

# FAQs - Acknowledgement / Welcome to Country –

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## 1. Why are Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country important?

The inclusion of a Welcome to Country or an Acknowledgement of Country

- is a culturally appropriate way to show respect for First Nations peoples key defining cultural lore, and histories
- contributes to the cultural inclusivity and safety of the function/event/ministry

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.

This history of dispossession of lands as a result of colonisation lies at the heart of the disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians today.

Including recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in events, meetings, and national symbols, firstly acknowledges this history and is one part of ending the exclusion that has been so damaging.

Incorporating welcoming and acknowledgement protocols into official meetings and events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians, and the Traditional Custodians of the land. It promotes an ongoing connection to 'place' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and shows respect for Traditional Custodians.

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## 2. Is an Acknowledgement of Country the same as a Welcome to Country?

No.

Understanding the difference and the surrounding protocol is important.

See following FAQs.

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## 3. What is meant by Welcome to Country?

Traditionally, 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.

When permission was granted, the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering them safe passage and protection of their spiritual being during the journey.

While visitors were provided with a safe passage, they also had to respect the protocols and rules of the land custodian group while on their Country.

Today, these protocols have been adapted to fit with contemporary life. However, the essential elements of welcoming visitors and offering safe passage remain in place.

A Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of a formal event, and can take many forms, including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies, or a speech in traditional language and/or English.

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## 4. Can anyone deliver a Welcome to Country?

No.

As distinct from an Acknowledgement of Country, only Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Elders (of their traditional land), or a Traditional Custodian who has been given permission, can welcome visitors onto their traditional land.

This is akin to who has authority to 'welcome' people into your 'home'. This is usually restricted to those whose home it is. Therefore usually, the neighbour or other person (unless they have been authorised) is

not in a position to welcome people into your home. Of course the neighbour, as well as others are able to 'acknowledge' who are the owners of your home.

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### **5. What is an Acknowledgement of Country?**

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for each one of us to show respect for Australia's Traditional Custodians, and the continuing connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to the land, sea, sky and waterways.

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### **6. Do you need to be an Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander to give an Acknowledgement of Country?**

No.

Anyone can deliver an Acknowledgement of Country, Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

This is a powerful statement when the delivery is genuinely heart-felt and respectful.

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### **7. On what occasion is a Welcome to Country delivered and for what occasion, an Acknowledgement of Country?**

There are no set protocols. It is a decision of the group hosting the event. However, the following may guide the decision.

**Welcome To Country:** Is usually used on more formal occasions, for example, opening of a conference; moving into new premises; commencing the construction or at the dedication of a new building; at a significant function/event, or similar. They require delivery by a Traditional Elder who holds the Traditional Cultural knowledge. It is usual for a fee to be charged for this service.

**Acknowledgment of Country:** Is used in less formal occasions, for example, at beginning of regular meetings as determined by group. Any one, appropriately prepared and with genuine purpose to honour the intent of the Acknowledgement, can provide the delivery. Personal Acknowledgements are often used, by speakers at conference.

Acknowledgements are more frequently delivered than a Welcome to Country.

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### **8. Is there set wording that needs to be used for an Acknowledgement?**

No, but inclusion of the following key concepts are guidelines for a recommended format:

As a Christian...

Begin with confessing/acknowledging the sovereignty of God (as creator of all). The word creator connects cultures.

Acknowledging the Traditional Custodians (identify if known) and the continuing importance of Country to them. Culturally, Country from First Nations perspective is inclusive of land, waterways, and skies, encompassing all that are contained within. Country is pivotal to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.

Acknowledging the Traditional Elders and their past, present and continuing cultural role they have. This recognition is given because of the important role Elders have held, and continue to hold as the authority on the traditional cultural knowledge and their responsibility to share this amongst the members of their First Nations community.

Where possible providing some connection to the context of the occasion ties the acknowledgement to the event/meeting/occasion.

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### **9. Are there examples of a respectful Acknowledgement of Country?**

Below are two examples adapted for use within a Christian context [Original Source: Reconciliation Australia]

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General: I begin by acknowledging God the Father, creator of all, who in His sovereignty entrusted the care and protection of the land on which we meet today to the Traditional Custodians of this nation. I recognise the continuing connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to the land, sea, sky and waterways. I pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Specific (where the name of the Traditional Custodians is known): I begin by acknowledging God the Father, creator of all, who in His sovereignty entrusted the care and protection of the land on which we meet today to the [Name Traditional Custodians] of the [nation]. I recognise the continuing importance of connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to the land, sea, sky and waterways. I pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Note: If possible, and where you are unsure of phrasing or specific details, it is recommended that contact be made with the local Traditional Custodians for information. Contacting the local council may provide a starting point where this is unknown and invites advice of how they would like to be acknowledged.

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## **10. What should be kept in mind when delivering an Acknowledgement of Country?**

Acknowledgements of Country:

- should be genuine and heartfelt to show true respect and recognition.
- usually occur prior to the formal commencement of a function/meeting/event.
- are not required to be delivered by a First Nations person. Any person, appropriately prepared, can deliver this.
- are usually brief and succinct - several sentences.
- are best provided in context to the occasion, followed by the recognition of the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which the meeting etc occurs, as well as the Traditional Elders, past and present, who provide the authority on, and are the holders of, the traditional cultural knowledge.

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## **11. Must the Acknowledgement of Country in the LCA RAP document be used for all Lutheran events?**

No.

Acknowledgements are intended to be a heartfelt and meaningful recognition. What this looks like will be different from one individual to another, different from one group to another.

Understanding the purpose and intent of the Acknowledgement together with the context of your local situation should guide the individual expression of the statement. This helps reduce the risk of 'tokenism'.

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## **12. Does the LCA RAP require an Acknowledgement of Country at every meeting/worship service/event?**

The LCA has no such requirement. This is a decision for each congregation/ministry group/organisation.

There is however, encouragement to learn and understand about the intent, purpose and respectful delivery of an Acknowledgement of Country. Based on this shared understanding, individuals/groups are then in an informed position to determine how to proceed on this matter.

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## **13. How can I avoid providing a 'tokenistic' Acknowledgment of Country?**

By becoming informed and understanding the intent and purpose of the Acknowledgement within the local context of your role which occurs on the Country of First Nations peoples.

Providing an Acknowledgement for the sake of 'ticking a box', or because it is the 'done thing' is tokenistic. But where there is thoughtful preparation (understanding the purpose and intent of an Acknowledgement, even developing some knowledge of the Traditional Custodians) combined with heartfelt and meaningful delivery, the risk of 'tokenism' is minimised.

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## **14. In what format can an Acknowledgement of Country be provided?**

As a statement of acknowledgement and recognition, this can be delivered in a range of formats. For example, but not limited to:

- \* Spoken prior to the commencement of proceedings
- \* In print / electronic format - hard and soft copies of newsletters, bulletins, agendas and minutes, letterheads, banners and other promotional material, title pages or footers in powerpoint presentations.
- \* As part of a signature (electronic or otherwise).
- \* Digital, as evidenced when the RAP website opened up.
- \* Plaques on buildings / signage.

These opportunities could be raised for discussion.

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Additional information on **Welcome to Country / Acknowledgement of Country** accessible from Reconciliation Australia [Fact Sheet](#)