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Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Traditional Ownership Guidelines

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1. Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide guidance and advice in relation to the acknowledgement of our traditional Aboriginal custodians of the land.

2. Background

Federation Council recognises that the traditional caretakers and custodians of the land and their unique position in the history and culture of Federation Council.

The Bpangerang people were the original owners of the land and it is important that the position and responsibilities held by these people are duly recognised and incorporated into official protocol to enable everyone to share in Aboriginal culture and facilitate better relationships between Aboriginal cultures and facilitate better relationships between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal communities.

By incorporating Aboriginal ceremonies into official Federation Council events we are able to:

- Recognise and pay respect to Aboriginal peoples' cultures and heritage
- Communicate to all people of Australia the cultural heritage of Aboriginal peoples and to promote development of mutual respect and understanding
- Provide opportunities to witness and experience Aboriginal cultures first hand and to change perceptions by demonstrating that Aboriginal cultures are "living" and "enduring"
- Build and strengthen relations with Aboriginal peoples and their communities

3. Scope

These guidelines apply to all of council's official functions and events including workshops, public events, festivals and ceremonies.

4. Definitions

Welcome to country – Can only be made by an Aboriginal Traditional land owner. It is a statement of welcome to attendees.

Acknowledgement of country – can be made by someone (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal who is not a Traditional land owner. It is a statement of recognition.

5. Guidelines

The planning timetable for official events should where possible allow time for consultations and negotiations with Aboriginal communities, as well as discussions and decision-making within those communities.

5.1 Minimum requirements

When planning an official event, Federation Council Officers are encouraged to consult on:

- Appropriate ceremonies and performances;
- Aboriginal Elders and communities who are to be contacted;
- Contacts for Aboriginal cultural practice providers.

These consultations may be undertaken with:

- NSW Aboriginal Land Council;
- The Local Aboriginal Land Council;
- Recognised local Elders where the event is being held;

The minimum requirement for Federation Council events is for an *Acknowledgement of Country* ceremony to be undertaken.

5.2 Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is a way, that an Aboriginal person who is not a traditional owner or custodian of the land where the meeting or event is being held or, for non Aboriginal people, to respect Aboriginal heritage.

A representative of council, speaker or Master of Ceremonies or other can begin the meeting or event by acknowledging that the gathering is taking place in the country of the traditional owners. An example of an Acknowledgement of Country is:

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting today, the Bpangerang people, and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in this area. I extend that respect to Elders – past and present of the Bpangerang nations.

Acknowledging Elders

It is important that all speakers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, acknowledge any Elders in attendance prior to presenting or speaking.

5.3 Major Official Events

Consideration should be given for the inclusion of a Welcome to Country ceremony, where members of the public, representatives of Federation Council and other Government agencies and/or the media are present at official major Federation Council events which may include

- Important historic or culturally significant commemorations or major festivals
- Opening of major Federation Council owned or supported facilities
- Major launches of Federation Council programs
- Statewide or Regional meetings conducted by Federation Council
- Major and international sporting events where Federation Council is participating or is a major sponsor

Other ceremonies or practices may also be undertaken as considered appropriate and desirable by Aboriginal people, including dances and performances. However as indicated above, a Welcome to Country should be a key consideration for all major official events. Staff are reminded that appropriate consultations and negotiations should be sought as outlined under minimum requirements.

At events that are not official but where Federation Council is a major sponsor and where Aboriginal people believe it appropriate, negotiations are to be undertaken with the event organiser to incorporate some form of recognition of Aboriginal heritage into the event.

5.4 Welcome to Country

The Welcome to Country ceremony is to be undertaken ONLY by Elders, locally recognised Aboriginal community spokesperson or locally recognised cultural service provider.

There is no exact wording for Welcome to Country. As such, the content of the ceremony should be negotiated between the agency and the provider with reference to the nature of the event and community practices. Generally, providers offer participants local Aboriginal history and cultural information and will go on to welcome the delegates to the country.

The traditional owners/custodians are to be approached to undertake the Welcome to Country ceremony. This is dependent upon the location of the event and the practices of the local Aboriginal community. It is important to ensure that negotiations with the local Aboriginal community have occurred and that appropriate Aboriginal Elders are invited to undertake the ceremony.

Key Contacts:

Freddie Dowling

Local Aboriginal Elder and Director of Bpangerang Aboriginal Corporation Inc.

Email: tiannig@murrumbidgee.nsw.gov.au

Phone: 0439 571 320

[Local Aboriginal Land Councils](#) and Indigenous Coordination Centres or [PM&C Network's](#) are also key contacts for Elders, who may be able to undertake a Welcome to Country. If a Welcome to Country ceremony cannot be undertaken then an Acknowledgement of Country is to be conducted.

Response to Welcome to Country

The speaker who follows immediately after the Welcome to Country ceremony should provide a response. Part of the response should acknowledge the person who delivered the Welcome to Country.

The following text can be used in response to the traditional Welcome to Country:

I respectfully acknowledge the past and present traditional owners of this land on which we are meeting, the people. It is a privilege to be standing on country.

5.5 Other ceremonies

Departments within Federation Council may choose to include one or more of the following ceremonies when organising official events:

- Welcome to Country;
- Acknowledgement of Country;
- Other ceremonies such as “smoking ceremonies”;
- Personal or cultural histories;
- Dance or other performances.

Flags on display

Events at which flags are shown, the order of display from an audience perspective from left to right is, the Australian flag, NSW flag, the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag.

Cultural or personal histories

Aboriginal people are often asked to give personal or cultural histories to non-Aboriginal communities to create a greater understanding and awareness about Aboriginal history and culture. The guest speaker may be able to give

a personal account, talk on history and/or provide audiences with knowledge of Aboriginal cultural heritage and practices.

Dancers

Dancers are often used as part of 'Welcome' ceremonies. There are many professional Aboriginal dance troupes and individuals in NSW. Charges vary according to level of training, the size of the company, the nature of the dance required and whether the dancers charge by the hour or per performance.

Didgereedoo

Didgereedoo players are frequently used in 'Welcome' ceremonies to "call" speakers, special guests and the audience to begin the ceremony. A didgereedoo player may also be used as a soloist in other parts of the ceremony. It is never appropriate for a non-Aboriginal person to play the didgereedoo unless invited by an Elder.

Smoking ceremony

Smoking ceremonies are only to be conducted by Aboriginal people with specialised cultural knowledge. The ceremony aims to cleanse the space in which the ceremony takes place. Given the significant nature of the ceremony, smoking ceremonies are usually only performed at major events.

REMEMBER: to consult with the Aboriginal communities at all times on the best form of recognition and cultural practice ceremonies.

5.6 Intellectual Property

In providing cultural services such as Welcome to Country, artistic performances and ceremonies Aboriginal people are using their intellectual property. As such providers of these services should be appropriately remunerated. Appropriate remuneration and/or assistance should be negotiated between the cultural service provider and the event organiser.

5.7 Calendar

To assist in planning for events it is recommended that each Department of Federation Council discuss their proposed events in which Aboriginal ceremonies can be incorporated with Councils Community Events and Projects Officer.

6. References & Associated Documents

Acknowledgements to:

Freddie Dowling Bpangerang Elder and Director of Bpangerang Aboriginal Corporation Inc

Department of Education and Training – Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians

NSW Health – Welcome to country protocols Document

Clarence Valley Council – Welcome to country information

City of Sydney – Welcome to country information

7. Document History

Version	Date	Changes / Amendments
1	04/07/2017	New document for Federation Council

8. Reviews

To be reviewed annually after the first release and then as needed.

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