

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country

Welcome to Country

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have always been a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Boundaries were clear, and 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. Visitors had to respect the protocols and rules of the land owner group while on their Country.

Today, while these protocols have been adapted to contemporary circumstances, the essential elements remain: welcoming visitors and respect for Country.

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

Your local Aboriginal Land Council or Native Title representative body can advise on organising a Welcome to Country by a Traditional Owner in your area.

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 language or English.

Acknowledgement 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.

An **Acknowledgement of Country can be offered by any person** and like a Welcome to Country, an Acknowledgement of Country is given at the beginning of a meeting, speech or formal occasion.

Suggested wording for an Acknowledgement of Country includes:

General: 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 and present.

Specific: 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 and present.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may also wish to acknowledge their own mob/s and other First Nations peoples present.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be expressed on behalf of an organisation in different forms of communications, such as email signature blocks, websites, and on social media, for example:

General: (organisation name) acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.



Virtual Acknowledgement of Country

Some suggestions for respecting Country “virtually” include:

At home

- Record your Acknowledgement of Country via video
- Take a photo of you, friends, or family with the name of the Traditional Owners, or a sign of Acknowledgement
- Make chalk art or signs on your driveway and upload photos or video.

At work

- Record a video message at your workplace or create a photo Acknowledgement
- Ask and encourage your colleagues to take part to create a collage or compilation
- If working remotely, host a zoom meeting with colleagues and ask everyone to hold a sign Acknowledging the Land they are working/living on, or add that detail into chat.

At school

- Create paintings, drawings or signs with your students and upload photos or video.
- Create video messages or photos and encourage teachers and staff to get involved.

Why acknowledging Country is important

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced a long history of exclusion from Australian history books, the Australian flag, the Australian anthem and for many years, Australian democracy.

This history of dispossession and colonisation lies at the heart of the disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australians today.

Including recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in events, meetings and national symbols contributes to ending the exclusion that has been so damaging.

Incorporating welcoming and acknowledgement protocols into official meetings and events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of land and shows respect.

The distinction between ‘country’ and ‘Country’

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. ...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.”

