

WELCOME TO AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



PROTOCOLS OF RESPECT

Tourism Australia encourages the use/observance of a 'Welcome to Country' or 'Acknowledgement of Country' to show awareness of and respect for the traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owners of the land.

A Welcome to Country can only be given by a Traditional Owner of the land where the event is taking place, whereas an Acknowledgement of Country can be delivered by anyone.

Both are protocols that precede an activity (eg. significant meetings with external partners, functions, conferences, speeches, webinars and other formal occasions) and recognise the significance of the connection to land, sea and waterways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



WHAT IS A WELCOME TO COUNTRY?

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have been a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for thousands of years. Despite the absence of fences or visible borders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups had clear boundaries separating their Country from that of other groups. Crossing into another group's Country required a request for permission to enter. When permission was granted the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering them safe passage and protection of their spiritual being during the journey. While visitors were provided with a safe passage, they also had to respect the protocols and rules of the landowner group while on their Country.

Today, obviously much has changed, and these protocols have been adapted to contemporary circumstances. However, the essential elements of welcoming visitors and offering safe passage remain in place.

A Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of a formal event and can take many forms including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English.

A Welcome to Country is delivered by Traditional Owners, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been given permission from Traditional Owners, to welcome visitors to their Country.

FOLLOWING A WELCOME TO COUNTRY

A Welcome to Country requires a response/acknowledgement by the next speaker.

The speaker following the Welcome to Country acknowledges the Traditional Owners, including the person who delivered the Welcome to Country. The following can be used to respond:

"Thank you for welcoming us today (name). I respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land on which we are meeting, and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging."

ROLE OF THE EVENT ORGANISER

Provide the Traditional Owners with relevant information about the event - eg. purpose, theme, aim, audience and duration. Invite the Traditional Owners to suggest a format, who should be invited, who should perform the Welcome to Country and how that person would like to be recognised for their time and commitment.

Allow sufficient time for traditional decision making and discussion among traditional custodians.

Request the Welcome to Country in language be translated into English so the audience understands the welcome message.

SHOULD I PAY FOR A WELCOME TO COUNTRY?

Yes. Traditional Owner groups will require a fee to cover the cost. It is a sign of cultural respect that Elders are paid or otherwise remunerated for their cultural knowledge and authority within their community.



WELCOME TO AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



WHAT IS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY?

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for anyone to show respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country. It can be given by both non-Indigenous people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

There are no set protocols or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, though often a statement may take the following forms.

General Acknowledgment: *I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.*

Specific Acknowledgement: *I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the (people) of the (nation) and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.*

If in doubt, it is recommended you use the General Acknowledgement.

WHY ARE WELCOMES TO COUNTRY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS OF COUNTRY IMPORTANT?

Incorporating welcoming and acknowledgement protocols into official meetings and events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Owners of land. It highlights the ongoing connection to place that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have and shows respect for the Traditional Owners.

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, the meaning of Country is more than just ownership or connection to land, as Professor Mick Dodson explains:

"When we talk about traditional 'Country'...we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal Australians... we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, Country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains. While they may all no longer necessarily be the title-holders to land, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are still connected to the Country of their ancestors and most consider themselves the custodians or caretakers of their land."

Source: *Reconciliation Australia*

FINDING WHERE YOU ARE ON COUNTRY

Take the time to research whose land you are on. Use the following [link to the AIATSIS map](#) to find who are the custodians of the land.



CONTACTING THE LOCAL TRADITIONAL OWNERS

To contact the local Traditional Owners, it is recommended you reach out to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, land councils or government departments where the event is being held, or the relevant State/Territory Tourism Organisation.

Be prepared and ensure you allow sufficient time for decision making and discussion among Traditional Owners.

New South Wales	<i>New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council</i> Tel: (02) 9689 4444
	<i>Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council</i> (Sydney metropolitan region) Tel: (02) 8394 9666
Queensland	<i>Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Partnerships</i> Tel: 13 74 68
Victoria	<i>Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council</i> Tel: (03) 9193 61999
Tasmania	<i>Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre</i> Tel: (03) 6234 0700
	<i>South-West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council</i> Tel: (08) 9358 7400
Western Australia	<i>Kimberley Land Council</i> Tel: (08) 9193 6199
	<i>Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation</i> Tel: (08) 9268 7000
Northern Territory	<i>Northern Land Council</i> Tel: (08) 8920 5100
	<i>Central Land Council</i> Tel: (08) 8951 6211

HOW TO PAY RESPECT IN A VIRTUAL EVENT OR ON PRINTED MATERIAL?

"In the spirit of reconciliation, (company name) acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging."

HOW TO PAY RESPECT TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CULTURES FROM OVERSEAS?

If you would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures at official functions in-market, the following statement is recommended:

"Sharing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, heritage and culture is a key part of (Company's) focus. In doing so we acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and their connection to land, sea and community and we pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging."