

Wine Australia

Acknowledgement of and Welcome to Country protocols

Wine Australia developed this guide to support awareness and knowledge around the use of Acknowledgement and Welcome to Country protocols.[1]

Why is this important?

Wine Australia encourages the use of the protocols to genuinely demonstrate awareness of and respect for the traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owners of the land.

This is important because it:

- educates audiences about Australia's cultural heritage
- demonstrates ethical and culturally aware practices
- recognises that Australian wine is a product of Country

What are the protocols?

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 Land, Culture and History.

A **Welcome to Country** can only be delivered by a Traditional Owner with ancestral ties to the land where the event is taking place (or an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who has been granted permission from the Traditional Owners). It generally occurs at the beginning of a formal event and may include various traditional cultural practices, such as singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English.

1. We gratefully acknowledge invaluable contributions and advice from Steven Warrior | Serving Country.
2. Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country - Reconciliation Australia

When should I be using the protocols?

What kind of event are you organising or hosting?	
Within your workplace **Examples:** • Larger staff briefings • Board meetings • Committee meetings • Team meetings during Reconciliation and NAIDOC weeks	An **Acknowledgement of Country** does not need to be included in every work meeting. The main thing to consider is that it's meaningful and appropriate to the context. We've provided some examples as a general guide.
Meetings or events with external attendees **Examples:** • Webinars • Events or launches • Trade tastings • Regional activities • Partnership events • Functions, conferences and other formal occasions • Activities with community or cultural importance	An **Acknowledgement of Country** is considered good practice, delivered by the host or Chair, or first speaker of the meeting. • If **multiple speakers** are present, once an acknowledgment is made, it is not necessary for every single speaker to continue to acknowledge (although some may choose to do so). • If you are in region you may prefer to ask the regional host to offer the Acknowledgement. • Depending on the size of the event, you may consider a **Welcome to Country** or **Smoking Ceremony**.
Large or significant event that is public-facing in Australia; warrants a formal ceremony, and has a budget.	A **Welcome to Country** can be considered when hosting an in-person event that includes a larger number of attendees from interstate, other regions, or overseas. This can only be delivered by **an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person from the traditional lands where the event is being held.**

Explanation of terms

Relationships to Country are complex and interrelated. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia is made up of many **different and distinct groups**, each with their own **culture, customs, language and laws**.

Traditional Owners/Custodians refers to individuals or groups who have historical connection, attachment and/or relationship to a **specific area of land.**

The specific area of land may be interchangeably referred to as Country or Place; where the spiritual essence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ancestors remains in the landscape, the sky and the waters[3]. Language group describes cultural groupings based on clan, social, nation or language[4].

The term **'custodian'** helps to express the point that both Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples have important responsibilities to their Country/Place, rather than a sense of the land and waters as their property. Elders in First Nations communities are custodians of cultural knowledge and law.

3. For example, Kaurna people of the Adelaide plains.
4. For example, there are about 29 clan groups of the Sydney metropolitan area referred to collectively as the Eora Nation.

What do I say?

In Australia

Not saying who the Traditional Owners are may be seen as tokenistic, so it is important to understand whose Country you are on.

While there is *no specific wording*, it is important to be sincere and focus on the inclusion and pronunciation of the country/language group you are acknowledging.

A typical acknowledgement uses this phrasing:

> ***"I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the [insert country/language group, e.g. Kaurna people / Gadigal people of the Eora nation], and I pay my respects to Elders past and present."***

Internationally

An acknowledgement, even when you are not from or based in Australia, can be delivered through the lens of respect:

> ***"We/I ... acknowledge(s) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodianship and connection to the lands and waterways across Australia and we pay our respect to their Elders past and present.***

Suggestions for online meetings and webinars

We encourage those hosting to find out who the Traditional Owners of Country are from where they are located, this will increase cultural awareness and understanding.

> ***I acknowledge that I am coming to you from the lands of the [insert country/language group]. I also acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which you all are joining from today. I pay my respect to Elders past and present and extend that respect to celebrate the rich cultural diversity of all First Nations people joining. I would like to encourage everyone to please share the Country you are joining from today in the chat.***

A note on acknowledging First Nations attendees

It is important to acknowledge *all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders* who gather at the event and not call out people individually (e.g. do not say 'Steven Warrior is here with us today').

> ***I acknowledge any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders joining us / in the meeting / on the call today, and their connections to land, sea, skies and community.***



Essential resources

AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia: will help you find the language, social or nation groups to use in your Acknowledgement of Country.

Pronunciation:
If you are unsure how to pronounce a name or a term, a google search will typically help you out.

Can I personalise my acknowledgement?

Yes, you can!

Acknowledgement of Country can be adapted and expanded to reflect different contexts.

Here are some ideas:

- Acknowledge the ongoing connection to land, waters, culture and community.
- Acknowledge and recognise that sovereignty has never been ceded.[5]
- Include personal reflections or how your work or event aligns with reconciliation or respect for Country, for example:
  - an author might acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the land's first storytellers
  - a meeting of scientists might Acknowledge the contributions and sophistication of First Nations knowledges.
- Participate in certified traditional language classes and seek permission to include language within your acknowledgement (see Resources section).

Important, please do not:

- Speak on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Over-personalise in a manner that shifts the focus away from First Nations sovereignty.
- Use cultural terms you don't understand or have permission to use, i.e. discuss song lines or lore.
- Conduct a Welcome to Country. Only traditional owners may conduct a Welcome to Country.

Examples:

I'd like to acknowledge the Peramangk people as the Traditional Custodians of the land we gather on today. I recognise their enduring connection to this Country – to the land, waters, and culture – and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

As someone who grows grapes on Peramangk Country, I'm personally grateful for the opportunity to learn and contribute here. I commit to listening, learning, and walking respectfully alongside First Nations communities.

5. Uluru statement from the heart

How do I organise or engage in a Welcome to Country?

Organising

A trusted list of companies that you can contact to organise a Welcome to Country:

- Adelaide: Kuma Kaaru
- Sydney: Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Melbourne: City of Melbourne
- Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Councils

Tips:

- Ensure you have allowed enough time to research, plan and book your Welcome to Country. It's recommended to book a Welcome to Country at least four weeks before your event, especially if it's a major public function.
- You may need to advise the purpose, theme, aim, audience and duration of your event.
- Payment for a Welcome to Country is standard practice.

Participating

If you are a speaker at an event following a Welcome to Country:

It is protocol to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, including the person who delivered the Welcome to Country. You may also choose to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, but this protocol may vary depending on the person who has delivered the Welcome and type of event, it is best to check beforehand if possible. The following is an example of how you might respond:

Thank you for welcoming us today (name). I also extend my respects to the Traditional Owners of this land and Elders past and present.

If you are attending an event where a Welcome to Country occurs:

Be present in the moment, respect the protocol and take time to reflect on what Reconciliation means to you. It is important to remember that being welcomed to Country is a privilege.

Resources and FAQs

Understanding the meaning behind the Welcome to Country

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 landowner group while on their Country.[6]

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, the meaning of Country is more than just ownership or connection to land, as Professor Mick Dodson explains:

> ***"When we talk about traditional 'Country'... we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal Australians... we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, Country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains. While they may all no longer necessarily be the title-holders to land, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are still connected to the Country of their ancestors and most consider themselves the custodians or caretakers of their land."***[7]

Today, obviously much has changed, and these protocols have been adapted to contemporary circumstances. However, the essential elements of welcoming visitors, connecting spiritually to the traditional lands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and offering safe passage remain in place.

Why is it important?

Incorporating acknowledgement protocols into meetings and events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Owners of land. It highlights the ongoing connection to place that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people have and shows respect for the Traditional Owners.

It is generally accepted that an Acknowledgement of Country is appropriate to conduct when referring to products produced in Australia. For example:

- As part of brand storytelling, particularly related to reconciliation, ESG, or Aboriginal partnerships.
- For wine, a product with a strong connection to place and terroir.
- In exported goods that communicate the Australian story.

What is 'truth-telling'?

Truth-telling enables a fuller and more accurate account of Australia's history. It necessarily acknowledges the historical silencing of injustices, colonial conflict, dispossession and ongoing impacts of colonisation on First Nations people.

It also promotes the strength, contributions and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

Truth-telling is fundamental to advancing reconciliation, but to be meaningful, **self-education** is pivotal work for truth and reconciliation. Should you wish to engage more deeply in this area, we offer the following:

- The courage to feel uncomfortable: what Australians need to learn to achieve real reconciliation
- Reconciliation Australia: truth telling

6. Tourism Australia
7. Reconciliation Australia

What about at a tasting?

It will be important to do your own research and ensure you refer to the land/s on which the grape and/or wine has been produced. You may need to speak with regional associations to ensure you are not mis-representing brand stories and connection to Country.

The following examples are offered, from the simple to more complex:

'The wines we are tasting were crafted on Ngadjeri Country'.

'We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the Yarra Valley, where this wine is grown and made. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and recognise that this always was and always will be Aboriginal land.'

'We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which these wines were grown and made. For tens of thousands of years, the Wurundjeri people cared for the lands, waterways, and skies, maintaining a deep spiritual and cultural connection to Country. We recognise their enduring relationship with the Yarra Valley and honour their custodianship of its landscapes and ecosystems. We pay our respects to Wurundjeri Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.'

Collaboration is best practice.[8]

- Where possible, co-create and consult directly with Elders, Knowledge Holders, or First Nations organisations.
- Stories, especially Dreaming or cultural narratives, should not be shared without informed, explicit consent. Public availability does not imply free use.
- Always **attribute and acknowledge** the Nation, community, or individual storyteller; ask how they would like to be credited as a first step.

Language resources

Taking the time to learn traditional language, and delivering your Acknowledgement of Country in language, is *generally* considered acceptable. However, we encourage you to participate in certified traditional language classes and note the following:

- Language can be a sensitive issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly for those who have been dispossessed of their country, their language and their families. Tread lightly and discuss ways of communicating in respectful ways.
- Avoid assuming the language backgrounds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in your community.
- Be aware of the local traditional custodians in your area as well as local community people and elders who have long histories in the area with strong connections.

Reference and more information: First Languages Australia

There are online resources, such as the Research Unit for Indigenous Language website. There is also a video series The sounds of Australian Aboriginal languages.

Useful snippet

"Niina marni?" is a Kaurna greeting meaning "Are you good?".

The appropriate response is "Marni ai," meaning "I am good." You can also use "Yaku marni ai" (meaning "so-so good I am") or "Kuku ai" (meaning "sick I am") if you are not feeling well.

Kaurna is an Aboriginal language from South Australia, spoken by the Kaurna people. [Kaurna is pronounced **gaa**·nuh].

8. Source: AIATSIS Code of Ethics, pp. 10–11, p. 16 and p. 17 sub-paragraph 1.9; Ethical Publishing Guidelines, pp.6–7