



# WELCOME TO AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY PROTOCOL MANAGEMENT POLICY

ADOPTED BY EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE: 25 MARCH 2021

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide Council and Council officers with a set of culturally appropriate protocols to follow when organising a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country for a Council event or activity.

## POLICY INTENT

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country Protocols recognise and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of these Lands and acknowledges the voices, traditions and histories Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people contribute to the Wollongong local government area.

The intent of this document is to assist Council in applying culturally appropriate protocols in recognising the Traditional Custodians of the Land at official events, Council meetings and ceremonies organised by, or on behalf of, Council.

The main objectives of this policy are to –

- Detail protocols to allow a culturally appropriate and consistent approach to Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country.
- Recognise the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our City and pay respect to their culture and heritage.
- Contribute to strengthening relationships and partnerships with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
- Communicate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices to the broader community to promote respect and understanding.
- Demonstrate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customs are living through practice of ceremonies and protocols.

## WOLLONGONG 2028 OBJECTIVES

The Policy will actively achieve Wollongong 2028 Community Strategic Plan Objective 3.3 - as conducting either a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country as is appropriate at events, activities or public meetings will build harmony, understanding and cultural awareness.

## POLICY

Wollongong City Council acknowledges and respects the Traditional Custodians of Dharawal Country, we recognise and appreciate their deep connection to this land, waters and the broader community. Council is genuine in its commitment to respect Australia's First Nation Peoples cultures and heritage. Recognising and acknowledging Aboriginal culture in the general community enables deeper understanding and builds stronger relationships between Aboriginal people and the general community.

### **'Welcome to Country' and 'Acknowledgement of Country'**

Connection to Country is fundamental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. The spiritual connection to land is an essential source of belonging and identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Connection to Country must be considered in any relationship with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

'Welcome to Country' and 'Acknowledge of Country' are different cultural practices and protocols exist about who can perform them. The following sections outlines the cultural sensitives and appropriate use.

### **What is a Welcome to Country?**

A Welcome to Country is when a Traditional Custodian of the Land, in most cases a recognised Elder within the local community, welcomes people to their traditional land. The practice of Welcome to Country has been performed since time immemorial by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The practice is based on the protocol of acknowledgement of another's Country and the permission to walk through Country that was not your own.

### **When should a Welcome to Country be performed?**

A Welcome to Country should occur at the opening ceremony of major events, such as:

- Commemorations and major festivals
- Conferences held or sponsored by Council
- Citizenship ceremonies
- Major sporting events
- International delegations organised or sponsored by Council
- Opening of new or redeveloped Council owned facilities.

A Welcome to Country should be performed at the start or opening of an event and must be conducted by a Traditional Custodian or appropriate Elder or member of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Inviting an appropriate representative is essential to respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols.

The Welcome to Country may consist of a single speech by the representative of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community with reference to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture. The ceremony may also include a performance such as a Traditional Welcoming Song, a Traditional Dance, a Didgeridoo performance or a combination. It is important that local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are employed for such ceremonies. In most communities, there are performing artists who are available.

### **How do I book a Welcome to Country?**

There are various suppliers in the area that can perform a Welcome to Country. Council's process is to use organisations which maintain a register of interested parties such as the Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation and Illawarra Aboriginal Land Council. Contact the organisations to book a Welcome to Country.

Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation and Cultural Centre and Keeping Place

Contact: Errolyn Strang and Irene Moore  
Telephone: 4228 1585  
Email: errolyn.strang@iac.org.au  
Address: PO Box 5457, Wollongong NSW 2521  
Location: 22 Kenny Street, Wollongong

Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council

Contact: Paul Knight  
Telephone: 4226 3338  
Email: ceo@ilalc.org.au  
Address: 3 Ellen St, Wollongong NSW 2500

Council's Aboriginal Community Development Worker can be contacted to discuss if required.

### **What happens after a Welcome to Country?**

When a Welcome to Country has been delivered it is respectful for the Council officer hosting the event to follow with a speech thanking the representative that conducted the Welcome to Country and deliver their own Acknowledgement of Country. For example:

“Thank you [Uncle/Aunty [person’s name] for welcoming us to the traditional lands of Dharawal Country. I would also like to pay my respect and acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which we meet, and pay my respect to Elders past, present and those emerging. I would also like to extend my respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people present here today.”

### **What is an Acknowledgement of Country?**

An Acknowledgement of Country is a way that non-Aboriginal people can show respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and the ongoing relationship of Traditional Custodians with the Land. The chair or organiser begins the meeting by acknowledging the meeting is taking place in the Country of the Traditional Custodians of this Land. On occasions there may be a difference of opinion as to who the Traditional Custodians are. To avoid causing offence this can be overcome by ‘acknowledging all the Traditional Custodians of the Land or you can ‘acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this land’ without naming those people.

The following is considered appropriate wording for an Acknowledgement of Country in Wollongong local government area:

“I would like to pay my respect and acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Dharawal Country, the land on which we meet. I would also like to pay my respect to Elders past, present and those emerging. I would also like to extend my respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people present here today.”

### **When should an Acknowledgement of Country be conducted?**

An Acknowledgement of Country is usually conducted at smaller, less formal gatherings. Generally, the Chairperson will conduct the Acknowledgement of Country. The Acknowledgement of Country can be personalised to suit the gathering. Examples of when an Acknowledgment of Country can be conducted include:

- Council meetings
- Team meetings
- Interagency meetings

### **How is an Acknowledgement of Country written in Council publications?**

Acknowledgement of Country should be included at the beginning of Council’s strategy and planning documents. Two options are provided:

“Wollongong City Council would like to show their respect and acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Dharawal Country, Elders past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”

Or

“We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our city is built, Dharawal Country. We recognise and appreciate their deep connection to this land, waters and the greater community.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and those emerging and extend our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who call this city home.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first people to live in the area. We respect their living cultures and recognise the positive contribution their voices, traditions and histories make to the city.”

### **What is a smoking ceremony?**

Smoking ceremonies are a traditional custom performed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Native plants are burnt to produce smoke and acknowledge the ancestors and pay respect to the land, waters and sea of country. It is a cleansing and healing ceremony and will generally involve a Welcome to Country.

Smoking ceremonies are usually performed on special occasions or at major events and places of spiritual significance. For guidance about when a smoking ceremony should be conducted please contact Council’s Aboriginal Community Development Worker.

### **What other protocols should be observed?**

When displaying images or film containing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the following statement should be provided:

“Wollongong City Council would like to warn any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers that the following program may contain images and voices of deceased persons.”

Do not mention the name of a deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person or show photographic images of a deceased person unless agreed to by the relevant family.

Demonstrate sensitivity to knowledge that is specific to gender, commonly known as “Women’s Business” or “Men’s Business”.

Appropriately acknowledge guest artists that are either from or supported by the local community.

It is considered offensive to question the ‘amount’ of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander blood an Indigenous person may possess. The labels “half caste”, “quarter caste” and “full blood” are now considered racist terms and should not be used. It is advisable to ask people how they would like to be described. This may include where they come from or which community or clan they identify with.

At events at which flags are shown, the order of display, from an audience perspective from left to right is as per Council’s flag protocol.

### **Performances and Fees**

Community representatives and artistic performers should be appropriately remunerated for their time and commitment. The schedule below sets minimum fees for a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural services, these are indicative only. Fees for performers can sometimes be negotiated. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives should be contacted, and arrangements mutually negotiated. Other factors requiring negotiation and considerations may include:

- Arrangement of transport for Elders and/or performers
- Public profile of the event

Dances and performances may also be included as part of ceremonies if considered appropriate by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Information about performers is available through a cultural database on Council’s website. Contact Council’s Aboriginal Community Development Worker for additional information and/or advice.

When planning the timetable of official events, it is important to schedule in enough time for discussion and negotiation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and communities. Also ensure guests are given guidance or direction on the timing and procedures on the day i.e. do not assume representatives know what to do or where to go once ceremonies are completed.

Didgeridoo	\$200
Welcome to Country	\$200
Cleansing Ceremony	\$800
Dancer	\$250

*These fees are in line with NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs cultural practices and performance fee schedule.*

## Terminology

Traditional Custodians is the term used to describe the original Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who inhabited an area. Traditional Custodians today are descendants of these original inhabitants and have ongoing spiritual and cultural ties to the Land and waterways where their ancestors lived.

Elders are custodians of traditional knowledge and customs and are charged with the responsibility of providing guidance to the community on cultural matters. It is the Elders who hold the history, know the culture and pass on the laws that govern the community. The term “Elder” is used to describe people who have knowledge, wisdom and the respect of the local community. An Elder is not necessarily an older person, however, must have the trust and respect of their community and is recognised as a cultural knowledge keeper.

Always use respectful and consistent language. Do not use the abbreviation ‘ATSI’ nor the words ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Aborigine’ as these terms are outdated and can cause offense. The terms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander should always be spelt with a capital A, capital T, capital S and capital I.

The appropriate terminology to use to refer to individuals or groups of people who identify as descendants of the original inhabitants of Australia are Aboriginal person (individual), Torres Strait Islander (Individual), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (collective), Aboriginal people (collective), or Torres Strait Islander people (collective). Using this language recognises and acknowledges that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders have separate linguistic and cultural identities.

## Resources for staff

A range of resources are available for staff to support culturally appropriate, meaningful and effective engagement with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. These include:

- The hub – extensive information is available about reconciliation, Aboriginal cultures, and histories.
- Aboriginal Engagement Framework – details a set of principles and protocols to guide Council’s elected members, staff and consultants when engaging with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. The Framework also provides definitions, terminology, significant dates and a list of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and organisations.
- Council’s website – information is available about community events, Aboriginal arts and culture, Aboriginal business and cultural tourism, local networks and services, Council programs and support and a brief history is available.

**REVIEW**

This Management Policy will be reviewed every two years from the date of each adoption of the policy, or more frequently as required.

**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Policy apply to all officers responsible for organising Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country ceremonies.

**RELATED PROCEDURES**

Aboriginal Engagement Framework

APPROVAL AND REVIEW	
Responsible Division	Community, Cultural + Economic Development
Date authorised by Executive Management Committee	25 March 2021
Date of previous adoptions	17 December 2013, 16 January 2018
Date of next review	March 2023