of outcome is important as it represents people sitting down together to talk and come to agreements. It is much better than a single judge deciding on the fate of so many people and parties,” said Damien Bell.

The native title is non-exclusive and does not affect freehold or other private interests. Existing rights of the public over Crown land are also unaffected.

The agreement was reached following comprehensive anthropological and archaeological evidence, and three days of on-country evidence by Gunditjmara people in 2005 which supported the Gunditjmara claims for ongoing connection to the area.

“Gunditjmara people and other parties have been engaged in a confidential mediation process for the past three and a half years. Now that we have today’s successful outcomes the Gunditjmara is ready to re-enter the public forum to voice its aspirations and work with the broader community in ensuring native title is valued and preserved,” said Mr Bell.

“Today’s successful outcome is especially important for the recognition of the Gunditjmara ancestors whose struggle and determination through the harsh days of European settlement in the far South West of Victoria provided us with the strength to achieve what we have today,” said Mr Bell.

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