

WGL Acknowledgement of Country Guidelines:

For use at meetings, programs, and events - both on site and via remote delivery

December 2020

Our Child Safety Commitment:

West Gippsland Libraries is committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of All children and young people



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WGL Acknowledgement of Country – Guidelines

These guidelines about West Gippsland Libraries protocols for Acknowledgement of Country were endorsed by the West Gippsland Libraries Board, in a lengthier report at the meeting of December 4th, 2020. This document provides guidance in specific situations and background information in support of the guidelines. Victorian State Government direction may seem clear on the appropriate ways to acknowledge and convey respect for country; it is a complex and nuanced topic and there are several sensitivities within Gippsland which should be approached in a balanced and respectful manner. West Gippsland Libraries is committed to ongoing conversations with Elders and communities. As a local government organisation, we believe that following current State Government guidance, while remaining aware of being respectful to all stakeholders, is how we should proceed.

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1. Overall Recommendations

(Please note - Further guidance about correct use of names of Traditional Owners is provided elsewhere in the guidelines)

For meetings or events held on site or in physical locations:

If a Registered Aboriginal Party [RAP] is recognised for the location, a SPECIFIC acknowledgement of country should be used:

SPECIFIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the [insert Traditional Owner name] people. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging, and to Aboriginal Elders of other communities who may be here today

Note: If there is not a Registered Aboriginal Party recognised for the area, a GENERAL acknowledgement of country should be delivered:

GENERAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging and the Aboriginal Elders of other communities who may be here today.

For meetings or events held remotely or online:

For remote delivery, a similar approach to that listed above can be taken, examples as follows:

If there is a recognised Registered Aboriginal Party for the land on which the host is hosting or recording the online event:



I/we acknowledge that I/we am/are hosting this program/event/meeting from the lands of the [insert Traditional Custodians name] people. I/we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which you all work and live today and welcome Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be participating. I/we pay my/our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

If there is **not** a Registered Aboriginal Party for the land on which the host is hosting or recording the online event:

I/we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which we all live and work and welcome Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be participating. I/we pay my/our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

2. Background

The WGL Acknowledgement of Country was raised for consideration at the September 2020 board meeting and it was considered timely to re-visit the topic and make suitable recommendations. It is important to note that while the terms 'Acknowledgement of Country' and 'Welcome to Country' are sometimes used interchangeably in everyday use; they are, in fact, quite different concepts and serve different purposes. Our focus, in these instructions is on the 'Acknowledgement of Country'. The following explanation clarifies the different terms.

3. What is an Acknowledgement of Country and how is it different to a 'Welcome to Country'?

Acknowledgement of Country.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be delivered by anyone or any organisation and conveys respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to country. This type of acknowledgement can be given by both non-indigenous people and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are no set protocols or templates or words which must be used for an Acknowledgement of Country. Acknowledgements are often general in nature and are often said at the start of a meeting or speech. Specific Acknowledgements also occur, whereby Traditional Owners and nations from geographic areas are mentioned.

Welcome to Country:

A 'Welcome to Country' is **only** delivered by Traditional Owners, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been given permission from Traditional Owners, to welcome visitors to their country. This welcome has been a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and cultural practice for thousands of years. It can take the form of a spoken or ceremonial welcome.

Aboriginal Victoria and State Government of Victoria information and recommendations:

'...The Victorian Government seeks to support the formal recognition of Traditional Owners across Victoria. Formal recognition ensures Traditional Owners are afforded the rights, responsibilities, and benefits as the First People of Country, and provides the broader community with certainty about who are the Traditional Owners of Country.'

The formal recognition processes uphold the self-determination of Traditional Owners to reach their own agreements about extent of Country... Welcomes to Country should be performed by formally recognised Traditional Owners on their land...'

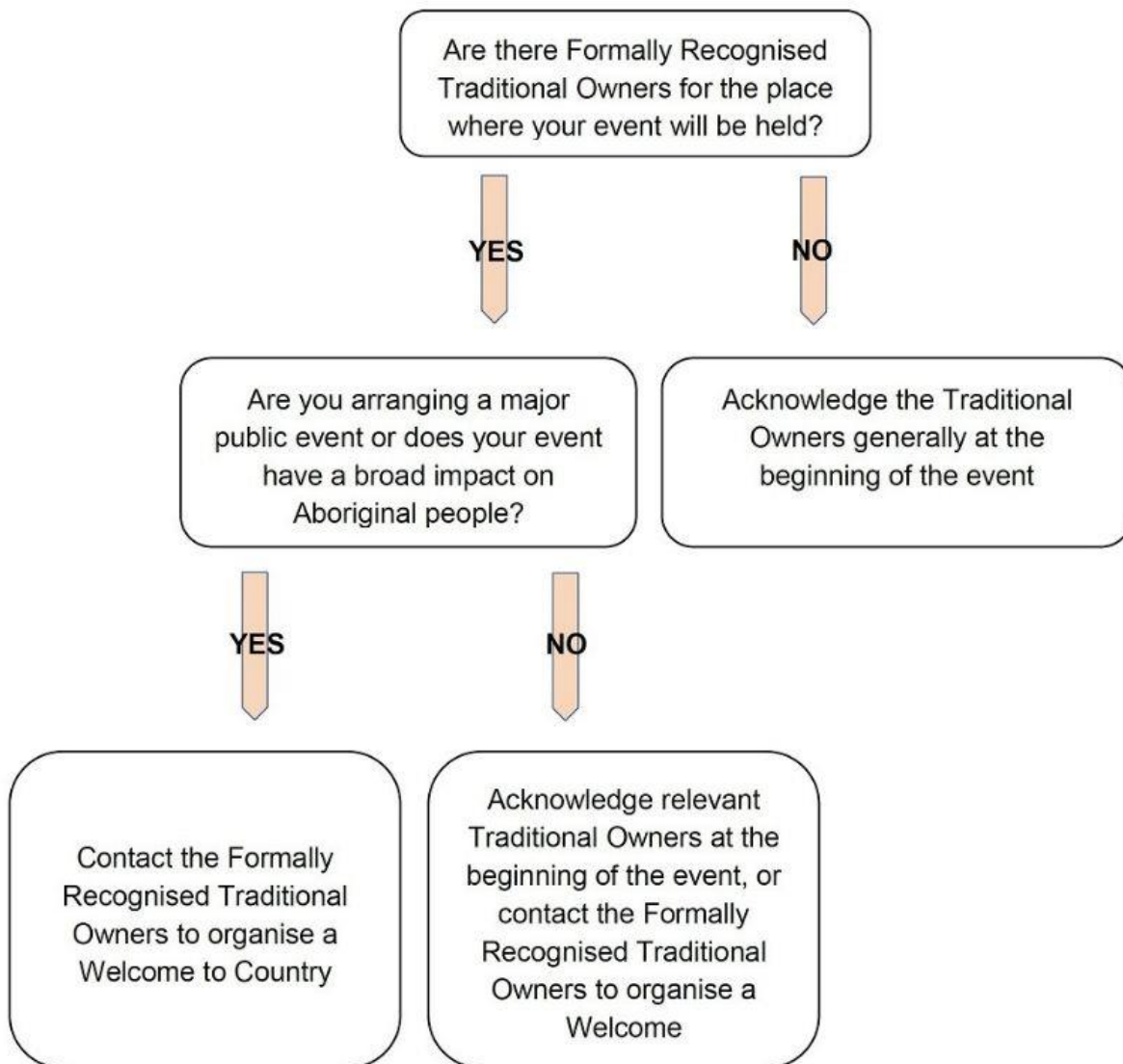
'...A *specific* Acknowledgement, or request for a Welcome to Country, is not recommended in areas where formal recognition has **not** occurred as it may:

- Privilege one group's interests in Country over other groups
- Pre-empt the outcomes of formal recognition processes
- Lead to disputes between groups who have an interest in or association with Country...'

4. Infographic from State Government – Aboriginal Victoria Infographic

Advice from the State Government via Aboriginal Victoria is clear, and represented by the following infographic:





<https://www.aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au/acknowledgement-traditional-owners>

At present, there are not formally recognised Traditional Owner groups for approximately 37.5% of Victoria. There are 11 formally recognised Traditional Owner Corporations or 'Registered Aboriginal Parties' [RAP] covering 62.5% of the state.

Maps of the Formally Recognised Traditional Owner groups are available at <https://www.Aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au>

5. Why are these protocols important?

Material from 'Reconciliation Australia' and 'Aboriginal Victoria' reminds us that: '...Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced a long history of exclusion from Australian History books, the Australian flag, the Australian anthem and for many years, Australian democracy...'

In the area now known as Gippsland, there is a similar long history of dispossession, removal of lands and the forced re-location and removal of communities, children, and families. Cultural erasure is a phrase that is also



used to describe the gradual removal or loss of traditions, customs, and language. Including this type of recognition or acknowledgement of country into official meetings and events reminds us all that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Australians and the custodians of the land. In our region there is a mix of both Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP) and several traditional owner groups that are not formally Registered Aboriginal Parties. We need to remain mindful about unwittingly excluding a community, by consulting with another community.

The following local thinking points have arisen from research through Aboriginal Victoria, Reconciliation Australia, the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council and from conversations in 2020 with Aunty Doseena Fergie (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategic Advisor – Bass Coast Shire Council).

- An acknowledgement of country (whatever the chosen words are) needs to be delivered in a meaningful, respectful, welcoming, genuine, and sincere way. It is about stopping to think about where we are, and that we are on Aboriginal lands.
- Boundaries between different Aboriginal communities and groups are not always represented in a meaningful way on a drawn map. There are many sensitivities within communities across Gippsland (and more broadly)
- Sometimes, a more general or broad statement (if it is meaningful and genuinely presented) can be good to use
- Some of our townships and areas are very close to boundaries of different Registered Traditional Owner organisations
- Some Aboriginal Organisations are known as Land Councils but may not be formally recognised as a Registered Aboriginal Party or may have had an application declined by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council.
- The Gunaikurnai Lands & Water Aboriginal Corporation are part of a formally recognised RAP area but have listed 'country of interest' areas which extend beyond the formal RAP map and includes land that Gunaikurnai have connection to. [https: www.gunaikurnai.org.au](https://www.gunaikurnai.org.au)
- Any acknowledgement is about **honouring** communities and community leaders

6. Townships and physical sites or service areas within WGL and Recognised Traditional Owners or Registered Aboriginal Parties

Township or area	Formally Recognised TO or RAP	Names to use in acknowledgement	Use of General or Specific acknowledgement	Notes
Warragul	Gunaikurnai Lands & Water Aboriginal Corporation (GLAWAC)	Gunaikurnai people	specific	
Drouin			General	Traditional Owners have not been formally recognised for parts of this area
Foster			General	Traditional Owners have not been formally recognised for this area
Inverloch	Bunurong Land Council	Bunurong people	Specific	
Leongatha	Bunurong Land Council	Bunurong people	specific	



Korumburra	Bunurong Land Council	Bunurong people	specific	
Mirboo North	GLWAC	Gunaikurnai people	specific	
Neerim South			General	Traditional owners have not been formally recognised for this area
Cowes	Bunurong Land Council	Bunurong people	Specific	
Poowong	Bunurong land Council	Bunurong people	Specific	
Wonthaggi	Bunurong Land Council	Bunurong people	Specific	
Welshpool	GLAWAC	Gunaikurnai people	Specific	
San Remo	Bunurong Land Council	Bunurong people	Specific	
Grantville	Bunurong Land Council	Bunurong people	Specific	
Erica	GLAWAC	Gunaikurnai people	Specific	
Longwarry			General	Traditional Owners have not been formally recognised for this area
Nyora	Bunurong Land Council	Bunurong people	Specific	
Rawson	GLAWAC	Gunaikurnai people	Specific	
Thorpdale	GLAWAC	Gunaikurnai people	Specific	
Trafalgar	GLAWAC	Gunaikurnai people	Specific	
Willow Grove	GLAWAC	Gunaikurnai people	Specific	
Yarragon	GLAWAC	Gunaikurnai people	Specific	

7. If your program, meeting, or event is taking place somewhere not listed in the table above:

If a program or meeting is being delivered at a location not listed above, the recommendation is that the responsible team member check the interactive map at <https://www.aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au> to determine if a general or specific acknowledgement is required.



Policy and legislation

Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006

References:

Reconciliation Australia
Bunurong Land Council
Gunaikurnai Lands & Water Aboriginal Council
Aboriginal Victoria – State Government of Victoria
Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health organisation
Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council
Maggolee – Local government and Aboriginal communities working together
Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Action Plan 2016
Local Government Victoria
Baw Baw Shire, South Gippsland Shire and Bass Coast Shire.

Next Revision is due in December 2022

