

Welcome to Country

Following Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocol



This presentation will explain Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country protocol and their meanings, purpose and importance.

The presentation will also explain the rationale behind payment for this service.



Welcome to Country

Following Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocol

The Holroyd area was traditionally occupied by people of the Darug Aboriginal Nation.

Council has maintained a warm relationship with the Darug People, in particular, its relationship with Aunty Mavis Halvorson (descendant of traditional custodians) who for some years conducted a 'Welcome to Country' for Holroyd's ceremonial occasions and chaired many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee meetings.

Members of the Committee regret she is no longer well enough to continue in this role. Council with its Consultative Committee must seek a replacement for the services she provided for so long, without receiving a fee for service.



Welcome to Country

Protocol, Meaning, Purpose and Importance

PROTOCOL:

Cultural protocols refer to the customs, lores and codes of behaviour of a particular cultural group.

Protocols are a set of rules or guidelines that help a community understand and work with others.

Protocols are an important part of all cultures and are in place to ensure people behave and interact with each other in an appropriate manner.

MEANING:

Australia with its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is fortunate to have the oldest existing culture in the world which has been living in Australia for over 50,000 years (Australian Government 2009). However, Australians have not always realised the full value of this culture to our nation.



Welcome to Country

Protocol, Meaning, Purpose and Importance

MEANING – continued

A Welcome to Country was a traditional cultural practice which allowed a person from one clan to pass onto another clan's land.

Today in a formal setting, a 'Welcome to Country' is where the Traditional Aboriginal Land owners (in most cases a nominated Elder or Elders) welcome people to their land at the beginning of a meeting, event or ceremony.

Welcome to Country enables Traditional Custodians to give their blessing for the event and is an important mark of respect for Aboriginal people.

An Acknowledgment of Country is a way to demonstrate respect to the traditional custodians of the land and also recognise their culture and existence as the first people.



Welcome to Country

Protocol, Meaning, Purpose and Importance

PURPOSE:

The objectives of a 'Welcome' or 'Acknowledgement' are:

- to promote a greater understanding of Aboriginal Culture in the wider community
- to demonstrate the valuing of and respect for appropriate Aboriginal ceremony
- to improve relationships between the local Aboriginal community and the wider community through ceremony, protocols and collaborative negotiation
- to further enhance a Council's commitment to Reconciliation
- to recognise the unique position of Aboriginal people in Australian culture and history

Welcome to Country is about respecting the traditional custodians of the land and their culture and is NOT about handing back land or compensation.



Welcome to Country

Protocol, Meaning, Purpose and Importance

IMPORTANCE:

For Aboriginal people, spirituality and the sacred are welded to the land and in their responsibility to care for it. How they care for it determines how they will be sustained. They don't own the land. The land owns them and they are the custodians of the land (this is the law).

Their law is not written; it is carried in the minds of the people in the form of stories, spoken and danced. The stories are the means of carrying the law from one generation to the next.

Today, in spite of the difficulties some Aboriginal communities still experience, the regional and urban rebirth of their culture in art, literature, dance and song is an indication of the growing importance of this culture to both the Aboriginal population and the whole nation.

Welcome to Country now takes place in all major public spheres and is recognised as best practice.



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WELCOME TO COUNTRY PROTOCOL:

Non-Aboriginal people cannot Welcome people to Country, similarly an Aboriginal person who belongs to a different Country (e.g. Wonkamurra [Bourke]) cannot Welcome people to another person's Country (e.g. Darug [Western Sydney]). In these cases the correct protocol to follow is to make an Acknowledgement of Country.

A Welcome to Country may consist of a Song, Dance, Speech or Historical Recognition of Aboriginal Culture. There is no exact wording when Welcoming to Country, however the Elder will most definitely include naming the Aboriginal Nation on which the event is being held.

An Acknowledgement of Country may be made by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and may consist of the following statement:

"I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Darug people, and pay my respects to Elders both past and present".



Welcome to Country

Rationale for payment of service

RATIONALE:

In providing cultural services such as Welcome to Country, artistic performances and ceremonies, Aboriginal people are using their intellectual property. As such, providers of these services should be appropriately remunerated.

Appropriate remuneration and/or assistance should be negotiated between the cultural service provider and the agency, considering travel to and from the event and public profile of the event (University of Sunshine Coast 2009, NSW Government & NSW Health 2005).

Legally known as “Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property” (ICIP) - Different laws all over the world protect some of the things that people produce as a result of their intellectual effort. ICIP includes the right to be paid for use of your ICIP.