

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country

An overview of protocols for DET employees and state schools



Welcome to Country

What is ‘Country’?

In terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, ‘Country’ refers to a specific tract of land or sea traditionally owned by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural/language group. More than 260 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander countries and language groups are represented across Australia. In Aboriginal cultures and Torres Strait Islander cultures, land, sea, air, language and spirituality are deeply connected, so Country includes all of these elements.

What is a Welcome to Country?

A Welcome to Country is a ceremony performed by Traditional Owners of the land and/or sea where an event is taking place to welcome visitors. A Welcome to Country can therefore only be performed by an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person with ancestral ties to the place where the welcome takes place. It can take many forms including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English.

When should an event include a Welcome to Country?

A Welcome to Country should be conducted at major public functions. Appropriate functions include DET organised, funded and co-funded events such as significant launches of government policy or programs, openings of festivals, award programs, conferences and significant community engagement forums.

Examples may include, but are not limited to the following:

- NAIDOC events
- graduation or award ceremonies
- festivals and event launches
- major conferences
- significant community forums
- school and venue openings.

It is suggested that a Welcome to Country be incorporated into events where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, programs or services are being promoted. Be guided by other participants as to whether to stand or not during the Welcome to Country.

Response to a Welcome to Country

Immediately following the Welcome to Country it is appropriate that a speaker, which may include a Queensland Government representative, responds by acknowledging the Traditional Owners/Custodians and Elders. This not only respectfully acknowledges the person who has provided the welcome, it also acknowledges the Traditional Owners/Custodians and Elders of the land and/or sea on which the event is taking place.

As a minimum, appropriate wording for responding to a Welcome to Country would include:

*“I acknowledge the * _____ people, the Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander** Owners of the land where we gather today and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I recognise their connection to Country and their role in caring for and maintaining Country over thousands of years. May their strength and wisdom be with us today.”*

*If known add the Traditional Owners’ clan/language group name

**Use ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Torres Strait Islander’ as appropriate

A short pause should be taken after the acknowledgment as a sign of respect, before continuing.



Queensland
Government

Acknowledgment of Country

What is an Acknowledgment of Country?

An Acknowledgment of Country is a demonstration of respect for the traditional custodians of the land on which a meeting or event is being held. It is recognition of the continuing relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their Country.

An Acknowledgment of Country is usually given at the beginning of a meeting, speech or other formal occasions. Unlike a Welcome to Country, it can be given by a prominent non-Indigenous person or an Indigenous person who does not have ancestral ties to the place where the event is taking place.

When should an Acknowledgment of Country be delivered?

Like a Welcome to Country, an Acknowledgment of Country is to be provided at all DET events as outlined in the Welcome to Country section. It may be given at other events including, but not limited to:

- inter-departmental and/or divisional workshops, meetings and seminars
- meetings with non-government organisations, businesses, Australian, state and local governments
- assemblies
- presentations
- sports days
- fetes
- parents and citizens' committee meetings
- events celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture
- official meetings with external groups and/or individuals.

How is an Acknowledgment of Country delivered?

When a meeting or event is being opened, either the person in charge of the meeting or event, or another nominated person, acknowledges Country by saying something like:

“I acknowledge the * _____ people, the Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander** Owners of the land where we gather today and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I recognise their connection to Country and role in caring for and maintaining Country over thousands of years. May their strength and wisdom be with us today.”

*If known add the Traditional Owners' clan/language group name

**Use 'Aboriginal' or 'Torres Strait Islander' as appropriate

How many times should an Acknowledgment of Country be given at an event or meeting?

Usually, the Acknowledgment of Country is given at the start of a meeting or event by the Chair or Master of Ceremonies. Other key speakers and participants may also wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, however this is their personal decision.

Organising a Welcome to Country – Call DATSIP

The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP) is best placed to provide further guidance and advice to Queensland Government employees on the appropriate procedures. Go to the DATSIP website to find their nearest office.

www.datsip.qld.gov.au/people-communities/regional-centres

For further information about the Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country protocols go to Queensland Cultural Capability Portal:

<http://datsima.govnet.qld.gov.au/datsimagovalnet/community-engagement/welcome-to-country>

