

Welcome to Country & Acknowledgement of Country



Australian Institute of
Landscape Architects

Important note

This document provides general guidance on the appropriate use of 'Welcome to Country' and 'Acknowledgement of Country' protocols for landscape architects in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities often have specific protocols which would take precedence and should be followed as closely as possible.

Introduction

AILA **acknowledges** and **respects** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across Australia as the Traditional Custodians of our lands, waters and seas. We **recognise** their unique ability to care for Country and their deep spiritual connection with Country. We **honour** Elders past, present and emerging, whose knowledge and wisdom will ensure the continuation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and the values which uphold them.

AILA recognises and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the oldest continuous living cultures in the world. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians for their wisdom, insight and connection to the land, waters and seas – the same land, waters and seas which are a central focus of our profession.

'Welcome to Country' and 'Acknowledgement of Country' are protocols used in Australia at the opening of meetings, launches, special events and official functions.¹ The AILA recognises and honors these protocols out of respect for Traditional Custodians, their communities and Country.

Background

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities recognise some 600 different Countries or Language Groups within Australia. Despite the absence of physical borders, each group has boundaries formed through ancient cultural and spiritual connections to specific places, some of which may be many miles in width.²

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have been a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for thousands of years. Traditionally, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples who wanted to travel, camp, hunt, trade or conduct other activities on another's Country would seek permission prior to entering. When granting permission the hosts would welcome the visitors on to Country through

ceremony, offering them food, water, a safe passage and protection of their spiritual being during the journey. While visitors were on another's Country, they also had the responsibility to respect the protocols and laws of their hosts.

Today, obviously much has changed. However, 'Welcome to Country' and 'Acknowledgement of Country' protocols are still relevant and important. These protocols have adapted to the modern Australian context and are dynamic and interchangeable by the author according to the circumstances.³

Welcome to Country

A Welcome to Country respects the inherent right of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples to welcome visitors on to Country in accordance with traditional cultural protocols. It is to be delivered by an Elder or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who has been given permission to represent the Traditional Custodians. A Welcome to Country should always occur at the beginning of a formal event, usually as the first item on the program. It might include singing, dancing, a smoking ceremony, and/or a speech given in traditional language or in English.⁴

Acknowledgement of Country

Similar to a Welcome to Country, an Acknowledgement of Country is generally offered at the beginning of a meeting, speech or other formal occasion. An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity to show respect for Traditional Custodians and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to Country. It can be given by anyone, but is usually given by a person who is conducting the meeting, giving a speech or has been invited to give an Acknowledgment of Country.⁵

FAQs

When should a Welcome to Country ceremony be conducted? When should an Acknowledgement of Country statement be made?

A Welcome to Country is recommended to be included at the opening of the AILA International Festival of Landscape Architecture, state and national awards ceremonies, and other AILA significant formal events. AILA members are also encouraged to include a Welcome to Country as part of formal work-related events such as official project openings.

An Acknowledgement of Country should be included at the commencement of all official AILA meetings and events held at National and State chapter levels.

How do I organise a Welcome to Country?

Identify and contact the appropriate Aboriginal Land Council or Native Title representative body for advice on organising a Welcome to Country ceremony. If you need help finding out who to ask, speak with a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Elder. Remember to ask about any specific protocols.

Are there costs I should anticipate and budget for a Welcome to Country?

Preparing for, traveling and providing a Welcome to Country requires time and expenses. Elders and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons who provide a Welcome to Country should be remunerated for their services. It is important to discuss and agree to the fees and method of payment prior to the event as these will vary between individuals or groups.

What is the protocol or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country statement?

While there are no set protocols or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, statements generally include acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the meeting is held and paying respects to Elders past and present. Following are examples.

General: I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. I also wish to acknowledge the Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in attendance.

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 the Elders past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in attendance

Are there other ways I can show respect through my practice?

The following Acknowledgement of Country is part of the AILA's constitution:

*We **acknowledge** and **respect** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across Australia as the traditional custodians of our shared lands, waters and seas.*

*We **recognise** their unique ability to care for Country and their deep spiritual connection with Country.*

*We **honour** Elders past and present, whose knowledge and wisdom will ensure the continuation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and the values which uphold them.*

AILA members are encouraged to include an Acknowledgement of Country statement in printed publications, websites, email signatures, and other ways as may be appropriate. When including an acknowledgement statement on a printed document, ideally it should be placed on the inside front cover, standing alone, in a place of significance.

Reference

The AILA acknowledges the authors of Indigenous Knowledge in the Built Environment: A Guide for Tertiary Educators, David S Jones, Darryl Low Choy, Richard Tucker, Scott Heyes, Grant Revell and Susan Bird, as well as Reconciliation Australia, whose work has been referenced in the preparation of this document.

Endnotes

1. Jones D S, Low D, Rucker R, Heyes S, Revell G & Bird S, *Indigenous Knowledge in the Built Environment: A Guide for Tertiary Educators*, Canberra, ACT Australian Government Department of Education and Training, https://ltr.edu.au/resources/ID12-2418_Deakin_Jones_2018_Guide.pdf (accessed 28 August 2019).

2. Readman P, Radding C, Bryant C (Eds.), *Borderlands in World History 1700-1914*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, page 51.

3. Jones D S, Low D, Rucker R, Heyes S, Revell G & Bird S, *Indigenous Knowledge in the Built Environment: A Guide for Tertiary Educators*, Canberra, ACT Australian Government Department of Education and Training, https://ltr.edu.au/resources/ID12-2418_Deakin_Jones_2018_Guide.pdf (accessed 28 August 2019).

4. *Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country*, Reconciliation Australia, <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Welcome-to-and-Acknowledgement-of-Country.pdf> (accessed 28 August 2019).

5. Ibid.