



ENGINEERS
AUSTRALIA

Acknowledgment of Country

A Guide for the Engineering Profession

This guide has been developed by the Indigenous¹ Engineering Group (IEG) to support the engineering profession in respectfully acknowledging country and Indigenous communities in a meaningful way. The Guide encourages all to share the remarkable story of Indigenous engineering – both the very long lineage of Indigenous knowledge and engineering, along with the contribution of contemporary Indigenous engineers.

It also relates the importance of Indigenous peoples' culture(s), connection and protection of country, and Chartered Engineers' commitment to working for the good of the community and to our Code of Ethics.

As engineers, we are proud to be part of a professional body whose core purpose is, as stated in our Royal Charter:

“to advance the science and practice of engineering for the benefit of the community”.

This overarching commitment to the communities we serve, is further defined in EA's Code of Ethics:

“As engineering practitioners, we use our knowledge and skills for the benefit of the community to create engineering solutions for a sustainable future. In doing so, we strive to serve the community ahead of other personal or sectional interests.”

Being a member of EA, we belong to a diverse professional engineering body. Such diversity is respected and represented at EA through the various divisions, technical societies and groups. EA is committed to ensuring that an equitable and socially accountable focus is transparent throughout all the work that we do and communities we engage with. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Nation Peoples of Australia and its adjacent islands. Prior to the colonisation of Australia, just over 200 years ago, there were more than 500 sovereign Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations, with approximately 250-300 languages and various dialects. These communities had and continue to have their own customs, lore, law and spirituality which are still practiced today.

As a profession with core values to serve the community, it is important and relevant for the engineering profession, to show respect and reciprocity for the First Nation Peoples of Australia and their communities. Such notions of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, their sovereign rights and self-determination, can be demonstrated by acknowledging the traditional owners at significant meetings and public events. At EA this acknowledgement and respect will be shown through the leaders of our profession, clearly demonstrating respect for the traditional owners at various EA meetings and events which are held around Australia.

The rest of this document contains guidelines which have been developed to assist our leaders to prepare for and deliver a meaningful acknowledgment of country.

¹ Please note the terms Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are respectfully used interchangeably throughout this document. Both terms respectfully refer to the First Nation Peoples of Australia.

Principles for Engineers Australia

'Acknowledgment of Country' and 'Welcome to Country'



Principle 1 Make a connection, make the acknowledgment personal, rather than just reading a prepared set of notes.

Although there are various examples which contain specific wording you can use, it is preferable that our senior leaders deliver an acknowledgment of country which is personal and meaningful. Acknowledgment of country is similar to the respect you would show if you were entering someone's house in western society as a guest. Generally, you would recognise that the owner of the house has given you a certain privilege in letting you enter their house. You would demonstrate respect for this privilege by thanking the owner in a way which demonstrates that you are genuine and thankful. However, for acknowledgment of country this connection and meaning, for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should go much, as elaborated below.

Principle 2 Understanding what 'Acknowledgement of Country', and 'Welcome to Country' are and why they are important

It is important to understand that 'Acknowledgement of Country' and 'Welcome to Country' are different.

'Acknowledgement of country' is a demonstration of respect by non-traditional custodians, for the traditional custodians of the land that they (non-traditional custodians) are currently living or traveling through. In this demonstration of respect comes the recognition of colonisation in Australia, the impact it has and continues to have on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, acceptance that Australia and the land non-traditional custodians are on is not Terra Nullius, and an expression of regards for the sovereign rights and self-determination of this Aboriginal nation.

'Welcome to country' is different, and can only be undertaken by an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person from the local Aboriginal nation. Generally, at community events this is undertaken by an Elder or senior community representative of that nation. This ceremony can be undertaken in several different forms (speech, song, reading, or dance) and may be spoken in the language of that nation.

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have been a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for thousands of years. Despite the absence of fences or visible borders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups had clear boundaries separating their Country from that of other nations. 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 during the journey. While visitors were provided with a safe passage, they also had to respect the protocols and rules of the local nation while on their Country.

Resource Reconciliation Australia:

<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Welcome-to-and-Acknowledgement-of-Country.pdf>

Principle 3 Respect and recognise the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander nation

Senior staff and office bearers should obtain an understanding of the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander nation. Engineers Australia through the Division Manager will support this by engaging with and building a relationship with representatives of the local nation, as well as providing information to senior staff and office bearers.

Principle 4 Complete cultural awareness training

Engineers Australia will make available cultural awareness training for relevant senior staff and office bearers, training which may be delivered by relevant local Aboriginal individuals or organisations. Engineers Australia will also provide basic and relevant online cultural awareness materials, please note that this information is at starting level and members are strongly encouraged to undertake face to face cultural awareness training in their own organisations.

Local examples of Aboriginal engineering and place making, information on Aboriginal engineers and role models, will also be placed online by Engineers Australia. This information may also be of relevance to assist in delivering an acknowledgment of country which is more relevant for our engineering profession.

Principles for Engineers Australia

'Acknowledgment of Country' and 'Welcome to Country'



Principle 5 **If appropriate, use the relevant local Aboriginal language**

If appropriate and as supported by the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander nation, Acknowledgement of Country can be undertaken in the local language. Such a gesture can demonstrate a sign of respect and commitment to understanding, but this approach must be checked with local community organisations. Please note that training with local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander educational resources for Acknowledgement to Country should occur so that appropriate pronunciation is provided.

NOTE: Each individual needs to make a determination if this is appropriate, and a meaningful and well-informed Acknowledgement of Country is the most important part of Acknowledging of Country.

Principle 6 **Welcome to Country**

For major public events run by Engineers Australia, it is more appropriate to engage an Aboriginal Elder or senior Aboriginal community leader from the relevant Aboriginal nation to conduct a Welcome to Country. Prior contact with the community in which the event is to take place should be done to ensure a sufficient amount of time to open communication between the parties and discuss the event.

If no direct contact or link to a community elder or senior leader can be easily sourced, contact should be made with local community organisations such as the Aboriginal Health Service, Legal Service, Community Centre or Local Land Council to assist in the engagement of an appropriate person or group for the event. It would be advisable to undertake this initial contact with the above mentioned groups as there may be some disputes in regards to local areas and/or community boundaries and should be considered when looking for engagement of the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. Remuneration for providing a significant service at such an event should always occur. Some community organisations may already have a set remuneration for Welcome to Country.

Acknowledgment of Country Examples



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Example 1.

Presented at a public meeting in Adelaide, Kurna country

David Cruickshanks-Boyd FIEAust CPEng EngExec NER

Past National President, Engineers Australia &

National Director, Corporate Sustainability, WSP



Image: Wikipedia Commons license

Marni naa pudni

Ngadlu tampintheni ngadlu Kurna yartangka inparrintheni

Ngadlu tampantheni Kurna miyurna puru purruna

Welcome everyone

We acknowledge that we meet on Kurna land, and

We celebrate the living Kurna people today.

(We also acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the audience today)

Recently I visited the Living Kurna Cultural Centre in Warriparinga in the City of Marion, which is a wonderful example of Kurna culture. It provides a contemporary example of Aboriginal placemaking in the metropolitan area of Adelaide, it is housed in a place where the Kurna people have lived for over 500 years.

If you visit it and take a cultural tour, you will be privileged, as I was, to be shown some of the sacred places which represent that are of significant important to the Kurna people. This experience demonstrated to me that engineers have much to learn from Aboriginal people, particularly the local Kurna community, as we strive to create a sustainable future.

Example 2. Engineers Australia’s College of Leadership and Management *Leadership Forum*
Craig Laslett FIEAust CPEng EngExec NER
Chair of the College of Leadership and Management &
CEO Engineering & Services Australia, Lendlease

I acknowledge the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land where we meet and I pay my respects to their Elders and to other Indigenous Australians present..... ..

This group have a range of initiatives to attract and support Indigenous engineers, including developing a guide that will be shared widely to help engineers to respectfully Acknowledge Country and to share the remarkable story of Indigenous engineering– traditional and contemporary and I would like to share some remarkable examples:

- Firstly, many of you may not be aware that Engineers Australia formally recognises the extensive hydrological works at Budj Bim in south west Victoria, as the oldest engineering infrastructure in the world – over 6½ thousand years old - older than Stonehenge and the pyramids. This infrastructure is still in use today! The Gunditjmara people are in the process of submitting Budj Bim for World Heritage listing.
- Secondly, we acknowledge the formidable contribution of leaders such as inventor and engineer, David Uniapon, who is celebrated on the \$50 note.
- And we celebrate the leadership of our contemporary Indigenous engineers such as:
 - Grant Maher, who recently completed his Masters of Façade Engineering and is the Façade Lead at AECOM in QLD;
 - Courtney Ryder, a biomedical engineer, currently completing her PhD, focusing on burn in Indigenous children;
 - Ross Peek, a mechanical engineer currently completing his MBA at Melbourne and a key member of new Victorian Indigenous Engineering Winter School committee;
 - Jemila Darr, an environmental engineer with significant experience in contaminated lands
 - Judd Harris studying a MPhil in Engineering focusing on sustainable development at Cambridge.
 - And there are many emerging leaders currently practicing or studying engineering at university and TAFE.

As a Chartered Executive, I believe we need to do things differently and to encourage more Indigenous students to consider engineering as a great career and for all in the profession to share these stories of the long history of Indigenous engineering.

Acknowledgment of Country Examples



Example 3. Presented at a public meeting in Adelaide, is Kurna country
Courtney Ryder, BSCBEng(Biomed)(Hons) PhDc,
Member, Executive Indigenous Engineering Group, EA
Student, Injury Division, The George Institute for Global Health

Na Marni Everyone

Na Marni are words from the Kurna language, where Na means many and Marni means good/happy. So I am asking if you are all good today?

Na marni? (wait for a response)

I would like to start by acknowledging that the land we meet on today is the land of the Kurna people, I would like to pay my respects to Elders, past, present, and emerging. Particularly, I would like to pay respects and acknowledge Kurna Elder, Uncle Dr Lewis O'Brein, who is an Aboriginal engineer, training as an engineer in the navy. He is also a philosopher, academic and researcher.

I have always been taught that Acknowledgement of Country goes back many generations over thousands of years. Where back before colonisation, if you wished to enter another Aboriginal country, then you would wait at the border or edge of that country, and send a signal i.e. smoke. You would wait to be received and welcomed into that person's country before you entered. This is a process which shows respect, acknowledgement and recognition for walking, working or even living on another person's country. So please take the time to reflect, and remember that today, here, you walk on Kurna land.

1. Acknowledgment of Country and Welcome to Country information

- Video by Kurna man Trevor-Tiritpa Ritchie from the University of South Australia:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CV-7VD-Dp9o&feature=youtu.be&list=UU9oGkvwSjtqyHe5hPqbx3w>
- Video by Kurna Elder Uncle Dr Lewis O'Brien (Navy Engineer), with some history on the Kurna people who were known as the educators:
<https://vimeo.com/186512285>
- Arranging a Welcome to Country in Adelaide
https://www.cityofadelaide.com.au/assets/documents/Kurna-welcomes_Register-Sept_2015.pdf

2. Appropriate terminology, representations, protocols and acknowledgement:

NOTE 1: Indigenous refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Please use either: Indigenous Australians/peoples OR Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

NOTE 2: A capital letter should always be used when referring to Indigenous or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

<http://www.flinders.edu.au/staff-development->

files/CDIP%20documents/CDIP%20Toolkit%202015/2_%20Appropriate%20Terminology,%20Indigenous%20Australians.pdf

3. Engineers Australia's (EA) Heritage Recognition Technical documentation

- Engineers Australia recognising Budj Bim as the world's oldest engineering infrastructure:
<https://www.engineersaustralia.org.au/portal/heritage/budj-bim-aquaculture-engineering-works-lake-condah-tyrendarra>
- *The rich cultural landscape of Budj Bim*: Broadcast on ABC Radio Awaye, 7 October
This program interviews Gunditjmara Traditional Owners, Denis Rose and Tyson Lovett-Murray, on the importance of Budj Bim, the world's oldest aquaculture system, and its recent listing on Australia's World Heritage Tentative List.
<http://radio.abc.net.au/programitem/pgAG3IKNI6?play=true>
<http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6167/>

4. Stories of Indigenous Engineering

Grant Maher, the Inaugural Chair of Engineers Australia's Indigenous Engineering Group

<https://www.ewb.org.au/whatwedo/engineering-with-communities/engineering-on-country/stories-of-Indigenous-engineering>

Courtney Ryder, biomedical engineer, currently studying her PhD, focusing on burn victims in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/nhmrc-in-focus/features/taking-leap-research-world>

5. Quote

'If a Gunditjmara youth is considering a career in engineering, he or she needs to remember that we've already had scientists and engineers in the past, it's not a new field they are going into, it's actually a very old field. We need to take pride in that and open our minds to the fact there's great opportunities to do something with your life.'

Denis Rose, Project Manager - Cultural and Heritage,
Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation