

1. Policy intent

That Council will have an inclusive, collaborative and sensitive approach to working with local Traditional Owner groups who are the custodians in the Local Government area.

2. Scope

This policy applies to elected Council members, employees, contractors and consultants who deliver services on behalf of Council.

3. Background/supporting information

- 3.1 The Tablelands Community Plan 2021 identifies social inclusion and wellbeing and cultural vibrancy as common goals for Tablelands communities. Council will contribute towards achieving these goals by the use of appropriate Aboriginal protocols and ceremonies as a means of promoting greater understanding of Aboriginal culture in the wider community.
- 3.2 Ceremonies and protocols are a fundamental part of Aboriginal culture. Two well known ceremonies that acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land are *Acknowledgement of Country* and *Welcome to Country*

4. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- 4.1 "Country" refers to the physical piece of earth or water that the event or meeting is taking place upon. For some Aboriginal people, "country" may also refer to the spirits, plants, animals, people and stories associated with that piece of land or water.
- 4.2 "Visitor" means any person who is not a traditional custodian of the relevant piece of country.

5. Policy statement

The purpose of *Welcome to Country* and *Acknowledgement of Country* is to facilitate better relationships between Aboriginal people and other Australians by recognising the unique role of Aboriginal people in Australian culture and history. Aboriginal people are the original custodians of the land. It is important this unique role is recognised and incorporated as part of official events protocol to enable the wider community to share in Aboriginal cultural heritage,

5.1 The difference between the two ceremonies

- 5.1.1 *Acknowledgement of Country* is like a knock on the door, whilst *Welcome to Country* is the invitation to come in.

- 5.1.2 *Acknowledgement of Country* is performed by the "visitor" and it respectfully communicates, "hello to you, the custodian of this place, here I am". Any person who does not have recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander ancestral links to the part of country in question is considered a visitor. Historically, when Aboriginal people were away from their home lands, they would perform an *Acknowledgement of Country* when going onto someone else's place. Traditionally they may have done this by lighting a small fire so the smoke would signal their presence. They would also speak an *Acknowledgement of Country* even if the traditional custodians weren't present, because it would be assumed their ancestors were listening.
- 5.1.3 In the modern context, an *Acknowledgement of Country* is generally conducted at the start of an important event or meeting which is attended by visitors. The acknowledgement may or may not be followed by *Welcome to Country* depending on the importance of the event and the wishes of the Traditional Owner groups.
- 5.1.4 *Welcome to Country* is a response to *Acknowledgement of Country*.
- 5.1.5 *Welcome to Country* can only be performed by the delegated "Elder/s" of the Traditional Owner group formally recognised as custodians of the country that the event is being held upon. *Welcome to Country* basically communicates, "it is OK for you to be here". Complex versions of the ceremony may establish mutual obligations of conduct and responsibility. Traditionally this might be done through dance, singing and the ritual exchange of gifts.

5.2 The 'Acknowledgement of Country'

- 5.2.1 *Acknowledgement of Country* is appropriate whether or not there are representative/s of the Traditional Owner group present.
- 5.2.2 *Acknowledgement of Country* is usually the first item of the agenda and is conducted at the beginning of public events or significant meetings. Although it is never inappropriate to do an *Acknowledgement of Country*, it may be waived for small, in-house or subsequent meetings of the same group in the same place.
- 5.2.3 In the absence of a Chair or Speaker, a senior official (such as the Mayor, a Councillor or Management) or otherwise officially designated master of ceremonies, it is the responsibility of the senior "host visitor" to perform an *Acknowledgement of Country*, on behalf of all assembled visitors.
- 5.2.4 For the purpose of this policy:
- a "visitor" is any person who is not a traditional custodian of the piece of country in question.
 - The "host visitor" is the person's holding the event / meeting.
- 5.2.5 Example Acknowledgement of Country:
- 'I would like to acknowledge the (traditional name of custodian group/clan) People who are the traditional custodians of this land we are meeting on. I would also like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present.'***
- 5.2.6 It is important to correctly identify which Traditional Owner group is recognised as the appropriate custodians for the piece of country. Seek advice from the Native Title and Cultural Heritage Officer (Plant and Facilities Management group). The National Native Title Tribunal website should be referred to for the latest Native Title claims or determinations. If a Native Title claim or determination has not been made, it is possible that custodianship is in dispute. If the name of the group is not known, the identity of the

appropriate group is unsure or there are assertions of multiple interest in the area (but no Native Title claims are lodged) it is best to be discrete and use the following general form:

'I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land we are meeting on and pay respect to their Elders both past and present.'

- 5.2.7 For example, for a meeting where there is a Native Title claim or determination covering the area, the specific Traditional Owner group name is used (i.e. the Tableland Yidinji in the Tolga area). Where there are no Native Title claims or determinations covering the area, the general form of the Acknowledgement should be used, unless there is agreement from the groups that multiple names can be mentioned i.e. for Atherton township name both the Tableland Yidinji and the Ngadjon Jii People.
- 5.2.8 At major functions where official guests and dignitaries are in attendance, the Acknowledgement of Country may be responded to by a pre-arranged Welcome to Country.
- 5.2.9 If it is to be followed by a Welcome to Country, or some other response from Traditional Owners, the following example Acknowledgement of Country is appropriate:
- 'I would like to acknowledge the (traditional name of custodian group/clan) People who are the traditional custodians of this land we are meeting on. I would also like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present. I am honoured to introduce (name of person) to speak to us on behalf of the (name of traditional custodians) today.'***
- 5.2.10 Although the Acknowledgement of Country is only conducted in person and on site, the acknowledgement of Traditional Owners may be appropriate in some circumstances on published material. Advice of the Council's Media and Communications Officer should be sought.

5.3 The 'Welcome to Country'

- 5.3.1 A *Welcome to Country* is where the Aboriginal traditional custodians welcome people to their land. Steps should be taken to ensure that the appropriate representative is invited to perform the welcome, because it is a significant recognition and a formal process. A *Welcome to Country* should always occur in the opening ceremony of the event in question, preferably as the first item with the *Acknowledgement of Country*.
- 5.3.2 The *Welcome to Country* is conducted by a representative/s of the local Aboriginal custodians who welcome the delegates and all in attendance. Protocols in relation to the performing of the *Welcome to Country* ceremony are well established in many Aboriginal communities. Seek advice from Council's Native Title and Cultural Heritage Officer regarding the correct Traditional Owner group and any established protocols relating to the group.
- 5.3.3 If there is any uncertainty regarding which group is the acknowledged traditional custodian, or if a dispute arises between Aboriginal individuals or groups at any stage, do not proceed with the *Welcome to Country*. It is much better to politely withdraw from the process and not conduct the *Welcome* than to proceed with the wrong people.
- 5.3.4 A *Welcome to Country* may consist of a single speech by the representative of the Aboriginal custodian group, or it may also include a performance of some description. Performances may include a traditional song and/or, a didgeridoo performance or a combination of rituals. In most communities, there are performing artists who are regularly available for such occasions.

5.4 Negotiating a 'Welcome to Country'

- 5.4.1 Initiation of negotiations to perform a *Welcome to Country* ceremony is to occur through Council's Events Coordinator.
- 5.4.2 The Traditional Owners of the land, usually a senior representative of the local Aboriginal community, should be invited to undertake the *Welcome to Country* ceremony. This will be dependent upon the location of the event and the practice of the local Aboriginal community. Steps should be taken to ensure that the appropriate Aboriginal Traditional Owner group is asked to nominate their ceremonial representative. It is important that the group decides who is their representative and that the representative is involved from the outset and is comfortable with the arrangements.
- 5.4.3 Please liaise with the Native Title and Cultural Heritage Officer to confirm the appropriate Traditional Owner group as per the National Native Title Tribunal determination map or to request an update from the North Queensland Land Council (NQLC). The NQLC is able to provide advice and information about how to make contact with the correct Traditional Owners for an area.

6. Payment for Welcome to Country

- 6.1.1 Where it is agreed appropriate, Council will arrange transport (or reimbursement of transport costs) for the attendees (Elder/s and other members of the Traditional Owner group). Council will ensure that refreshments are provided.
- 6.1.2 Payments for *Welcome to Country* are not Council policy. Any exception would need to be negotiated on a case by case basis and with reference to Council's Indigenous Land Use Agreements with Traditional Owner groups.
- 6.1.3 Remuneration or reimbursement arrangements may be appropriate for enhancement services if the *Welcome to Country* includes a performance by a professional troupe or requires special resources. This would only be appropriate for a large, unique event involving dignitaries or exceptional circumstances. Special arrangements must be negotiated with the Traditional Owner group prior to the event and should be formalised in writing.

7. Cultural protocols to be observed

- 7.1.1 There are certain Indigenous protocols that should be observed:
- a. The practice of not mentioning the name of a deceased Aboriginal person, or displaying photographic images of a deceased person unless agreed to by the relevant family;
 - b. Sensitivity to knowledge that is specific to gender (commonly referred to as 'Women's Business' or 'Men's Business').
 - c. Appropriate acknowledgement of guest artists that are either from or supported by the local community.
- 7.1.2 In most cases, members of the Aboriginal community will advise staff of intrusive behaviour and/or if they are not permitted to discuss the protocol or ceremony with staff because of age, gender, status or because staff do not belong to their Clan or Tribal Group.

8. Responsibility

Council is responsible for the adoption, amendment and repeal of the Policy and the Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the development and amendment of any associated procedures and guidelines relevant to the Policy.

9. Review

It is the responsibility of the General Manager Organisational Services to monitor the adequacy of this policy and recommend appropriate changes. This policy will be formally reviewed every three years or as required by Council.

This Policy is to remain in force until otherwise amended/repealed by resolution of Council.

JUSTIN COMMONS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER