

WELCOME TO COUNTRY & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Brotherhood of St Laurence Protocols



Brotherhood
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

Brotherhood of St Laurence's VISION FOR RECONCILIATION

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve an Australia free of poverty. We will work together, and learn from, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to build mutually respectful relationships and ensure the Brotherhood of St Laurence plays its part in advancing the rights, equality and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The Brotherhood's vision for Reconciliation helps to lay the foundation for this document.

The purpose of this document, which stems from our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2014–2017, is to give staff and volunteers practical and meaningful guidance on how to organise a Welcome to Country and how to deliver an Acknowledgement of Country.

These protocols form part of a wider effort by the Brotherhood of St Laurence to continue building effective and respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – the traditional owners of the land on which we live and work.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence, an organisation that has been tackling poverty since 1930, is deeply aware that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians suffer higher levels of social inequality, injustice, economic and social exclusion than any other group in our society. We also recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a rich and continuing linguistic and cultural heritage, and a strength and resilience that should be acknowledged and celebrated.

WELCOME TO COUNTRY

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What is a 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. Of course 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. A Welcome to Country can only be done by a recognised member of the traditional lands on which you meet.

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 – like gaining a visa – and when that permission was granted the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering them safe passage. Today, obviously 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.

- Reconciliation Australia Fact Sheet

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, indeed, 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.

It is recommended that major or official events hosted by the Brotherhood of St Laurence should begin with a Welcome to Country, particularly if the event holds significance for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

FITZROY

How to organise a Welcome to Country in Fitzroy

If the event is to be held at the Brotherhood's head office, or at another Brotherhood site in Fitzroy, contact the traditional owners of the land – the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council.

Level 1, Providence Building Abbotsford
Convent, 1 St Heliers Street Abbotsford,
Victoria 3067
Request a booking : [www.wurundjeri.com.au/
request-council-traditional-ceremony](http://www.wurundjeri.com.au/request-council-traditional-ceremony)
Phone: 03 9416 2905

Registered Aboriginal Parties: Disputed land in Melbourne and Fitzroy

While the Brotherhood recognises the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners of the Fitzroy area, it should be noted that Melbourne CBD land and the surrounding area immediately to the north – including Fitzroy – is currently contested. According to the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, which is responsible for appointing the official Registered Aboriginal Parties (land councils) for particular areas, both the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people claim Fitzroy as their land. Therefore, as it stands in early 2016, there is no official Registered Aboriginal Party that represents traditional owner interests for the Brotherhood sites in Fitzroy.

However, in 2007, the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, which sits within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, did recognise the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council as the Registered Aboriginal Party to the north and east of Melbourne, as well as tracts of land to the north-west of Melbourne.

[View the Wurundjeri Registered Aboriginal Party map](#)

[Learn more about Registered Aboriginal Parties](#)

After external consultation and internal discussion, the Brotherhood has decided to continue recognising and acknowledging the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners of the land on which the Fitzroy offices are located.

FRANKSTON

How to organise a Welcome to Country in Frankston

The Brotherhood has several sites in the Frankston area. All sites are located on the traditional land of the Bunurong people, who speak the Boon Wurrung language.

Similar to the current situation in Fitzroy, in early 2016 there is not yet an official Registered Aboriginal Party to represent traditional owner interests in Frankston and its surrounding areas. According to the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, several Bunurong organisations currently have a claim to become the Registered Aboriginal Party, which would officially permit them to represent the Bunurong people. It is not clear when this question will be settled.

After consultation, the Brotherhood has decided that if you are organising a Welcome to Country ceremony at a significant event in Frankston, you should contact the Boon Wurrung Foundation. Led by Boon Wurrung Elder Carolyn Briggs, the Foundation represents the First People of Port Phillip and Westernport Bays and south-east Victoria.

Boon Wurrung Foundation
208 Bank Street
South Melbourne
Victoria 3205
Email: info@boonwurrung.org.au
Phone: 03 9537 2222

OTHER LOCATIONS

What to do at other Brotherhood locations

If you are organising an event at another Brotherhood site (not in Fitzroy or Frankston) and decide to have a Welcome to Country ceremony, see our website for who to contact and which Aboriginal group to name. You will note that in many Brotherhood locations, this protocol advises to simply acknowledge "Traditional Owners" and not specify a particular Aboriginal group. This is because in these areas there is not yet a Registered Aboriginal Party to represent traditional owner interests. In these locations, this protocol also advises that you limit your recognition to a general Acknowledgement of Country.



Wurundjeri Elder Colin Hunter performing a smoking ceremony at the Brotherhood's National Sorry Day event on May 26, 2015



Singer-songwriter Kutcha Edwards (L) and Colin Hunter during the 2015 Sorry Day event

What is a smoking ceremony?

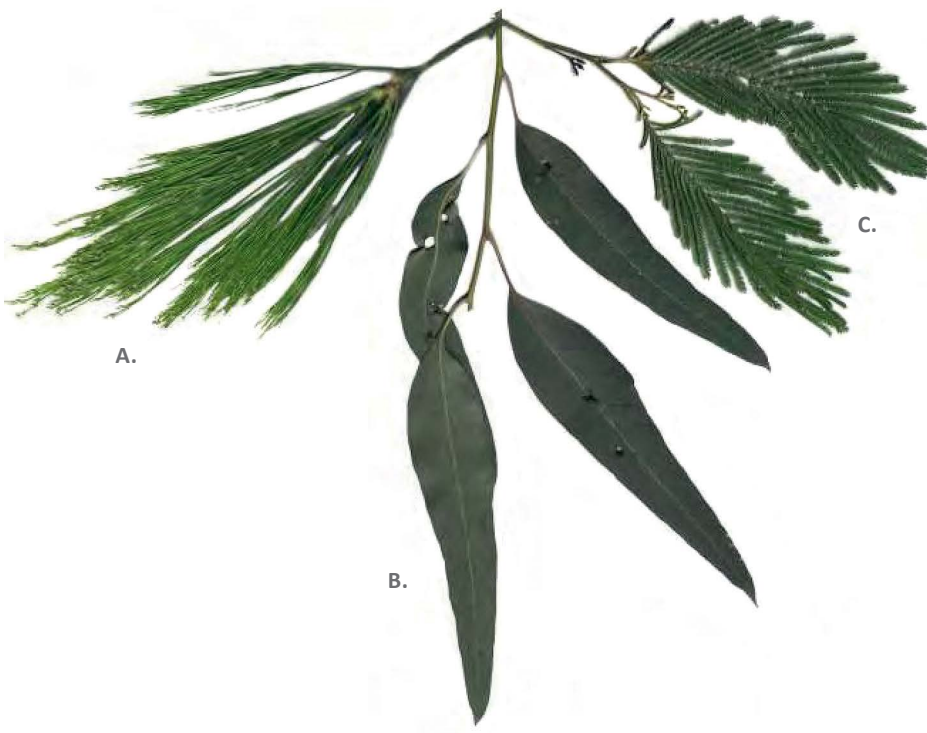
A smoking ceremony aims to cleanse the space where the event or meeting is taking place. It is performed by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who has specialised cultural knowledge, usually as part of a Welcome to Country or traditional welcome. The smoke comes from the burning of traditional leaves. Smoking ceremonies are usually performed at major events that have significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are also other types of ceremonies that can be performed at events. It is best to consult with the local Aboriginal community on which ceremony is appropriate for individual events.

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.

TANDERRUM CEREMONY

Traditional Wurundjeri Welcome to Country ceremony



A. BALLEE – CHERRY BALLART

Requires support when young (juvenile plants parasitic on Eucalypts) but strong and resilient
Symbolic of Youth

B. BIEL – RED RIVER GUM

This is the most dominant tree in Australia.
Symbolic of the entire community and offers respective access to the land and its resources

C. MUYAN – WATTLE

Vital to local clans, every part of the plant was used (seed, bark, gum).
Symbolic of Elders

Source: Royal Botanic Gardens, Aboriginal Resource Trail

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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What is an Acknowledgment of Country?

An Acknowledgement of Country, which can happen with or without a Welcome to Country, is a way for people who are not the traditional owners of a particular area of land to show respect to those who are. It pays respect to the Elders of that area – both past and present.

If Elders or traditional owners of the area are present, an effort should be made to get their names and titles and to acknowledge them. However, note that in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, you should not refer by name to those who have passed away.

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

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 Australians and custodians of their land. It promotes an 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 Acknowledgment of Country.

If there is a Welcome to Country, an Acknowledgment of Country generally follows. If there is no Welcome to Country then the event or meeting should start with an Acknowledgement.

Who should give the Acknowledgement of Country?

Following the Welcome to Country or if there is no Welcome, the first speaker or chairperson at an event or meeting should deliver the Acknowledgement of Country. Subsequent speakers, at a conference, for example, may also give an Acknowledgment if they wish.

What to say and who to acknowledge?

If you are clear about who the traditional owners are, you can say something like:

“I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the [particular group, e.g. Wurundjeri] people. And I would like to pay my respects to their Elders both past and present, and to Elders from other communities who may be here today.”

If you are unclear about who the traditional owners are, or if the area is shared or contested land, you can say something like:

“I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land [or country] on which we are meeting. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and to the Elders from other communities who may be here today.”

FITZROY

What to say in the Fitzroy area?

The Brotherhood recognises the Wurundjeri people, who speak the Woi Wurrung language, as the traditional owners of the land in Fitzroy. Your Acknowledgement of Country should reflect the following:

“I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people. And I would like to pay my respects to their Elders both past and present, and to any Elders from other communities who are here today.”

FRANKSTON

What to say in the Frankston area?

The Brotherhood recognises the Bunurong people, who speak the Boon Wurrung language, as the traditional owners of the land in Frankston. Your Acknowledgement of Country should reflect the following:

“I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the Bunurong people. And I would like to pay my respects to their Elders both past and present, and to Elders from other communities who may be here today.”

OTHER LOCATIONS

What to say at other Brotherhood locations?

Our website outlines which Aboriginal group to acknowledge. In many Brotherhood locations, this protocol advises to simply acknowledge “Traditional Owners” and not specify a particular Aboriginal group. This is because in these areas there is not yet a Registered Aboriginal Party to represent traditional owner interests, and therefore it is unclear which group should be acknowledged. Thus, you can acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, rather than specifying a particular Aboriginal group.

“I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land [or country] on which we are meeting. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and to the Elders from other communities who may be here today.”



MORE INFORMATION

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



Australian 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.

Significant dates

January 26	Australia Day; Survival Day; Day of Mourning; Invasion Day
March 21	Harmony Day
May 26	National Sorry Day
May 27 – June 3	National Reconciliation Week
June 3	Mabo Day
July 1	Coming of the Light Festival
First full week of July	NAIDOC Week (National Aboriginal and Islander Observance Committee)
August 4	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day
August 9	International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

The Kulin Nation: Traditional Owners of Central and Southern Victoria

Bunurong people | Boon Wurrung language | *Boon-wur-rung*
Of the bays and south coast

Jaara people | Dja Dja Wurrung language | *Ja-ja-wur-rung*
Of the north-west region and Loddon River area

Taungurung people | Taungurung language | *Tung-ger-rung*
Of the Koriella catchment and Goulbourn River area

Wathaurong people | Wathaurong language | *Wath-er-rung*
Of the western plains

Wurundjeri people | Woi Wurrung language | *Wu-rund-jeri*
Of the Birrarung (Yarra) catchment

All five groups are divided into smaller, land-owning communities.

Resources

[Information on the Kulin people: Victoria University](#)

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

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

[Boon Wurrung Foundation](#)

[Fact Sheet on Welcome to Country: Reconciliation Australia](#)

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

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

[Victorian Aboriginal Business Directory](#)

[National Sorry Day information](#)

[Victorian Aboriginal Corporation Languages](#)

The background is a solid orange color. Overlaid on this is a large, circular pattern of dots. The dots are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with some being yellow and others being a darker red-orange. The pattern is slightly blurred, giving it a soft, ethereal appearance.

Produced 2016, updated 2018
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