

Welcome to Country vs. Acknowledgement of Country ?

The importance of including a Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country at the beginning of any event or meeting or even at the beginning of a day at school or work is an act of reconciliation in and of itself. It is a simple way of acknowledging and demonstrating an understanding of the complex relationship of living on and in the Country of the oldest continuous living culture in the world.

The genuine and heartfelt practice of Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment to Country is a custom that allows truth telling to take place and demonstrates an understanding that the land always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced significant exclusion from Australian society for many years, many non-Indigenous Australians have not had the opportunity to learn about, and celebrate, the rich cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This contributes to a disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians that persists today.

Acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in events is one part of ending this exclusion. It recognises the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people as the first custodians of this land and, importantly, promotes awareness of the history and culture of Indigenous peoples.

“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.”



A **Welcome to Country** is a ceremony performed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Elders, or Traditional Owners who have been given permission to welcome visitors onto their traditional land. Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have been part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for thousands of years. This welcome can take the form of a speech (sometimes in traditional language) or a performance (including smoking ceremony, singing and/or dancing). Whether spoken or performed, the aim of the ceremony is to acknowledge the traditional custodians and welcome the wider community. The Elder (or a representative) will give their blessing to the event, function, meeting or occasion. In response, the host (or key speaker) will acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by paying respects to Elders (past, present and emerging).

An **Acknowledgement of Country** is where other people acknowledge and show respect for the traditional custodians of the land on which the event is taking place. Such an acknowledgement of Country can be used exclusively if an Elder or other appropriate member of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities is not available to perform a Welcome to Country. Incorporating a welcome or acknowledgement protocol into official meetings and events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and custodians of their land. It promotes an awareness of the past and continuing connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to the land, sea, sky and waterways. An Acknowledgement of Country can be performed by an Indigenous or non-Indigenous person and is generally offered at the beginning of a meeting, speech or formal occasion.

Welcome to Country

Acknowledgement of Country

What Is It?

A formal welcome onto Aboriginal Country.

Paying respects to the Traditional Custodians of the land you are on.

Who Can Give It?

A Traditional Custodian Elder of the lander, or an Aboriginal person with approval by the Traditional Custodians.

Can be performed by anyone (Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal).

When Is It Appropriate?

Major public events, forums, and functions.

If a traditional custodian is unavailable to perform a Welcome to Country.

When Should It Occur?

At the opening of the event.

At the beginning of an event, or in response to a Welcome to Country.

What Form Can It Take?

Varies from speeches, in language or English, to dance, song, and ceremonies.

During a speech, part of email signatures, featured on websites, and signs at workplaces and homes.