Launch of
Dardee Boorai: Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young People
by Maxine Morand MP at Yappera Children’s Services Cooperative on Wednesday 10 December 2008

Acknowledgments:
• Fiona Richardson, MP, Member for Northcote
• Jill Gallagher, Chair, Aboriginal Children and Families Advisory Committee
• Helen Szoke, Chief Conciliator/Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission
• Bernie Geary OAM, Child Safety Commissioner
• Cecily Atkinson, Chair of the Board, Yappera Children’s Services Cooperative
• Stacey Brown, CEO, Yappera Children’s Services Cooperative
• Aboriginal community members and workers.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we stand today, the Wurundjeri people, and I pay my respects to their elders both past and present.

Along with Jill, it is my great honour to be launching Dardee Boorai: the Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young People:

• in partnership with Aboriginal communities via the Chair of the Aboriginal Children and Families Advisory Committee;
• and on behalf of the Victorian Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs.

This Charter is all about such partnership, and about Government departments working together to make a concerted impact.

Charter development has been jointly overseen by the Aboriginal Children and Families Advisory Committee and a working group of senior group of Government officials, under direction of the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs.

I would like to thank and acknowledge the Gunnai people for allowing us the use of the words ‘Dardee Boorai’ to represent the Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young People. ‘Dardee Boorai’ literally means ‘strong children’, a term that well captures the aspirations of the charter.

A specific requirement under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, Dardee Boorai has been developed in recognition of the impact of past removal policies, particularly the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, forcibly removed from their families.
and communities by State and Territory governments. The 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey found that 45% of Aboriginal Victorians who responded to the Survey had either been removed from their family or had a relative who had been removed, far higher than the national rate of 37.6%.

This is a sobering reminder of the challenges confronted by Aboriginal families. The strength of Aboriginal families, community and culture is a testament to their resilience.

Aboriginal community voices are strongly reflected in the Charter. Community forums were held in Ballarat, Geelong, Heywood, Morwell, Bairnsdale, Swan Hill, Bairnsdale, Echuca, Shepparton, Wodonga, Mildura, Thornbury, Dandenong and Croydon.

In signing the Charter, the Victorian Government and Aboriginal communities and community controlled organisations commit to working in partnership to improve the health, learning, wellbeing, development and safety of Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria. Work in this area is already a high priority under the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework and now the work of the Council of Australian Governments.

**Dardee Boorai** provides a philosophical framework that reflects but does not duplicate specific government strategies such as Wannik, the Aboriginal Justice Agreements, the Indigenous Family Violence Plan, the Aboriginal Human Services Plan and Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework Strategic Action Plans. There is also a strong relationship between this Charter and the Victorian Charter of Human Rights. The commitment to spelling out key actions and measures of progress in improving the lives of Aboriginal children and young people will be further supported by the development of a 10 year Plan for Aboriginal children and young people.

In implementing the charter from a government and agency perspective, the emphasis will be on getting things right at a policy and planning stage to ensure all relevant programs and policies are consistent with the Charter and its principles and outcomes. There will also be a twin focus on celebrating the strength and resilience of our first Australians. **Dardee Boorai** is the statement of a shared commitment between community and government that both affirms this strength and resilience and sets out shared values and principles and commits to improving outcomes for Victoria’s Aboriginal children and young people.

Finally, I would like to thank the many people who worked on the development of this charter especially members of the Aboriginal Children and Families Advisory Committee, and the Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers who helped to frame the Charter and who came with many ideas on how to ensure its relevance and influence. To Ingenuity SED Consulting for leading consultations, and to SistaGirl for the striking design.