



Australasian College  
for Emergency Medicine

# Acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Māori at College Meetings and Events

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Guidelines COR583

## Document Review

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Timeframe for review:	Every three years, or earlier if required
Document authorisation:	Council of Advocacy, Practice and Partnerships
Document implementation:	Council of Advocacy, Practice and Partnerships
Document maintenance:	Department of Policy and Strategic Partnerships

## Revision History

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Version	Date	Pages revised / Brief Explanation of Revision
v1	Jul-2017	Approved by Board
v2	Feb-2019	Revision to create a bi-national meeting acknowledgement
v3	Dec-2019	Update branding

## Related documents

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These guidelines may be read in conjunction with the following ACEM documents.

- [ACEM Reconciliation Action Plan](#)
- [ACEM Manaaki Mana Strategy](#)
- [Statement on Culturally Competent Care and Cultural Safety in Emergency Medicine \(S63\)](#)
- [Statement on The Health of the Indigenous Peoples of Australia and New Zealand \(S52\)](#)

# 1. Introduction

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This policy outlines the protocols for recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land in Australia, and Māori as tangata whenua (First People) of Aotearoa New Zealand at official Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) meetings and events.

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have been a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for thousands of years. These protocols have been adapted to contemporary circumstances; however, the essential elements of welcoming visitors and offering safe passage remain in place. Including these protocols at ACEM events and meetings is an important part of Reconciliation. It is one step towards addressing the long history of exclusion and dispossession experienced by Australia's First Peoples. It pays respect to and recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples still have strong and enduring cultural connections to the land.

Māori have specific protocols for welcoming visitors and conducting meetings. Visitors are accorded the highest level of respect and honour when welcomed onto the marae (sacred meeting space) and into homes. In an office space or at meeting venues, there are also protocols for welcoming guests, and opening and closing meetings. These will depend on the context and agenda of the meeting. These protocols are conducted in te Reo Māori (the Māori language).

In recognition of ACEM's status as a bi-national College, an acknowledgement to open meetings has been developed specifically for ACEM that recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Traditional Custodians of the land in Australia, and Māori as tangata whenua (First People) of Aotearoa New Zealand.

## 2. Definitions

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### **Australia**

#### ***Acknowledgment of Country***

Formally recognises the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the land. An Acknowledgement pays respect to the Traditional Custodians and their ancestors. It recognises the enduring connections to land, waterways and culturally significant sites. It also acknowledges the importance of the continuing cultural and spiritual practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

#### ***Welcome to Country***

A ceremony that gives Traditional Custodians the opportunity to formally welcome people to their land through spoken word, dance, music or ceremony. It is an acknowledgement of the time-honoured connection to land and the boundaries that separate the country of different communities by offering safe passage for visitors.

Welcome to Country ceremonies are usually delivered by Elders from the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been given permission from the Traditional Custodians to welcome visitors to their Country.

### **Aotearoa New Zealand**

#### ***Karakia***

Prayer. An important part of Māori culture and used to begin and end gatherings, and to bless meals.

#### ***Mana whenua***

Customary authority exercised by an iwi (tribe) or hapū (sub tribe) in an identified area.

## **Marae**

A sacred meeting place that is the focal point for Māori communities. A marae is a complex of carved buildings and grounds that belongs to a particular iwi, hapū or whānau (family). The marae is tūrangawaewae – a place to stand and belong. Marae are used for meetings, celebrations, funerals, educational workshops and other important tribal events.

## **Mihimihi**

An introduction to let people know a little bit about yourself. It tells people where you are from and who you are, linking you to your mountain, river, sea, iwi, hapū, whakapapa (genealogy) and marae. Non-Māori might identify places that are significant to them and where they grew up.

## **Pōwhiri**

The custom of welcoming and hosting manuhiri (visitors). Even when you are not on a marae (for example in an office space or other meeting venues) protocols guide how pōwhiri should be conducted.

## **Tangata whenua**

Often translated as First People of Aotearoa New Zealand. Tangata whenua literally means people of the land – those who have authority in a particular place. This is based on a deep connection to place through generations of ancestors having been born, lived, died and buried in that place, as well as personal connection to having been born and raised there, or having maintained connection with a community that values and enhances a sense of belonging to the land and the iwi/hapu.

## **3. Acknowledgement of Country (Australia)**

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There are no set protocols or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country that is appropriate for all communities, contexts or geographical locations. An Acknowledgment should be a thoughtful process, so there is room for individual and local interpretation.

Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can deliver an Acknowledgement of Country. It is usually conducted by the Chair, at the start of a meeting. It is acceptable to read an Acknowledgement of Country from notes.

If you are unsure of the local Custodians, then it is acceptable to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a group. Learning the correct pronunciation of Indigenous names and groups is encouraged and shows a mark of respect.

### **4.1 Confirming the Traditional Custodians of an Area**

It may require research to determine the local Custodians for the region of the meeting. This can be facilitated by seeking the advice of the local Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, the Local Council or the Council's Aboriginal liaison officer if one is available, or alternatively an Aboriginal organisation in your local area. Note that an administrative fee may be charged by the referring agency.

#### **Traditional Custodians in metropolitan areas:**

- Adelaide: Kurna People
- Brisbane: Turrbal People
- Canberra: Ngunnawal, Ngambri and the Ngarigu Peoples (Historically, Acknowledgement of Country has been for the Ngunnawal, but these three groups all claim connection with Canberra. It is suggested all three groups are acknowledged).
- Darwin: Larrakia Peoples
- Hobart: Muwinina People
- Melbourne: Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation
- Perth: Wadjuk People of the Noongar group
- Sydney: Gadigal People of the Eora Nation

## 4. Suggested meeting acknowledgement

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### 5.1 Suggested Acknowledgement of Country for a face-to-face meeting at ACEM head office

I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which we meet today. I also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which Australian emergency departments are located. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and future; for they hold the memories, traditions, culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

In recognition that we are a bi-national College, I take this opportunity to acknowledge Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 5.2 Suggested Acknowledgement of Country for other ACEM face-to-face meetings held in Australia

For face-to-face meetings held outside the ACEM head office in Melbourne, such as Faculty Meetings and workshops:

I would like to acknowledge the [People] of the [nation – if applicable] as the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which we meet today, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and future; for they hold the memories, traditions, culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

In recognition that we are a bi-national College, I take this opportunity to acknowledge Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

If you are unsure of the Traditional Custodians in Australia:

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land where we meet today and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and future; for they hold the memories, traditions, culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

In recognition that we are a bi-national College, I take this opportunity to acknowledge Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 5.3 Suggested Acknowledgement of Country for teleconferences held in Australia

I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this teleconference is hosted. I also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands where my Australian-based colleagues are located today, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

In recognition that we are a bi-national College, I take this opportunity to acknowledge Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 5.4 Suggested Acknowledgement for Aotearoa New Zealand-based face to face meetings and teleconferences

For Aotearoa New Zealand based Faculty, committee and steering group meetings, ACEM recommends that, at a minimum, the Chair opens the meeting with:

*Kia ora koutou*

*I take this opportunity to acknowledge Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners in Aotearoa New Zealand. I pay my respects to the mana whenua of the land on which we meet today. In recognition that we are a bi-national College, I acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands collectively known as Australia.*

*Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.*

Chairs are further encouraged to open the meeting with a mihimihi if they feel confident doing so. Depending on the context of the meeting, it may be appropriate to close the meeting with a karakia. The following is a suggestion:

*Kia hora te marino*

*Kia whakapapa pounamu te moana*

*Hei huarahi mā tātou I te rangi nei*

*Aroha atu aroha mai*

*Tātou i a tātou i ngā wā kātoa*

*Hui e tāiki e.*

*Translation:*

*May peace be widespread*

*May the sea be smooth like greenstone*

*A pathway for us all this day*

*Give love, receive love*

*Let us show respect for each other.*

## **5.5 Suggested Acknowledgement for ACEM printed publications**

The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) acknowledges the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which our office is located. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

In recognition that we are a bi-national College, ACEM acknowledges Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

It may be appropriate to include an Acknowledgement of Country and recognition of Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners in online learning materials. ACEM staff should seek advice from the Indigenous Health Committee.

## **5.6 Acknowledgement on ACEM staff email signatures and ACEM website**

The following acknowledgement will appear in ACEM staff email signatures and on the homepage of the ACEM website:

*ACEM acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Australia on which our members live and work, and to their Elders, past, present and future. We pay respect to the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which ACEM's office stands.*

*ACEM acknowledges Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners in Aotearoa New Zealand.*

## **5. Welcome to Country (Australia)**

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A Welcome to Country is a significant formal process where the Traditional Custodians welcome people to their land. A Welcome to Country takes place at the start of an event.

The actual format of the Welcome to Country will depend on the location of the event and the practice of the local community, which can vary according to region. It may be a simple speech in the local language and/or English, or it may include a smoking ceremony, or a performance such as a song, dance, didgeridoo piece or any combination of these.

After the Elder has completed the Welcome to Country, the following speaker should acknowledge the Elder, and provide their own Acknowledgement of Country before they commence their speech. Additional speakers are not obligated to provide an Acknowledgement of Country, unless they have a particular wish to do so.

### **5.1 Organising a Welcome to Country**

In the first instance organisers should use existing contacts within their local community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, to identify appropriate people to perform the Welcome.

It is important that event organisers allow time prior to the event to meet with the Traditional Custodians to discuss the form of the Welcome to Country ceremony. Observing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocol includes allowing time for traditional decision-making and discussion among the Traditional Custodians.

The content of the ceremony should be negotiated between the event organisers and the provider with reference to the nature of the event and the community practices. This should include if any particular protocols or customs need to be observed by those in attendance. It should also include discussion of equipment the Elder or community member may require.

In providing a cultural service such as Welcome to Country, the Traditional Custodians are using their intellectual property and should be appropriately remunerated. The exact form and amount of payment is negotiated and agreed between the Custodians and the event organisers with payment made either to individuals or to an organisation for providing such a service. A Welcome to Country that includes traditional dance and smoking ceremonies will generally involve a more substantial fee.

### **5.2 At the Event: Protocols for a Successful Welcome to Country**

- Check in with the Elder several days before the event to ensure all arrangements are in place
- Arrange transport for the Elder on the day
- Ensure that the Elder has been introduced to the Chair or facilitator of the event, and that they are accompanied at all times - they are a VIP and we should make them feel special
- Ensure the Elder has been briefed on proceedings: what time the event starts, who will bring them to the front of the room, and who will introduce them
- Make sure the Elder's title and name is correct when acknowledging them following their speech
- The speaker following the Elder should acknowledge the Elder, and provide their own Acknowledgement of Country before they commence their speech
- Following the close of the Welcome Ceremony, the event facilitator should acknowledge and thank the Elder for their contribution
- After the event, send a letter of thank you to the Elder for their participation.

## **6. Pōwhiri (Aotearoa New Zealand)**

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A pōwhiri is the custom of welcoming and hosting visitors, traditionally to a marae. Pōwhiri have evolved to include events and meetings not held on a marae. Pōwhiri follow strict protocol and will be conducted by kaumātua (elders).

If you are holding an event or meeting on a marae, the marae manager will advise you on arrangements for the pōwhiri. For significant events or meetings not held at a marae, talk to the venue manager in the first instance if you don't have local hapū or iwi contacts.

## 7. Meeting protocol

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### 7.1 Standing Agenda Item

An Acknowledgement of Country and recognition of Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners will be added as a standing agenda item to all ACEM Board, Council, Foundation and other College entity meeting agendas. The order in which they are listed on an agenda will reflect the country in which the meeting is being held.

### 7.2 ASM and Winter Symposium

For ACEM Annual Scientific Meetings, Winter Symposia and Faculty Symposia held in Australia, a Welcome to Country will be organised by the event convenors in consultation with the Local Aboriginal Land Council. A pōwhiri will be organised by event convenors in consultation with local iwi or hapū when these events are held in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 7.3 ACEM Staff meetings

An Acknowledgement of Country and recognition of Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners will be conducted by the CEO or nominated senior staff member at all-staff meetings. Staff are encouraged to consider when this acknowledgment may be appropriate for other meetings and events held at ACEM Head Office or other locations.



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