



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Acknowledgement to Country Policy



*We're with you*

## PEOPLE

### A creative, diverse and vibrant community

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## Contents

1	Objectives .....	4
2	Policy Statement .....	4
3	Scope.....	6
4	Responsibilities.....	6
4.1	Councillors .....	6
4.2	Executive .....	6
4.3	Aboriginal Community Development Officer:.....	6
4.4	Managers .....	6
4.5	Council staff .....	6
5	Definitions .....	7
6	Performance Measures .....	7
7	Non-compliance with this Policy.....	7
8	Document Control.....	7
8.1	Version Control.....	7
8.2	Attachments.....	8

## 1 Objectives

The objectives of the Policy are to:

- Pay respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- Acknowledge the connection and trust that Aboriginal people have with maintaining and managing Country
- Provide guidance for including Aboriginal cultural activities as part of Council events
- Provide protocols for delivering Acknowledgment of Country
- Articulate Council's responsibility and commitment to maintaining and celebrating Aboriginal culture and Traditional Custodianship/Ownership.

## 2 Policy Statement

Wingecarribee Shire Council recognises that by acknowledging our past, we are laying the groundwork for a future which embraces all Australians; a future based on mutual respect and shared responsibility for our land.

Aboriginal culture is recognised as one of the world's oldest living cultures. Aboriginal peoples have shown, and continue to show, enormous resilience coupled with generosity of spirit towards other peoples with whom they now share their Country.

The Wingecarribee Shire Council acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians/Owners of our land. Council acknowledges the Gundungurra and "Tharawal" or "Dharawal" (as it is referred to in historical records) people as the Traditional Custodians of this place we now call the Wingecarribee Shire.

According to the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census there was a recorded total of 1,188 Wingecarribee Shire residents who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This was an increase from 954 at the 2016 Census and from 529 at the 2006 Census.

The purpose of this document is to provide Councillors, Council staff and volunteers at Wingecarribee Shire Council with an understanding of some of the important protocols of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. While this is not a complete list of protocols, staff should continue to consult with Traditional Custodians and the local Aboriginal community about how and when to observe these and other protocols in the most appropriate manner.

When facilitating community events and ceremonies, Council or Committee meetings and staff meetings with external stakeholders, Council will ensure:

A Traditional Custodian Elder is given the opportunity to conduct a Welcome to Country to officially open the event or ceremony. The Elder may nominate a representative to conduct the Welcome or Acknowledgement on their behalf.

*OR*

An Acknowledgement of Country is performed.

### **Welcome to Country**

A "Welcome to Country" or "Traditional Welcome" is where the Traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Traditional Custodians welcome people to their Country at the beginning of a meeting, event or ceremony. This welcome must be conducted by an appropriate person such as a

recognised Elder from the local area. Welcome to Country enables the Traditional Custodians to give their blessing to the event and is an important mark of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's original inhabitants. It is important to remember that being welcomed to Country is a privilege.

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

An Acknowledgement of Country is a way that Aboriginal people and the wider community can demonstrate respect for Aboriginal protocol, and can be undertaken by any person participating in an occasion of any kind. It is a demonstration of respect dedicated to the Traditional Custodians of the land, sea and waterways where the gathering is taking place.

A Chair or Speaker begins the meeting by acknowledging that the meeting is taking place on the Country of the Traditional Owners.

### **Suggested wording for an in person Acknowledgement of Country:**

"Wingecarribee Shire Council acknowledges the Gundungurra and Dharawal people as the Traditional Custodians of this land. I pay my respect to the Traditional Custodians, their Ancestors who cared for this Country for many thousands of years, and their Elders and descendants who continue to care for Country. I would also like to extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including those here today."

### **Suggested wording for an Acknowledgement of Country for online meetings (multiple locations)**

"In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country on all of the lands we are meeting from today. I am on the lands of the Gundungurra and Dharawal people in the Wingecarribee Shire. We pay our respect to their Ancestors and Elders, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today."

### **Acknowledgement of Recognised Community Elders**

Acknowledging Elders is an important mark of respect for the Elders of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities including, but not limited to, Traditional Owners/Custodians. This acknowledgment can follow the Welcome to Country or Acknowledgment of Country with the speaker paying respect to Elders past and present.

### **Smoking Ceremony**

Smoking ceremonies are undertaken in Aboriginal communities to cleanse the space in which the ceremony is taking place. The Smoking Ceremony is a ritual of purification and unity, and is always undertaken by an Aboriginal person with specialised cultural knowledge.

This is a very significant ceremony and is performed only at events deemed appropriate by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community. Local Elders may choose an appropriate representative to provide the Smoking Ceremony.

### **Other Events and Ceremonies**

An increasing number of people are Acknowledging Country in events and ceremonies undertaken by Council and in the community without the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is becoming recognised that some acknowledgement should be given to the local Aboriginal people of the area. Representatives of Council should always consult with Traditional Owners, the Aboriginal community, Aboriginal Community Development Officer and/or Illawarra

Local Aboriginal Land Council to make sure they have correctly identified the Traditional Owners and have the correct wording for Acknowledging Country.

### **Fee for Services**

It is important to acknowledge that Aboriginal people are using their intellectual property whenever they carry out a cultural ceremony or any activity and it is appropriate that they receive payment for the service. The payment should consider travel to the event, time and complexity of the service provided and the profile of the event.

## **3 Scope**

This Policy applies to all Council staff and elected representatives and describes the appropriate protocols regarding the opening of official Council ceremonies, events and community meetings.

## **4 Responsibilities**

Responsibilities for implementing this policy are shared between Councillors, Executive and staff as follows:

### **4.1 Councillors**

Councillors shall:

- Lead the community in their understanding of and compliance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Acknowledgment to Country Policy.
- Comply with Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Acknowledgment to Country Policy.

### **4.2 Executive**

The Executive shall:

- Communicate, implement and comply with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Acknowledgement to Country Policy.

### **4.3 Aboriginal Community Development Officer**

The Aboriginal Community Development Officer shall:

- engage with Traditional Owners/Custodians of the lands now located within the Wingecarribee Shire
- provide guidance to Councillors, Executive and other Council staff as to the content and implementation of this Policy
- ensure the timely review of this Policy
- guide the community in their understanding of and compliance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Acknowledgement to Country Policy and
- ensure Traditional Custodian/Owner Elders are consulted, including when reviewing The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Acknowledgement to Country Policy.

### **4.4 Managers**

Managers shall:

- Provide guidance to Council staff within their respective branches as to the content and implementation of this Policy, seeking guidance from the policy owner as required.

### **4.5 Council staff**

Council staff shall:

- Comply with The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Acknowledgement to Country Policy.

- Seek clarification and guidance from the Aboriginal Community Development Officer in relation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Acknowledgement to Country Policy.

## 5 Definitions

### **Traditional Custodian**

Traditional Custodian in relation to the lands are respected custodians of the Aboriginal community on whom their community rely to give advice or pass on knowledge. Traditional custodians have “primary spiritual responsibility” for sacred sites on a piece of land, and are entitled by Aboriginal tradition to hunt and gather on that land. Traditional Custodians are the key decision makers for their land.

A Traditional Custodian in relation to the lands means an Aboriginal person who, in accordance with Aboriginal tradition, has social, economic and spiritual affiliations with, and responsibilities for, the lands or any part of them.

### **Recognised Community Elder**

In some Aboriginal communities there may be individuals who are ‘recognised elders’. These are people who are respected by the Aboriginal community as elders but have not necessarily undergone traditional initiation ceremonies or are not traditional custodians.

## 6 Performance Measures

The success of this Policy will be measured by:

- consultation and engagement regarding the policy is common in everyday practise for staff
- engagement with Traditional Owners/Custodians and Aboriginal community members is common in everyday practise for staff
- improved cultural awareness among staff
- majority of staff are culturally competent and aware of Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols
- Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country is carried out as per policy.

## 7 Non-compliance with this Policy

Non-compliance with this Policy should be reported to Manager Community Life and Libraries who will investigate and determine the appropriate course of action.

## 8 Document Control

### 8.1 Version Control

Version	Adoption Date	Notes
1.0	9 November 2016	Initial adoption of document
2.0	7 August 2024	- Correction of wording from Tharawal to Dharawal People. - Removal of term First Nations People. - Wording changed from ‘Traditional Owner’ to ‘a Traditional Custodian Elder’.

- Traditional Custodian Elder to conduct a Welcome to Country or the Elder may nominate a representative to conduct the Welcome to Country or the Acknowledgment to Country.

## **8.2 Attachments**

There are no attachments to this Policy.

### **Approved by:**

**WINGECARRIBEE SHIRE COUNCIL**

7 August 2024