



**Early Childhood  
Australia**  
A voice for young children



# Protocol on Acknowledgement of Country

As part of the Early Childhood Australia (ECA) Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) we are committed to developing one or more acknowledgements that can be used in different contexts.

## Background

Incorporating welcoming and acknowledgement protocols into official meetings and events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and custodians of their land. It promotes an awareness of the past and ongoing connection to places of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

**Welcome to Country** is a formal welcome onto Aboriginal Land given by an Elder or person of that 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.

**Acknowledgement of Country** is a statement of recognition of the traditional owners of the land. An Acknowledgement of Country can be given by any person, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or not. This is a way of showing awareness of and respect for the traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander owners of the land on which a meeting or event is being held and recognising the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to their country.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be informal or formal and involves visitors acknowledging the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander owners of the land as well as their long and continuing relationship with their country.

At a meeting, speech or formal occasion the speaker can begin their proceedings by offering an Acknowledgement of Country. Unlike a Welcome to Country, it can be performed by a person of any cultural background. There are no set protocols or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, though often a statement may take the following form: 'I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional land of the (appropriate group) people, and pay my respect to Elders both past and present.' It helps to think about how you might personalise and localise an acknowledgement to make it as meaningful as possible, so this statement is just a guide.

## Developing an Acknowledgement for ECA

Elements for inclusion:

- recognising the traditional owners—by name wherever possible
- pay respect to the Elders and their continuing connection to Country
- acknowledge that the education of children has been occurring in these lands for thousands of years
- celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture
- commit to reflect on reconciliation and equality during the meeting or event.

### Tips for Acknowledging Country

- Remember to acknowledge 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' people present at the meeting and in the room.
- If an Acknowledgement of Country has already been done at the meeting—there is no need to repeat it, but instead acknowledge and thank the person who did the first Acknowledgement of Country.

## ECA has previously used ...

I would like to acknowledge the Nggunawal and Ngambri people as the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay respect to their Elders past and present and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living and working in the area today.

*Addition ... We must reflect upon the significance of the commitment to true reconciliation for all of ECA's work for all children and particularly for Aboriginal children and their families.*

*Addition ... We also recognise that Aboriginal people have been nurturing and teaching children on this land for many decades, we honour and respect that role.*

## Acknowledgements for ECA staff and representatives

ECA staff and consultants who represent the organisation are to use either one of the Acknowledgement of Country as drafted below.

### Acknowledgement of Country—long form

I acknowledge that we meet today on the traditional country of the Ngambri and Ngunnawal people and pay my respects to the Elders past and present for their continuing custodianship of the land. Early Childhood Australia recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have nurtured and educated children on this land for thousands of years, we respect that history and look for ways to recognise and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through our work in this place. We also commit to reflect on reconciliation and equality during our meeting (or event).

### Acknowledgement of Country—short form

I acknowledge that we meet today on the traditional country of the Ngambri and Ngunnawal people and pay my respects to the Elders past and present for their continuing custodianship of the land and the children of this land across the generations.

## Things to consider when preparing Acknowledgement of Country

### Tailoring to local geography

Local government websites usually have information about Aboriginal local history and links to Elders groups or land councils who can provide 'Welcome to Country' services. In researching that, we should be able to identify who to acknowledge in the Acknowledgement of Country. The Chair of each meeting should seek any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the land on which the meeting is being held to open the meeting.

### Personalising the Acknowledgement

When speaking on behalf of ECA it is acceptable to add to the acknowledgement with sincere statements of respect and acknowledgement reflecting your personal view or experiences. However, it is recommended that acknowledgements be kept short in order not to lose the meaning.

### Multiple Acknowledgements

The Acknowledgement of Country is traditionally given once at the beginning of a meeting or event. Indeed in some regions, local Elders strongly recommend that the acknowledgement is made just once and feel that it is disrespectful for multiple speakers to acknowledge country or have the acknowledgement repeated throughout the event. In other regions multiple speakers are welcome, sometimes actively encouraged to individually acknowledge country. If you are planning an event or providing guidance to speakers please check with local Elders or Aboriginal cultural advisers to identify local protocols.

