



Brotherhood
of St. Laurence

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country

Brotherhood of St. Laurence Protocols

Acknowledgement

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways on which our organisation operates and recognises First Nations culture as one of the richest and oldest continuous cultures in the world.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present.

We commit to actively listening and working alongside First Nations people to support reconciliation through our sphere of influence. We recognise the importance of ensuring First Nations voices are at the forefront of our actions.

BSL's vision for reconciliation

BSL's reconciliation vision is for a community where every person feels safe, respected and valued, and where cultural expressions are honoured.

We recognise reconciliation is a continuous, transformative journey - a living, breathing environment that emerges when commitment is translated into genuine action.

This vision is foundational to our Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2026-2028 and the cultural protocols in this document. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to engage with this practical and meaningful guidance, which supports understanding of how and why to organise a Welcome to Country and how to deliver an Acknowledgement of Country.

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Welcome to Country

A Welcome to Country is a ceremony performed by the Traditional Owners of the land, welcoming visitors to their community as a sign of respect and hospitality. Also known as a traditional welcome, it often takes the form of a speech by a local Elder or recognised member of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Dances and Smoking Ceremonies are also commonly part of a traditional welcome.

There is no particular way that a ceremony runs. There will be similarities, but each community approaches its Welcome to Country in a unique manner.

Why is a Welcome to Country important?

Traditional welcomes are not a recent development. Historically, and still today, a Welcome to Country enables Traditional Owners to ensure the safety of visitors while they are on their land.

A Welcome introduces people from outside the area to the land in an appropriate way: connecting the unknown (visitors) with the known (land) to build understanding and peace. Welcome to Country is delivered by Traditional Owners, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been given permission from Traditional Owners, to welcome visitors to their Country.

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have been 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 – like gaining a visa – and when that permission was granted the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering them safe passage. Today, much has changed, and these protocols have been adapted to contemporary circumstances, but the essential ingredients of welcoming visitors and offering safe passage remain in place.

When is a Welcome to Country appropriate?

It is generally accepted that a Welcome to Country is recommended for major or significant events of a formal nature.

Many organisations open these larger, formal gatherings with a Welcome to Country to show respect to the Traditional Owners of the land and to recognise that the meeting is happening on traditional land. It acknowledges the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to their Country.

The Welcome to Country ceremony is carried out at significant events functions involving people from other parts of the country, overseas or where important delegates have been invited.

How to organise a Welcome to Country

To organise and book a Welcome to Country, it's important to know the Traditional Owners of the land on which you are holding an event. BSL's protocol is for a Welcome to Country to be organised through the local [Registered Aboriginal Party](#). Contact details and supporting are available via the [Aboriginal Heritage Council website](#).

Remuneration: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the owners and holders of their culture and knowledge. When an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person chooses to work with you in any capacity (speech, dance, Smoking Ceremony, artwork, etc.) you should pay appropriately for their time and service. Prices for Welcome to Country, Smoking Ceremonies and other cultural practices vary.

Virtual Welcome to Country

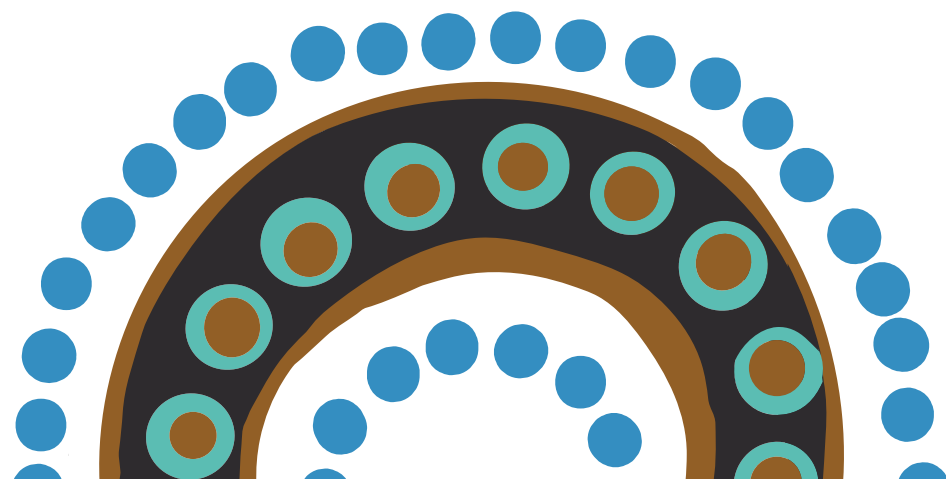
Much like you would organise a Welcome a Country face to face, you must discuss how Traditional Owners would like to conduct a virtual Welcome to Country through the appropriate Registered Aboriginal Party. The appropriate Registered Aboriginal Party for a Virtual Welcome to Country would be the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the meeting is being hosted from.

Smoking Ceremonies

A Smoking is an important part of any ceremony and can also be performed as its own ceremony. Usually at the beginning of a ceremony, it accompanies a Welcome to Country and assists in cleansing the area and the people of bad spirits and to promote the protection and well-being of visitors.

It is not just the smoke that is important in the ceremony, but also how the fire is lit and what is used to make it.

Traditionally, the Country on which the Smoking is taking place will determine which native leaves, bark and tools are used.



Registered Aboriginal Parties

A Registered Aboriginal Party is a Traditional Owner Corporation formally appointed under the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 to manage and protect Aboriginal cultural heritage within a defined area.

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council has 11 Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs), which covers about 75% of Victoria. The remaining 25% is considered contested lands or lands on which there is no government-recognised claim to traditional ownership.

In Melbourne, you will be on the lands of the Wurundjeri or Bunurong people. If you were organising a Welcome to Country in Fitzroy, you would contact the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Organisation. If you were organising a Welcome to Country in Frankston, you would contact the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

Likewise, if you were doing an Acknowledgement of Country in Fitzroy, you would acknowledge the Wurundjeri People. If you were doing an Acknowledgement of Country in Frankston, you would acknowledge the Bunurong People.

Formally recognised Traditional Owner Corporations and Traditional Owner names in Victoria

Formally recognised Traditional Owner Corporation	Traditional Owner name for Acknowledgements
Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation	Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk Nations
Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation	Bunurong People
Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation	Dja Dja Wurrung people
Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation	Eastern Maar People
First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee	First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee, being Latji Latji and Ngintait Traditional Owners
Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation	Gunaikurnai People
Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation	Gunditjmara People
Taungurung Clans Aboriginal Corporation	Taungurung People
Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation	Wurundjeri People
Wadawurrung Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation	Wadawurrung People
Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation	Yorta Yorta People

Contact details are available through the [Aboriginal Heritage Council website](#).

You can also view an [interactive map](#).

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is a way for people who are not the Traditional Owners of a particular area to show respect to those who are. It pays respect to the Elders of that area – both past and present. It can happen without a Welcome to Country and often does.

If Elders or Traditional Owners of the area are present, ensure you acknowledge any First Nations people present in the room and respectfully acknowledge any Elders that are present.

If you are unsure who is present at an event, how to pronounce names – or whether it is appropriate to acknowledge certain people at all – it is always best to ask the relevant people and organisations beforehand.

If there is no Registered Aboriginal Party, you can acknowledge the ‘Traditional Owners’ without citing a specific name.

Regardless of who is in attendance, it is good practice to respectfully acknowledge Elders past and present, and extend respects to any First Nations people present.

Why give an Acknowledgement of Country?

Offering an Acknowledgement of Country at meetings or events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of the lands and waterways now considered Australia. It promotes awareness of the past and ongoing connection to place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

When is an Acknowledgement of Country appropriate?

An Acknowledgement of Country should be made at formal events and meetings, for instance, at Board meetings and program openings. Smaller, less formal meetings may also begin with an Acknowledgement of Country.

At BSL, staff and volunteers are encouraged to adapt Acknowledgements of Country to all meetings. This should be done mindfully, with presence, supported by the following advice.

How to personalise your Acknowledgement of Country

At BSL, we encourage all staff to develop confidence in acknowledging Country in a way that feels respectful, genuine and meaningful. If you feel more comfortable reading an Acknowledgement of Country, that is always okay.

As part of our learning and everyday practice, we also encourage staff to gradually learn how to create their own Acknowledgement of Country. This helps build understanding, connection and confidence over time.



When acknowledging Country, we recognise:

- The Traditional Custodians of the land we are on.
- Elders past and present.
- Any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people present.

Personalising your Acknowledgement

Personalising an Acknowledgement is about noticing, reflecting and connecting. It does not need to be long or complex. Reflect on your own connection to the land, waters and place.

For example:

- This morning I could smell the grass after the rain, and I appreciate what Country provides.
- Yesterday I walked along Merri Creek a part of Country that I really value.
- On the weekend I spent time outside the city and enjoyed being on Country.
- I acknowledge Country and the sunshine we are sharing today.

Questions you could consider:

- What about Country connects to you personally?
Think about how the land, seas and waterways that connect to you. What is your favourite part of Country?

- What do you love to do on Country?
Share personal experiences you have on Country.
- Is there something you recently learnt about Country?
If the seasons are changing, consider what this means for the land on which you work and live. For example, Waring (or Warinj) is the Wombat Season in the Eastern Kulin Seasonal Calendar, spanning from April to July.

When we acknowledge Country, we are also acknowledging the land itself and the deep cultural, spiritual, and living connections Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with Country. This practice invites us all to be part of Country, to connect with the land we live and work on, and to show respect for our First People that have existed and continued culture for more than 65,000 years.

Take your time, have a try, see what feels comfortable and remember learning happens through practice.

Who should give an Acknowledgement of Country

It is best practice that the person leading the meeting is the one to give the Acknowledgement before the meeting begins. It is also appropriate to ask someone else in the meeting to conduct the acknowledgement. Anyone can give an Acknowledgement of Country.

If there is also a Welcome to Country, the first speaker or chairperson at an event or meeting after the Welcome should deliver the Acknowledgement of Country. Subsequent speakers may also give an Acknowledgement if they wish.

Virtual Acknowledgement

If you are hosting an online meeting you can acknowledge the lands on which you are on.

You can also extend those respects to the Traditional Owners of the lands others are joining the meeting from.



More information

Significant dates

26 January:	Survival Day; Day of Mourning; Invasion Day
13 February:	Anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations
19 March:	National Close the Gap Day
26 May:	National Sorry Day
27 May – 3 June:	National Reconciliation Week including Anniversary of 1967 Referendum (May 27) and Mabo Day (June 3), Baymob Expo and Victorian Aboriginal Remembrance Service
First full week of July:	NAIDOC Week (National Aboriginal and Islander Observance Committee)
4 August:	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day
9 August:	International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

Legislation

Legislation in Victoria recognises the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Section 19 (2) of Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act

Aboriginal persons hold distinct cultural rights and must not be denied the right, with other members of their community:

- (a)** to enjoy their identity and culture; and
- (b)** to maintain and use their language; and
- (c)** to maintain their kinship ties; and
- (d)** to maintain their distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters and other resources with which they have a connection under traditional laws and customs.

Flags



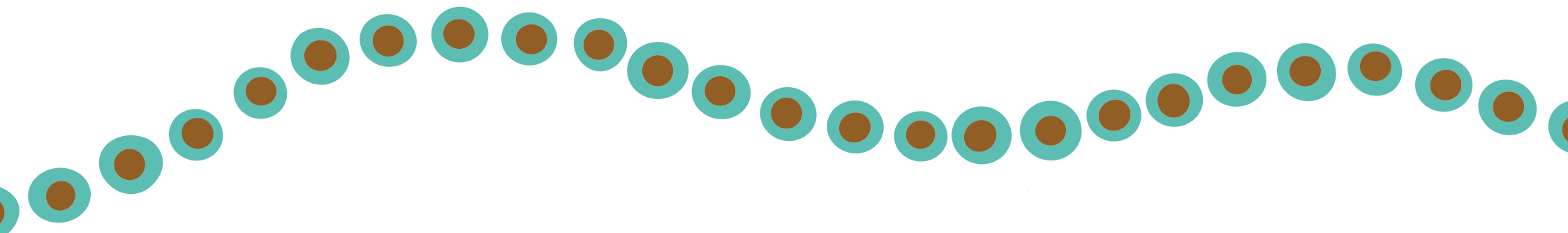
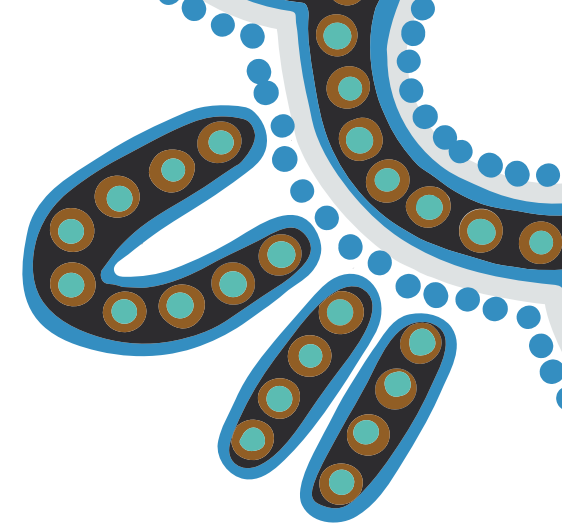
Aboriginal flag

The flag is divided horizontally into two equal halves of black (top) and red (bottom) with a yellow circle in the centre. The black symbolises Australia's Aboriginal people and the yellow circle represents the sun. The red represents the earth and people's relationship with the land. It also represents ochre, which is used in Aboriginal ceremonies in Australia. Harold Joseph Thomas designed the flag. It was first flown at Victoria Square in Adelaide on 12 July 1971.



Torres Strait Islander flag

The Torres Strait Islander flag stands for Torres Strait Islanders' unity and identity. It features three horizontal stripes, with green at the top and bottom of the flag and blue in between, divided by thin black lines. A white Dharri or Deri (a type of headdress) sits in the centre, surrounding a five-point star. The five-point star symbolises the island groups. The star is white, symbolising peace. The colour green represents the land. The Dharri symbolises all Torres Strait Islanders. The black represents the people and the blue represents the sea. The late Bernard Namok designed the flag in 1992.



References and resources

[Aboriginal Heritage Council](#)

[Aboriginal History of Yarra: Yarra City Council](#)

[Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies](#)

[Bunjilaka: Melbourne Museum's First People](#)

[Boon Wurrung Foundation](#)

[Deadly Story](#)

[First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria](#)

[First Peoples State Relations](#)

[Map: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies](#)

[Queensland Department of Education, Acknowledgement of Country resource](#)

[Reconciliation Australia](#)

[The Torch](#)

[Treaty](#)

[Victorian Aboriginal Business Directory](#)

[Victorian Aboriginal Corporation Languages](#)

[Victorian Traditional Owners map](#)

[Yoorrook](#)

Visit [BSL Connect](#) or bsl.org.au/rap to learn more



About the artist and artwork

Desert Meeting Places, 2025

This is my Country, the land on which we roam.

For thousands of years, my ancestors lived, hunted and flourished. This is desert Country, hot land.

The rivers have dried up until the next rain, and when it does rain, it pours down, with a big explosion of life and greenery.

Chris S

Yorta Yorta/Barkindji People

The Torch

The Torch is a not for profit First Peoples-led arts organisation that provides art, cultural, and arts industry support to First Peoples with lived experience of incarceration in Victoria.

Its core purpose is to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within Victoria's legal system through its Statewide Indigenous Arts In Prisons and Community Program.

First Peoples are supported to reclaim cultural connections through art and cultural practice. 100% of any artworks sold goes directly to the artist.



Brotherhood
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