



Welcome to Country Protocol

ANMF Federal Office Staff

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 safe passage, they also had to respect the protocols and rules of the land owner group while on their Country.¹

Preamble

The inclusion of a Welcome to Country at the commencement of a formal event is an important way of showing awareness and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising their unique position in Australian culture and history. Only an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Elder from the Country where the event is taking place may deliver a Welcome to Country ceremony.²

Importance of Welcome of Country

Reconciliation Australia, an Aboriginal-led organisation, articulates the importance of Welcome to Country as follows:

'Welcome to Country' is an important ceremony and inviting a custodian or elder to perform it helps non-Indigenous people recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced significant exclusion from Australian society for many years. Further, many non-Indigenous Australians have not had the opportunity to learn about, and celebrate, the rich cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This contributes to a disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians that persists today.

Incorporating Welcome and Acknowledgement protocols into official meetings and events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians, and the Traditional Custodians of the land.

It recognises the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first custodians of this land and, importantly, promotes awareness of the history and culture of Indigenous people. This increased awareness will help us create a more united Australia, which celebrates and embraces our First Australians.³

Guidance

A Welcome to Country should be performed at the commencement of each ANMF Biennial National Conference. The conference is hosted in a different state or territory each time, so the organisers

¹ Reconciliation Australia. *Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country*. Canberra: RA, [2018]. Viewed 12 August 2019 at https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/welcome_acknowledgement_v4.pdf

² Creative Spirits, Jens Korff, *Welcome to Country & Acknowledgement of Country*, viewed 02 January 2019 from <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/spirituality/welcome-to-country-acknowledgement-of-country>

³ Common Ground, viewed 20 February 2019 from <https://www.commonground.org.au/learn/acknowledgement-of-country>

must identify the appropriate Aboriginal Land Council to liaise with to arrange the Welcome to Country.

The way in which the Welcome to Country ceremony is conducted is negotiated between the Elder and the event organiser. It may be a speech or incorporate song, dance, music or a smoking ceremony. The ceremony will reflect the personality of the Elder engaged to conduct the Welcome.

Other significant national or international forums hosted by ANMF for which a Welcome to Country is appropriate include the South Pacific Nurses Forum and National Enrolled Nurses Association and any other forum conducted by Federal Office.

When arranging a Welcome to Country, it is important to:

- Find out the name of the Aboriginal group and nation where the event is taking place;
- Find out which Aboriginal Land Council to contact to arrange the Welcome to Country;
- Learn how to properly pronounce the name of the Aboriginal group and nation;
- Make planning the Welcome to Country a priority and provide plenty of lead-time for organising.

Signed by Chair:  Date: 20/02/19

This protocol should be read in conjunction with the ANMF Federal Office Acknowledgement of Country Protocol.