

VIEW RESOURCE

Welcome to Country & Acknowledgement of Country

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Why do we use these Protocols?

Australia's Indigenous peoples are two distinct cultural groups made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first inhabitants of Australia and the Original Custodians of the Land.

It is important this unique position is recognised and incorporated as part of official protocol and events to enable the wider community to share in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage, facilitating better relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider community.

Should we say Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples or First Peoples

On the advice of Reconciliation Australia, we now prefer to use the phrase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We have also included a resource from Reconciliation Australia entitled "Demonstrating inclusive and respectful language", this document can be found at: <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/inclusive-and-respectful-language.pdf>.

The process of "Welcome to Country" and "Acknowledgement of Country" recognises the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultural protocols. Taking the time to Acknowledge Country or including a Welcome or Acknowledgment to Country at an event, reminds us that every day we live, work, and dream on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands.

What is the difference between acknowledging Traditional Owners/and a Welcome to Country? Think of it as the difference between the guest and host. The guest acknowledges that they are on someone else's property "Thank you for having me". The host says "Welcome to my home".

A Welcome to Country can only be performed by the Traditional Owners of the land.

An Acknowledgment to Country can be made by any visitor to the land.

Section 1 – Welcome to Country

What is a Welcome to Country?

A 'Welcome to Country' is where the Traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people (in most cases the Elders) welcome visitors to their Land. This is a significant recognition and is made through a formal process. A 'Welcome to Country' should always occur at the opening ceremony of the event in question, preferably as the first item.

The 'Welcome to Country' is conducted by a representative (or representatives) of the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who welcome the delegates, those in attendance, invited guests, VIEW members and friends to their Country. Protocols in relation to the performing of a 'Welcome to Country' Ceremony are wide and diverse and can vary according to region and locality. A 'Welcome to Country' may consist of a single speech by the representative of the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community, or it can also include a performance of some description (which will vary according to region and locality). Performances can include a Traditional Welcoming Song, a Traditional Dance, didgeridoo performance or a combination of any of the above.

Section 2 – Acknowledgement of Country

What is Acknowledgement of Country?

'Acknowledgement of Country' is a way that the wider community can demonstrate respect for Aboriginal protocol and can be performed by any party that is participating in an occasion of any kind.

'Acknowledgement of Country' is a respectful means of Acknowledging that the event, meeting, function, etc. is taking place on the Country of the Traditional Custodians.

'Acknowledgement of Country' can be performed by both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is a demonstration of respect dedicated to the Traditional Custodians of the Land and or Sea where the gathering of participants is being conducted.

Government, organisations and government departments have adopted the practice of Acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of Country at events, ceremonies, meetings and functions, and VIEW Clubs, National and Zone Councillors and Advisors may wish to consider including this practice at meetings, functions and events; especially those that include members of the general public. **This is entirely optional.**

At the beginning of the meeting or function, a Chair or Speaker begins by Acknowledging that the meeting is taking place in the Country of the Traditional Custodians. Where the name of the Traditional Custodians is known, it is specifically used. Where it is not known, a general Acknowledgement is given.

Incorporating Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country into meetings, gatherings, and events shows respect by upholding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols.

Is there standard wording for an 'Acknowledgement of Country'?

There is no specific wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, just be sincere and, if possible, do some research on the area, region/locality of the Traditional lands / you are acknowledging. See some examples provided below.

When do you use an 'Acknowledgement of Country'?

An 'Acknowledgement of Country' is given at the beginning of a meeting, speech, event or community/public events.

Can an 'Acknowledgement of Country' be given if the meeting/event is held online?

Yes, an 'Acknowledgement of Country' can be given at the beginning of any virtual meeting or event. The Acknowledgement would be more general to include all the lands that all attendees are living on or located.

Section 3: Examples of 'Acknowledgement of Country'

If you know who the local Traditional Owners are:

Example 1: I would like to show my respect and Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Land/s, of Elders past and present, on which this meeting takes place.

Example 2: I would like to Acknowledge the _____ people who are the Traditional Custodians of this Land. I would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present of the _____ Nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present.

Example 3: "I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are meeting today the _____ (National) OR the _____ (People) of the _____ (Nation) and pay my respects to their Elders past and present."

Example 4: We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, the _____ people. We honour the ancestors of yesterday, the custodians of today and those of tomorrow. We recognise the continuing connection to land and waters, and how culture is held, nurtured and shared. We pay our respects.

If you are unsure who the local Traditional Owners are – use a more general approach:

Example 1: "I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land/s on which we are meeting today and pay my respects to their Elders past and present."

Example 2: "I pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the land/s on which we are meeting and their continuing connection to land, waters and sea. I pay respect to them and their culture and to Elders both past and present".

If you are holding a virtual meeting/event:

Example 1 – known Traditional Owners:

I acknowledge that I am hosting/recording this meeting/event from the lands of the _____. I also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which you all work today and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in this meeting/event.

I pay my respects to Elders past, present and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters.

Example 2 – unknown Traditional Owners:

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which we work today and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in this meeting/event. I pay my respects to Elders past, present, and recognise and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters.

How do I find out who the Traditional Owners are?

Local Council (shire and/or municipal council) websites are a good place to find this information. Many Council websites include an acknowledgement of the local traditional owners.

State and Territory government websites also include information about traditional owners in their jurisdictions.

Reconciliation Australia website - www.reconciliation.org.au is also an excellent resource
<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/acknowledgement-of-country-and-welcome-to-country/>