

# Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country Policy

**Date Adopted:** 24 July 2018

**Version:** 3.1

## Policy Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to establish a consistent process for Council to:

- a) Observe the appropriate protocols for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- b) Foster cultural practices and facilitate relationships in the broader community promoting respect and understanding.

## Policy Scope

This policy applies to the General Manager, Mayor, councillors, delegates and all staff of Maitland City Council. Council contractors and volunteers are also required to observe this policy when presenting on behalf of Council at meetings, functions or events.

## Policy Statement

The Maitland Local Government Area is within the traditional lands of the Wonnarua people.

A Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country in a range of forms are applicable to Council related civic and business activities as outlined in this document. The type of recognition selected should be appropriate to the nature and size of the event.

### 1. Why is Welcome To and Acknowledgement of Country Important

‘Incorporating Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country protocols into official meetings and events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and custodians of their land. It promotes awareness of both the past and ongoing connections to place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ (Reconciliation Australia 2013).

Ceremonies and protocols are a fundamental part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Valuing and respecting these ceremonies is imperative to understanding and mutual respect for cultural practices.

### 2. Welcome to Country

‘A Welcome to Country is a ceremony performed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to welcome visitors to their traditional land. It can take many forms, depending on the particular culture of the Traditional Owners. It can include singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English’ (Reconciliation Australia 2013).

The Welcome to Country must be conducted by a recognised Elder or other appropriate representative from the local Wonnarua community.

Council recognises that Welcome to Country is a service and as such a fee is payable.

A Welcome to Country will be requested to be performed at:

- The first ordinary Council meeting held following an election
- The Australia Day official ceremony
- Riverlights Multicultural Festival
- Any other appropriate civic event.

### **3. Acknowledgement of Country**

‘An Acknowledgement of Country is a way of showing awareness and respect for the Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Owners of the land on which a meeting or event is being held, and of recognising the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to their Country’ (Reconciliation Australia 2013).

An Acknowledgement of Country will be performed at:

- Every Council meeting
- Civic welcomes and receptions
- When an officer or representative of Council officiates at an event.

The Acknowledgement of Country is to be performed at the beginning of the proceedings. The person performing the Acknowledgement of Country should ensure it is appropriate to the type and size of the event. Once an Acknowledgement of Country has been performed, it is not required for any further speakers at the same event to re-perform the acknowledgement.

Aboriginal people can subsequently determine themselves if they wish to do their own acknowledgement on the grounds of cultural obligation.

There are no set protocols or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, however, Council’s suggested statement is as follows:

‘I acknowledge the Wonnarua People as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. I pay respect to all Aboriginal Elders, past, present and future with a spiritual connection to these lands’.

### **4. A written Acknowledgement of Country**

Council produces a variety of publications, both printed and online, across a diverse range of services.

Council will include a written Acknowledgement of Country in the following publications:

- Council’s corporate website and other appropriate organisational websites
- Council’s Integrated Planning and Reporting publications
- Other appropriate strategies and publications of Council.

There are no set protocols or wording for a written Acknowledgement of Country, however, Council's suggested statement is as follows:

'We acknowledge the Wonnarua People as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land within the Maitland Local Government Area. Council pays respect to all Aboriginal Elders, past, present and future with a spiritual connection to these lands'.

In addition, Council will affix a written Acknowledgement of Country, in a prominent location near the entry to the following Council facilities: Council administration building, Council depot administration building, Council's branch libraries, Maitland Regional Art Gallery, Maitland and East Maitland Pools, Maitland Visitor Information Centre and other facilities as appropriate.

There are no set protocols or wording for a written Acknowledgement of Country affixed to facilities, however, Council's suggested statement is as follows:

'We acknowledge the Wonnarua People as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land upon which this building stands.'

From time to time, in particular cases, it may be appropriate for a single written Acknowledgement of Country to vary from the above options. A request to vary a written acknowledgement must first be approved by the General Manager of Maitland City Council, and subsequently by Mindaribba LALC.

## References

Reconciliation Australia

[https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/welcome\\_acknowledgement\\_v4.pdf](https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/welcome_acknowledgement_v4.pdf)

## Policy Definitions

**Aboriginal people:** The Australian Human Rights Commission 2005 defines an Aboriginal Person as 'someone who:

- Is of Aboriginal descent
- Identifies as an Aboriginal Person; and
- Is accepted as an Aboriginal person by the community in which he or she lives.'

**Acknowledgement of Country:** 'An Acknowledgement of Country is a way of showing awareness and respect for the traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Owners of the land on which a meeting or event is being held, and of recognising the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to their Country' (Reconciliation Australia 2013).

**Events:** Includes Council meetings, civic functions, Council committees, presentations, forums, speeches and other functions where the public are present and there is an official ceremony or opening.

**Torres Strait Islander:** The Australian Human Rights Commission define Torres Strait Islander Peoples as descending from the Islands of the Torres Strait.

**Welcome to Country:** 'A Welcome to Country is a ceremony performed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to welcome visitors to their traditional land. It can take many forms, depending on the particular culture of the Traditional Owners. It can include singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English' (Reconciliation Australia).

## Policy Administration

<b>Business Group:</b>	Office of the General Manager
<b>Responsible officer:</b>	Office Manager, Office of the General Manager
<b>Council reference:</b>	Ordinary Council Meeting 24 July 2018
<b>Policy review date:</b>	Three (3) years from date of adoption
<b>File number:</b>	35/1
<b>Relevant legislation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)</li> <li>• Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW)</li> </ul>
<b>Related documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of Meeting Practice</li> <li>• Special Events Policy</li> </ul>

## Policy History

VERSION	DATE APPROVED	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGES
1.0	12 June 2012	New policy adopted
2.0	24 November 2015	Periodic review of policy
3.0	24 July 2018	Periodic review of policy
3.1	-	Updated to new branding and alignment to organisation structure. No change to content.