

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY GUIDE

Why is it 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 non-Indigenous Australians today.

Including recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in events, meetings and national symbols is one part of ending the exclusion. Incorporating welcoming and acknowledgement protocols into official meetings and events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of land. It promotes an ongoing connection to place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and shows respect for Traditional Owners.

By researching and writing an Acknowledgment as a non-Indigenous Australian, you are teaching yourself more about the true history of the Country you are on. By actively giving an acknowledgment you are acknowledging that the land always will be that of the Traditional Custodians.

Acknowledgement or Welcome: what is the difference?

There's sometimes confusion as to what the difference between a Welcome and an Acknowledgement is and when it is appropriate to do them. The key difference is **who** performs each one. Both are generally offered at the beginning of a meeting, speech or special occasion.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be said by anyone, Indigenous or non-Indigenous. 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 is an opportunity to learn more about the land you are on so research this beforehand. Some resources for this purpose are listed below.

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

- **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.

As part of its Reconciliation Action Plan, the Academy developed this wording for an Acknowledgement of Country which can be freely used at Academy meetings and events:

The Australian Academy of Science acknowledges and pays respects to the Ngunnawal people, the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the Academy office is located. The Academy also acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Owners and the Elders past, present and emerging of all the lands on which the Academy operates, and its Fellows live and work. They hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

A Welcome to Country can only be given by a Traditional Owner. 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.

A Welcome signifies the Traditional Custodians inviting you onto their land and granting you safe passage. It's sometimes accompanied by a [Smoking Ceremony](#), to cleanse the energy of those being welcomed and can take many other forms including singing, dancing or a speech in traditional language or English.

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 land owner group while on their Country.

Useful resources

Learn more about Ngunnawal Country [Ngunnawal is pronounced 'nunnerwall']

- [Mt Ainslie](#)
- [Black Mountain](#)
- [Jerrabomberra Wetlands](#)

Identifying Traditional Owners

- [AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia](#)
- [ACT Traditional Custodians](#)
- [VIC Traditional Owners map](#)
- [Sydney – Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, Welcome to Country booking form](#)

Words adapted from

- Acknowledgement of Country: Your Go-To Guide—[Georgia Mae Capocchi-Hunter](#)
- Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country—[Reconciliation Australia](#)

For more information about the Australian Academy of Science Reconciliation Action Plan, visit: science.org.au/reconciliation-action-plan