

**Part 1:**

# **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework**

For the Victorian health, human  
and community services sector



# Acknowledgement of Aboriginal peoples in Victoria

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge Aboriginal peoples as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we live, work and play. We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life and how this enriches our society more broadly. We embrace self-determination and reconciliation, working towards equality of outcomes and ensuring an equitable voice.

Victorian Aboriginal communities and peoples are culturally diverse, with rich and varied heritages and histories both pre- and post-invasion. The impacts of colonisation – while having devastating effects on traditional life – have not diminished Aboriginal peoples' connection to Country, culture or community. Aboriginal nations continue to strengthen and grow with the resurgence of language, lore and cultural knowledge. These rich and varied histories need to be understood and acknowledged by all Victorians, to truly understand the resilience and strength of previous generations, as well as the history of the fight for survival, justice and Country that has taken place across Victoria and around Australia.

As we work together to ensure Victorian Aboriginal communities continue to thrive, the government acknowledges the invaluable contributions of generations of Aboriginal warriors that have come before us, who have fought tirelessly for the rights of their people and communities towards self-determination. We are now honoured to be part of that vision.

This document honours the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders and staff in the health, human and community services sector for their tireless work in improving cultural safety and the delivery of high-quality services over many decades. This framework attempts to strengthen, reiterate and amplify their wisdom and expertise.

## Please note

The department acknowledges the diverse and distinct cultures of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. This cultural safety framework is intended for both Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders living in Victoria or accessing Victorian health, human or community services. In this framework, 'Aboriginal' refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Indigenous' or 'Koorie' is retained when part of a report, program or quotation.

# Secretary's foreword

## Cultural safety is everyone's business

I am pleased to present the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework*.

Cultural safety means creating environments where people feel safe – where there's no challenge to their identity, and where their needs can be met.

It's clear that racism and discrimination can significantly impact upon an individual's health and wellbeing. Aboriginal Victorians tell us that a lack of cultural safety, racism and fear are the main barriers to accessing essential services.

As a department, we believe that cultural safety is everyone's business. We are committed to investing the time, energy and resources to improve the cultural safety of our services – to increase the life expectancy of Aboriginal Victorians and improve their quality of life.

This framework marks our department's commitment to reform. To achieve this, it guides Victorian health, human and community services - and the department - to work together to deliver more culturally diverse and safe environments, services and workplaces.

The framework builds on the actions of *Korin Korin Balit-Djak*, our 10-year Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan.

It also contributes to the Victorian Government's commitment within the *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework* to advance Aboriginal self-determination and cultural safety.

This cultural safety framework was developed in collaboration with Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal staff across the department.

We believe that it will help us, and our partners, move beyond cultural awareness by placing a strong importance on reflecting how one's own beliefs, values and behaviours impact upon the safety of others.

For the department, the framework offers a new approach to how we can we can deliver and regulate services using a continuous quality improvement model.

For our mainstream partner organisations, it will support the strengthening of cultural safety through improved accountability requirements included in existing standards and service agreements.

The framework is more than a compliance exercise. The key to success is its application in every service and every workplace.

We will partner with Aboriginal organisations to lead on the delivery of training and support for all Victorian organisations, helping them to truly deliver on the intentions of this work.

This framework is an important catalyst for change – and through a shared commitment from the department, mainstream services and Aboriginal organisations – we can together make a positive impact on the health, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal Victorians.

**Kym Peake**  
Secretary

# Artwork

## Korin Korin Balit-Djak Artwork



Artist – Dixon Patten

*The artwork for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework uses a section of the artwork from Korin Korin Balit-Djak, the Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan (2017–2027) and has been adapted with the artist's permission and depicts the Aboriginal community and our connection to culture and each other.*

*Within the detailed circles, the Department of Health and Human Services and community work together to help with system reform across the health and human services sector with the ultimate goal of physical, social and emotional wellbeing for all Aboriginal people. The ripples represent the positive impact on community that this strategy will have and that Aboriginal culture and community is a priority.*

*The hands represent individuals, couples and families. The white circles represent various tribes/families/regions. The various paths with the footprints depict our life journeys and transference of knowledge, history and culture.*

Dixon Patten was commissioned by the Department of Health and Human Services to produce the artwork for *Korin Korin Balit-Djak*.

Permission to use *Korin Korin Balit-Djak* for this policy was provided by the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Council.

To receive this publication in an accessible format please email Aboriginal Strategy and Oversight <[aboriginalstrategyandoversight@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:aboriginalstrategyandoversight@dhhs.vic.gov.au)>

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury place, Melbourne. © State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Health and Human Services, June 2019. ISBN 978-1-76069-855-3 (print) ISBN 978-1-76069-856-0 (PDF/online/MS Word) Available at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework <<https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/frameworks>>

Printed by Metro Printing, Airport West (1903193).

# Contents

<b>Part 1: Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>What is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The cultural safety framework</b>	<b>7</b>
1. Vision	8
2. Principles	9
3. Domains	10
4. Cultural safety continuum	10
<b>Reflective tool</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>11</b>





# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework

## Introduction

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are the oldest living cultures in the world. Cultural factors, such as identity, language and spirituality, as well as connection to Country, to family and to community, can positively impact on the lives of Aboriginal people.**

Aboriginal communities are culturally diverse, with rich and varied heritages and histories both pre- and post-colonisation. Aboriginal communities in Victoria were heavily affected by colonisation and past discriminatory policies such as the policy of assimilation. Unequal power relationships and inequities continue to exist between Aboriginal peoples and the dominant non-Aboriginal population.

The Victorian Auditor-General's 2014 report *Accessibility of mainstream services for Aboriginal Victorians* identified lack of cultural safety as a significant barrier to accessing services. It also highlighted the critical importance of Victorian Aboriginal peoples and their communities being authentically engaged in the design and delivery of health and community services, policies and programs.

Despite concerted efforts to address racism and discrimination through policies and legislation, both remain systemic issues across the health, human and community services sector.

Cultural safety is a fundamental human right. Public agencies are

required by legislation to provide safety in the workplace. If we do not invest the time, energy and resources required to improve cultural safety, our health, human and community services sector will not increase life expectancy and improve the quality of Aboriginal people's lives.

The development of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework* is a key commitment in the department's *Aboriginal employment strategy 2016–2021* and in *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017–2027*. The framework will support *Korin Korin Balit-Djak* to achieve the Victorian Government's vision of 'self-determining, healthy and safe Aboriginal communities'.

This framework has been developed as the first phase of a continuous quality improvement approach.

- Phase 1, 2019: launch the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework – aimed at **reflection** and planning.
- Phase 2, 2020: key standards and measures will be developed to help individuals and organisations track their growth – aimed at **improvement and development**.
- Phase 3, 2021: individuals and organisations will be required to meet and be measured against cultural safety standards – aimed at **accountability** and compliance.

*The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework has been developed to assist the department and mainstream Victorian health, human and community services to create culturally safe environments, services and workplaces.*

### **The cultural safety framework is for:**

- every person and every mainstream organisation to take responsibility and work together to create culturally safe services and workplaces
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and clients, who have a right to culturally safe workplaces and services.

# What is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety?

Professor Gregory Phillips, PhD

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety is defined as an environment that is safe for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity and experience (Williams 2008)**

**Cultural safety is about:**

- shared respect, shared meaning and shared knowledge
- the experience of learning together with dignity and truly listening
- strategic and institutional reform to remove barriers to optimal health, wellbeing and safety outcomes for Aboriginal people. This includes addressing unconscious bias, racism and discrimination, and the ability to support Aboriginal self-determination
- individuals, organisations and systems taking responsibility for ensuring their own cultural values do not negatively impact on Aboriginal peoples, including a responsibility to address their potential for unconscious bias, racism and discrimination
- individuals, organisations and systems taking responsibility to support self-determination for Aboriginal peoples – this includes sharing power (decision making and governance) and resources with Aboriginal communities, and is especially relevant for the design, delivery and evaluation of services for Aboriginal peoples (Phillips 2015).

Figure 1 outlines the key features of a culturally safe workplace.

**Figure 1: Key elements of culturally safe workplaces and services**



Adapted from (Phillips 2015).

## The cultural safety framework

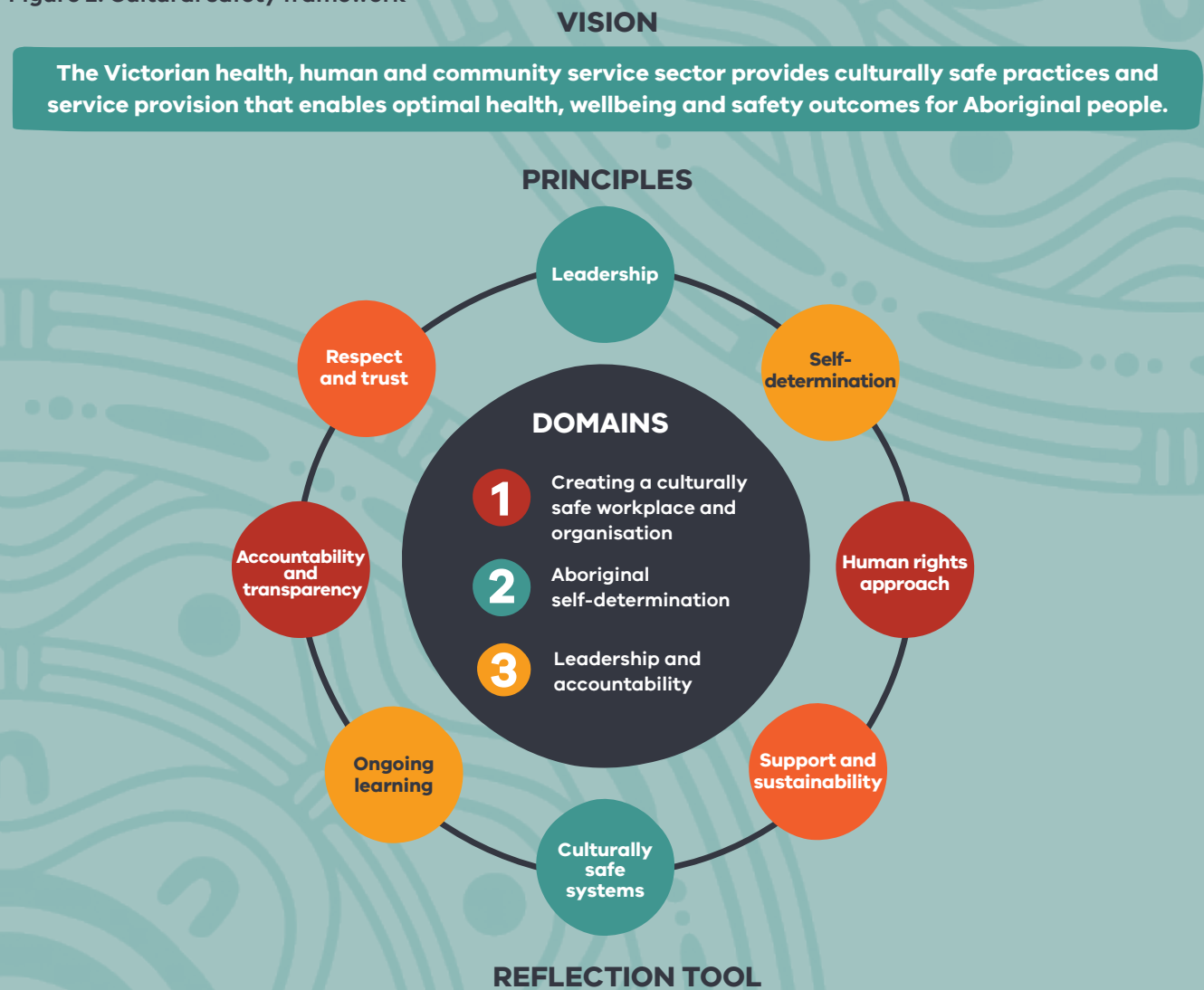
**The cultural safety framework is designed to improve cultural safety for:**

- Aboriginal employees working within the Victorian health, human and community services sector
  - Aboriginal clients accessing services within the Victorian health, human and community services sector.
- The framework aims to assist the department and mainstream health and community services to strengthen their cultural safety by participating in a process of continuous learning and practice improvement. The model is designed to guide the department and mainstream organisations as they develop strategies, policies, practices and workplace cultures that address unconscious bias, discrimination and racism.
- The cultural safety framework has been informed by evidence and consultations including:
- a series of consultations with Aboriginal Victorians, including staff and organisations
  - consultation with the department's Aboriginal Strategic Governance Forum and its Koorie Caucus
  - a series of pilots with departmental staff to test and validate the framework and reflective tool
  - material received in response to a call for written submissions from the health, human and community services sector
  - a literature review on cultural safety
  - existing government and sector standards, policies, procedures and strategic documents.
- This framework does not specifically address the issue of lateral violence for Aboriginal workers, but it is acknowledged that this is a significant issue relating to their cultural safety. Addressing lateral violence requires supervisors and organisations having advanced cultural safety knowledge, skills and attitudes. Organisations may need to assist Aboriginal employees to engage specialist expertise and support to address issues of lateral violence in the workplace.

# 1. Vision

The Victorian health, human and community services sector provides culturally safe practices and service provision that enable optimal health, wellbeing and safety outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Cultural safety framework



The four stages of learning	→ TOWARDS CULTURAL SAFETY →			
	1ST STAGE: UNAWARE	2ND STAGE: EMERGING	3RD STAGE: CAPABLE	4TH STAGE: PROFICIENT
	‘Unconsciously incompetent’ learning stage	‘Consciously incompetent’ learning stage	‘Consciously competent’ learning stage	‘Unconsciously competent’ learning stage
<b>Overall reflection</b>	I am unaware of how my unconscious biases and behaviours affect the cultural safety of the workplace and services delivered	I recognise the need to unlearn and build my skills and knowledge to improve cultural safety	I consciously apply my learnings and improve cultural safety practice	My work practices are culturally safe and do not require a conscious correction. I am open to and enact ongoing learning and improvement



## 2. Principles

The cultural safety framework is supported by an agreed set of guiding principles. Table 1 outlines the principles to be applied across the three domains of the framework.

Table 1: Cultural safety framework principles

Principle	Explanation
<b>Leadership</b>	Organisations provide meaningful leadership opportunities to design, deliver and evaluate culturally safe policies, programs, initiatives and services. Organisations have leadership at all levels that understand and champion the organisation's role in cultural safety.
<b>Self-determination</b>	Aboriginal staff, people and communities have meaningful leadership and decision-making roles, and are involved in designing, delivering and evaluating Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety policies, programs and initiatives.
<b>Human rights approach</b>	The rights-based approach that drives this framework is an essential part of Victorian Aboriginal service delivery and sector development. The United Nations <i>Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i> recognises both the principle of self-determination (Article 3) and the right to culture (Articles 11 and 31). <i>The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006</i> also recognises culture as a right.
<b>Support and sustainability</b>	Staff at all organisational levels are supported to undertake ongoing cultural safety professional and personal development. Workplaces have processes to build individual and organisational capacity, provide mentoring opportunities and establish culturally safe spaces for Aboriginal staff and clients.
<b>Culturally safe systems</b>	Embed culturally safe practice into recruitment and retention processes, as well as into existing policies, programs, procedures, procurement and services.
<b>Ongoing learning</b>	A continuous process of reflection and quality improvement to identify and reflect on individual and organisational practice, and implement the actions required for ongoing learning and self-reflection at all levels of the organisation.
<b>Accountability and transparency</b>	Individuals reflect on their own level of competency in cultural safety and identify required improvements. Organisations reflect on their current policies, practices and procedures and reflect on their organisational competency. Organisations demonstrate accountability by implementing key performance indicators.
<b>Respect and trust</b>	Individuals and organisations establish a relationship of trust and respect with Aboriginal staff, clients and local Aboriginal communities.



### 3. Domains

The cultural safety framework has three key domains for action:

#### 1 Creating a culturally safe workplace and organisation

This domain focuses on changing workplaces and organisations to be culturally safe by reforming strategies, policies, procedures and accountabilities. It helps individuals and organisations build on their cultural safety through professional development, reforming governance, policies, procedures and evaluation measures.

#### 2 Aboriginal self-determination

This domain is closely aligned to changing workforce and organisational practice. It focuses on building our ability to hear the Aboriginal client and community voice and support the decisions of Aboriginal people, families and communities.

#### 3 Leadership and accountability

This domain highlights the importance of leaders being accountable for driving quality improvement to affect behavioural and systemic changes so that cultural safety becomes embedded in everyday practice.

### 4. Cultural safety continuum reflective tool

The framework includes a continuous quality improvement approach and uses the 'Johari window' approach to the four stages of learning a new skill (Figure 3).

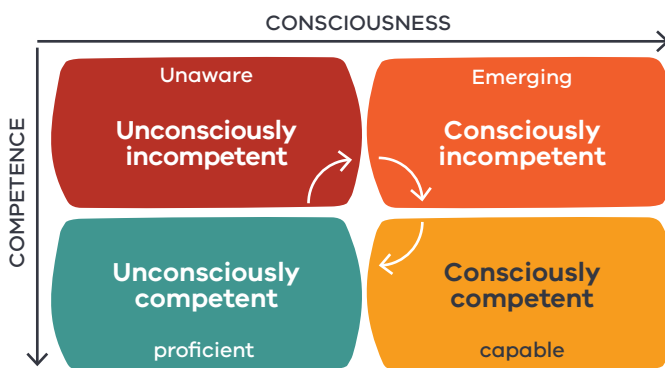
#### Competence continuum model

The competence continuum model describes the four stages of competency in cultural safety as:

1. **unaware** – unconsciously incompetent
2. **emerging** – consciously incompetent
3. **capable** – consciously competent
4. **proficient** – unconsciously competent and open to continual learning and improvement

The continuum acknowledges coming into consciousness along the learning journey (Getha-Taylor et al. 2013; Luft & Ingham 1955; Pateros 2001). These terms relate to the competency level of learning a new skill, rather than the competency of an individual.

Figure 3: The four stages of learning a new skill



Adapted from Getha-Taylor et al. 2013.

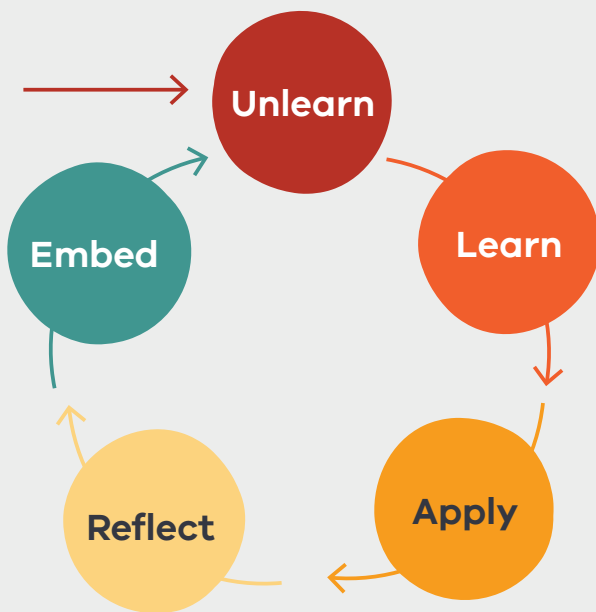


## Continuous learning and improvement

**Improving cultural safety is an ongoing learning process. Proficiency will be achieved when individuals and organisations commit to improving their knowledge of cultural safety and changing their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.**

The cultural safety continuum reflective tool intends to support a continuous quality and practice improvement approach. Figure 4 outlines the continual learning journey from 'unlearn' to 'embed'.

**Figure 4: Continual learning journey**



**Unlearn** – Challenge what is established as ‘the norm’ and question what is accepted so a non-biased and more balanced set of shared values and ways of doing things can be learnt.

**Learn** – Understand why ‘established’ or ‘usual’ practice is not always the best way to learn. Learn other, more balanced ways to learn as part of everyday practice.

**Apply** – Implement what is learnt to create positive interactions and environments.

**Reflect** – Continually challenge assumptions, which may require returning to the unlearning and learning stages to gain more knowledge.

**Embed** – Implement continuous quality improvement to reform systems, procedures, policies, strategies, programs, procurement, workplace culture, accountability and monitoring.

The aim is for individuals and organisations in the Victorian health, human and community services sector to continuously improve cultural safety proficiency by adopting the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework*.

## References

Department of Health and Human Services 2017, *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017–2027*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne.

Getha-Taylor H, Hummert R, Nalbandian J and Silvia C 2013, ‘Competency model design and assessment: findings and future directions’, *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 141–171.

Luft J and Ingham H 1955, *The Johari window, a graphic model of interpersonal awareness: Proceedings of the western training laboratory in group development*, University of California, Los Angeles.

Pateros J 2001, *The four stages of learning*, Process Coaching Centre, San Rafael, viewed 22 February 2019, <<https://www.processcoaching.com/fourstages>>.

Phillips G 2015, *Dancing with power: Aboriginal health, cultural safety and medical education*, PhD thesis, School of Psychological Sciences, Monash University, Clayton.

Williams R 2008, ‘Cultural safety: what does it mean for our work practice?’ *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 213–214.

Victorian Auditor-General 2014, *Accessibility of mainstream services for Aboriginal Victorians*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne.

Victorian Government 2006, *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, no. 43 of 2006, Victorian Government, Melbourne, <[http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web\\_Notes/LDMS/LTOObject\\_Store/LTObjSt8.nsf/DD\\_E300B846EED9C7CA257616000A3571/87318807B8E7A33ACA257D07\\_00052646/\\$FILE/O6-43aa013%20authorised.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/LTOObject_Store/LTObjSt8.nsf/DD_E300B846EED9C7CA257616000A3571/87318807B8E7A33ACA257D07_00052646/$FILE/O6-43aa013%20authorised.pdf)>.

United Nations (UN) 2008, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, UN, Geneva, <[https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)>.

