

Aboriginal Cultural Protocols Welcome to Country, Acknowledgment of Country and Smoking Ceremony

Purpose

The difference between a 'Welcome to Country' and an 'Acknowledgment of Country' is often not understood. It is important for those organising a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country to understand the differences between them and know who to contact for an Aboriginal Elder to conduct a welcome ceremony.

Statement

Georges River Council is committed to showing respect for Aboriginal people as Australia's First Peoples. Council, in collaboration with the Aboriginal Advisory Committee, is committed to working in genuine partnership promoting greater understanding of Aboriginal culture and protocols.

Council is adopting the practice of acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land at events, ceremonies, meetings and functions.

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is a statement of recognition of the Traditional Custodians of the land. An Acknowledgement of Country can be given by both Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal people.

Example 1

"I would like to acknowledge the Biddegal/Bidjigal/Bedegal people of the Eora nation who are the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which this (meeting/event) is taking place and pay my respects to the Elders past and present".

Example 2

"I would like to acknowledge the Biddegal/Bidjigal/Bedegal people who are the Traditional Custodians of this land and pay my respect to the Elders past, present and

emerging, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are present here today".

Welcome to Country

A 'Welcome to Country' is a formal welcome onto Aboriginal Land given by:

- an Elder/Aboriginal person who traditionally comes from that land, or
- an Aboriginal person who has been granted permission from the Local Aboriginal Land Council.

A 'Welcome to Country' can only be performed by a Traditional Custodian from that particular Country where the event is being held. This is usually a recognised Elder from the local community. The Elder welcomes people to their land.

Smoking Ceremony

A Smoking Ceremony is undertaken in Aboriginal communities in order to cleanse a space in which the ceremony takes place, so as to allow peace and recognise the importance of the occasion. The Smoking Ceremony is a purification ritual and is always undertaken by an Aboriginal Elder or an Aboriginal person with specialised spiritual and cultural knowledge.

Given the significant nature of the ceremony, a Smoking Ceremony is usually only performed on special occasions or at major events and places of spiritual significance.

It should be noted that a Smoking Ceremony is more appropriate for outdoor occasions due to ventilation requirements.

Aboriginal people may request a Smoking Ceremony in a workplace where a death or other traumatic event has occurred. This request is of tremendous significance to them and should be respected: failure to do so may cause significant distress.

Council's Community Development staff can provide contact details for suitable Aboriginal persons who can perform any of the above protocols.