



# Writing an Acknowledgement of Country



Community  
Legal Centres  
Queensland



# What is an Acknowledgement of Country?

There are a number of myths about an **Acknowledgement of Country**.

Unlike a **Welcome to Country**, an Acknowledgement of Country can, and should, be performed by anyone.

It is a way of respectfully and authentically acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands we are blessed to live, work and play on.

It can take a number of forms, both written and spoken, such as:

- Presented at the start of an event
- Featured on your website
- Displayed on the wall
- Included in your publications
- All of the above



# Why is it important?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been excluded from society for generations, suffering discrimination and oppression.

First Nations people were not even classed as human beings in recent history.

Being recognised as the true custodians of the land through an Acknowledgement of Country is one way to say 'I see you'.

It promotes awareness of the history and culture of the land, encourages reconciliation and fosters a more united Australia that celebrates and embraces our First Nations people.



# Fact check



Anyone can do an  
Acknowledgement  
of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country does not need to be done by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. It can be performed by anyone. It is a way of respectfully and authentically acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on.



An  
Acknowledgement  
of Country and a  
Welcome to  
Country are the  
same

This is incorrect. A Welcome to Country and an Acknowledgement of Country **are not** the same thing. There is a significant difference and it is important that we respect the disparity between the two.



## An Acknowledgement of Country can be personalised

An Acknowledgement of Country is your own way of paying respects to the traditional owners of the lands you are standing on. It is an opportunity to reflect with reverence on the enduring history of First Nations culture, the oldest living culture on the planet, and should be given in a way which is comfortable for you.



## Any First Nations person can do a Welcome to Country

A Welcome to Country is a sacred ceremony, which can only be performed by a traditional owner of the lands on which you are meeting. It occurs at the beginning of an event and is a tradition passed down over thousands of years, granting permission to visitors to enter and providing safe passage and protection.

# Spot the difference

An Acknowledgement of  
Country

vs

Welcome to Country

Scott Kneebone, a Bangerang man, describes the  
difference

W

A Welcome to Country is like hosting  
a birthday - you do a welcome and  
say thank you for coming to my  
birthday.

A

An Acknowledgement of Country is  
like you're a guest at the birthday -  
you would say thank you for having  
me.

# The protocols

An Acknowledgement of Country happens at the start of an event, such as an external meeting, a speech or a formal event.

An Acknowledgement can vary in length and formality, it is very much at that person's discretion.

There are critical components to be included in **all** Acknowledgements of Country:

- Acknowledge the accurate traditional owners of the lands you are standing or working on
- Pay your respects to their connection to land, water and culture
- Pay respects to the Elders past, present and future





# Writing your own

Write it in your own voice and personalise the script if you need to.

An Acknowledgement of Country is one way we can personally appreciate our First Nations people in a way which is thoughtful and authentic.

It is our responsibility to appreciate Australia was cared for and protected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for thousands of years before it was invaded.

It is a chance to reflect, with reverence, on the atrocities of the past, and celebrate the enduring connection to culture, and resilience of our First Nations people.





# Where do I start?

1. Research the traditional owners of the lands where you were born and any other places which are special to you.
2. Research the First Nations history of the lands and any areas of special significance or history.
3. Use the CLCQ Acknowledgement of Country at the end of this resource as a guide to the introduction of your own Acknowledgement of Country.
4. Reference the language map from AIATSIS if you are having trouble finding out who your Traditional Owner's are.

# What's next?

The next step is to piece all of your information together. Here is a suggested format and examples from CLCQ staff:

- Start with the Acknowledgement of Country protocols above
- Pay respects to the elders of the lands on which you grew up or your chosen place of significance
- Include some of the information you have found about your area and any thoughts, feelings or connections you have to this place
- If it is written rather than spoken, you may wish to include a photograph



# Dos and don'ts

## Do



● Do follow the protocols for inclusion:

- Acknowledge the traditional owners
- Acknowledge their connection to country
- Acknowledge the elders

● Do Personalise it!

Use your own voice. It is easy to download a script, try and adapt it to make it more authentic.

● Do take your time.

Be confident. Be genuine. Adapt it to suit the context.

## Don't



● Don't expect that a First Nations person should do the Acknowledgement of Country or burden them with a token gesture. Performing an authentic Acknowledgement of Country is also a good way to build rapport with your audience.

● Don't use language in past tense.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still here. They have an enduring connection to the land, water and culture.

● Don't use offensive language.

Avoid phrases such as Aborigine or ATSI. They are derogatory and unnecessary.



# When to use a cultural safety warning

Cultural beliefs, practices and protocols can be very strict and will vary for each family or community following the death of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

It is imperative if you are using the name, photo, voice or artwork of someone who is deceased in your stories, that you include a cultural safety warning, such as below.

Example cultural safety warning:  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers are advised that this presentation (or website/story, etc.) may contain images, voices and names of deceased persons.



# Examples from CLCQ

Samantha Cooper  
Gumbaynggirr woman  
Sector Sustainability Coordinator

## Giinagay

As a proud Gumbaynggirr woman I would like to acknowledge the traditional lands of the Turrbal and Jaggera people, who are the traditional custodians of the lands which I now live and work and play. I pay my deepest respects to their elders past, present and emerging, and thank them for taking care of the lands, which I am now blessed to raise my own family on.

The beautiful bushwalks of Brisbane, in particular the Mt Coot-Tha Forest, remind me of the lands where I grew up in northern New South Wales. I consistently carry with me the memories of the Gumbaynggirr nation, where I spent the first 20 years of my life.

I grew up in a small country town called Coramba, meaning mountain, in the Orara Valley, 20 minutes west of Coffs Harbour. I hold dear the stories from Uncle Mark Flanders who told yarns from our old people about the bush and the mountains; he taught the boys to play didgeridoo and the girls to gather bush tucker. I remember the sound of the fresh water creeks off the Orara River where Dad and I used to catch turtles and critters, the bush tracks we drove in search of snakes and echidnas, feeling their soft bellies and learning how to care for them. We brought a turtle home to Mum who let us keep it in the preschool we built. She was less impressed about the python but that's a story for another day.

Coramba was a meeting place for the Gumbaynggirr people for thousands of years. The first European contact was in 1841 on the Bellinger Rivers. Soon after was the Red Rock Massacre claimed hundreds of Aboriginal lives. At school we learned that troopers entered the camp and began shooting. Those who fled were tracked down to Corindi Creek where they met the same fate. Those who survived were driven to the headland and herded off the rocks into the sea. The hunters kept shooting at the swimmers but some hid in a cave and moved south. One of the survivors was the Uncle Tony Perkins' grandmother, she crouched in a paddock with a bub in her arms. Her resilience and strength; her bravery and protection of her family; her story, stays with me. My home was one of the earliest settlements recorded in New South Wales and carries generations of language and storylines - history that is both horrific and inspiring.

I am blessed to be part of a nation that has been able to protect its language and culture, and pass it on. We were traditionally known as the 'sharing people', because the land was rich with food and resources that were shared with other groups. This same value was instilled from an early age and I am forever grateful for the many hands that were often at our dinner table. I am excited every year to come home and put my feet in the creek, and toes in the sand, and look forward to dipping tiny feet in the same rivers and creeks one day.



Rosslyn Monro  
Director

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which I live, the Turrbal people, and pay my respect to elders past, present and emerging.

I have lived in Enoggera in Brisbane for over 20 years, so I was interested to find out more about the country in which I have made my home. The first thing that stunned me was how little I could find about the Turrbal people as custodians of Enoggera. Written histories only contained a few lines about pre-colonial Aboriginal culture, before moving onto the white farming families of the district.

The little I could find initially put a smile on my face as the country was a significant place for the Turrbal culture as a place for camping, corroboree, song and dance. However, the word Enoggera is a result of a spelling error by the Government Land Office as it was intended that name should be recorded as Euogerra, a contraction of the Turrbal phrase youara-ngarea which means “sing-play”. Yet again proof that good intentions may pave the way.

Having read the Forde Inquiry Report in the early 2000s, I was also aware that the history of the area got darker for Aboriginal people. I often walk my dog around the Hillbrook Anglican School where I see lots of white kids getting in and out of expensive cars. Between 1906 and 1978 it was the site of the Enoggera Boys Home. In my reading I found out that many Aboriginal boys were placed in Enoggera Boys Home after being taken from their families. The Forde Inquiry told the stories of children being abused and mistreated. In 1998, commemorative Sorry Day plaques were installed by Brisbane City Council in Brisbane parks. One of the commemorative plaques is placed in nearby Teralba Park. It was chosen not only because of its proximity to the old Enoggera Boys Home but it also overlooked Kedron Brook, which was an important meeting place and home for Aboriginal people. Kedron Brook was a vital trade route connecting Samford Valley and the coast, with several Bora ring sites that were used for ceremonies and initiations.

I decided to look for the plaque and pay my respects. The plaque was nestled in beside a children’s playground and was surrounded by recently laid bouquets and art. As I continue to walk my dog through the parklands of Enoggera, I appreciate the beauty and lament the tragedy of the country on which I am privileged to walk and to call my home.





Penny Sullivan  
Sector Sustainability Coordinator

Today, I live and work on the lands of the Turrbal and Jagera peoples, traditional custodians of the lands and waters of the Brisbane area. I pay my deep respect to their elders past, present and emerging.

I grew up in the Northern Territory, on a farm on the banks of the Adelaide River, about 120km southeast of Darwin. Life was pretty free, and my siblings and I roamed around on our bikes with the Aboriginal kids who were our friends. They showed us to carry their pet possum around on our heads, and where to find the best green plums (*Buchanania obovata*).

Although my parents established a farm on the land, there were people on that country long, long before my family arrived. It has taken me some digging to find out about these people. I had to refer to a Land Claim report from the early 1980s to find some clues, and then use satellite maps of the region to identify the landmarks and find the boundaries of the nations who lived south of Darwin. I found them eventually. They are the Warai (Waray) people from around Batchelor, Adelaide River and Stapleton. The Kungarakany people were their north-western neighbours, and the Larrikiya people were to the north around Darwin.

It seems the Warai were pushed from their traditional lands during the late 1800s or early 1900s (the records don't show this clearly); but sadly, we can probably imagine what this process was. I don't know if the people that I grew up with were Warai or Kungarakany, or maybe neither. But as a small child, I remember lying in my bed at night listening to the corroboree, the singing and chanting and clapping. I have clear memories of strong men with traditional striation scars on their chests - the [Australian Museum](#) says that the 'scarring is like a language inscribed on the body, where each deliberately placed scar tells a story of pain, endurance, identity, status, beauty, courage, sorrow or grief.'

As I played with my Aboriginal friends and visited their families who lived on our farm, I didn't understand then what had been taken from the people who once were the custodians of the land. I just knew that I loved that place.

So I am honoured now to also pay my deepest respects to all of the people of the Warai nation, their elders, their ancestors, and their descendants, gone from their traditional lands, but with whom I will always share a deep sense of connection through the land on which we all once lived.

# CLCQ Acknowledgement of Country

Community Legal Centres Queensland pay our deepest respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the land in Australia, and recognise their continuing connection to land, water and culture. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge the stories, traditions and living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and commit to fostering a culture of learning from and working with First Nations peoples in the spirit of reconciliation and access to justice.

This resource was created by Samantha Cooper, Gumbaynggirr woman, and Sector Sustainability Coordinator, and was meant as a guide only. If you would like more information please get in touch with CLCQ.

