



# MDBA First Nations cultural protocols and style guide

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## Introduction

This First Nations cultural protocols and style guide has been developed as a knowledge resource to assist Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) staff to respectfully and confidently engage with First Nations communities. It will allow us to achieve a consistent approach across the MDBA when working with or referring to First Nations people in facilitation, publications, products and on the web. This document will be updated regularly as knowledge and insights evolve.

Please note that this document is intended as a guide only. If you are working with First Nations people for the first time, you should liaise with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employee's Network (ATSIEN) Ambassador or Secretary, the [Aboriginal Partnerships program](#) and the [Communications, Engagement and Strategic Policy program](#).

Further, where your work involves receiving, handling or using culturally sensitive information, you should refer to the Guidance note: [Handling of culturally sensitive information](#), prepared by the Legal and Government Relations program.

## Acknowledgement and Welcome to Country

Traditionally when wanting to walk on or through the Country of your neighbours or anyone else's Country, it was common courtesy to acknowledge the First Nations people who are the caretakers of that Country, seeking permission and safe passage. This practice has been occurring for many thousands of years. The First Nations people would then do a Welcome to their Country and allow safe passage or permission to do business on Country. In most cases this would involve ceremony, including a smoking ceremony, to remove any bad spirits from those entering Country.

### Acknowledgement of Country

Today we live and work on the Country of many different First Nations people. Out of respect for the local First Nations people whose land we reside and work on, we do a modern-day acknowledgement of Country. We do an Acknowledgement for meetings and gatherings and there are no hard rules for how many people need to be in a meeting for an Acknowledgement to be done. Generally, an Acknowledgement includes recognition of the First Nations people, we acknowledge we are on their ancestral lands (Country), we offer our respect to elders past, present and emerging and we offer our respect to any other Indigenous peoples who are with us on the day.

An acknowledgement can be done by anyone. It is up to you how much detail to include in an Acknowledgement. It is done out of respect, and an acknowledgement of Country can be done singularly or on behalf of a group. For suggested words see the [MDBA Acknowledgments section](#).

### Welcome to Country

A welcome to Country can only be done by a First Nations person who has the cultural authority to do so.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) acknowledges and offers its respect to the Traditional Owners, and their Nations, of the Murray–Darling Basin, who have a deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to their lands and waters. The MDBA understands the need for recognition of Traditional Owner knowledge and cultural values in natural resource management associated with the Basin. The approach of Traditional Owners to caring for the natural landscape, including water, can be expressed in the words of the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) Board:

*As the First Nations peoples (Traditional Owners) we are the knowledge holders, connected to Country and with the cultural authority to share our knowledge. We offer perspectives to balance and challenge other voices and viewpoints. We aspire to owning and managing water to protect our totemic obligations, to carry out our way of life, and to teach our younger generations to maintain our connections and heritage through our own law and customs. When Country is happy, our spirits are happy.*

## Cultural protocols

### Respect hierarchy

First Nations communities are hierarchical structures. Elders are very powerful and influential. In some communities, men and women are elders with equal standing. If you need to engage with the Basin's First Nation communities, it is imperative that you engage with the community Elders first as they can and will, very quickly stop your engagement if it is not done correctly.

### Uncle/Aunty

Elders are usually addressed using 'Aunty' or 'Uncle' which in this context are terms of respect. They are used for people held in esteem, generally older people who have earned that respect. However, the terms can be used for other members of the community who are not Elders. Any members of the community, whether older or the same age, who are held in a position of high esteem or respect by their peers can be called Uncle or Aunty. If you hear someone referred to as Uncle or Aunty it does not mean you can refer to them in this way, until you have built a solid relationship with them. Only after you have asked for permission and it has been granted can you refer to someone as Aunty or Uncle.

### Listen before you speak

Over millennia Australia's First Nations people learnt to take time to look, listen and observe their surroundings and in this way, they developed deeper levels of knowledge and understanding to make informed and holistic decisions. This ancient technique is called Dadirri or deep listening and it is still used today.

When you are engaging with the Basin's First Nations people, introduce yourself but don't be in a hurry to say your piece and leave. Engaging with patience, taking the time to listen to what is being

said and allowing time to find wisdom in what you are hearing before you speak, shows respect for other voices and starts the process of trust and relationship building.

## Relationships

Time constraints can be challenging when trying to build trust in community. Ensuring adequate time to build a relationship prior to 'doing business,' should be included in project management and meeting timeframes. Are there existing relationships between MDBA staff members and the Community you wish to engage with first, such as Regional Engagement Officers or NBAN and Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN)?

First Nations peoples hold relationships as priority in most cases, before business can take place. A common First Nations modern cultural practice is to ask, "who is your mob?" or "where are you from?". These questions emphasise First Nations people's cultural morals where family and Country are the points of interest in contrast to the wider Australian community setting, where questions like "what do you do for work?" primarily make up initial small talk. Make the time to have a cuppa, ask how they are going. Talking about the weather is always a good conversation starter, don't be in a rush to get to the next place. This says, 'I don't really care, I just need to get down the road'.

If you have not taken the time to build relationships, sometimes First Nations peoples will indicate they will attend your meeting but then not show up. This is because they don't know you, they really don't care that you are having a meeting and they are not going to tell you that over the phone. It is much easier to get you to go away when you believe they will be there, then simply not show up. You need to remember in a lot of cases they are not being paid fuel money to drive in and attend your meeting. Also, a large percentage of First Nations people who are active in MDBA community consultation are also very active community leaders who work in their communities. They may be on multiple committees and be very time poor and if they are not getting compensated for their time at your meeting why would they take time off work to show up?

Traditional Owners know they will have little effect on what you are doing. If you truly want the input of the Basin's First Nations people you need to spend a lot of time building genuine relationships with them.

## Walking on Country

When a First Nation person invites you to walk with them on their Country, it can be a sign of respect, the equivalent of being asked into a family home.

### **What is meant by walking on Country?**

*For many First Nations people, 'Country' encapsulates more than just the physical aspects of the environment like creeks, rock outcrops, hills, rivers and waterholes. Country includes all living and non-living. It incorporates people, spirits, plants and animals. It embraces the seasons, stories and creation spirits and First Nation world view where every organism has an equally important role to play. Country is both a place of belonging, self-identity, a way of believing, and a way of living"*  
From [Our Country](#). © 2020 Aboriginal Art & Culture, Alice Springs.

Walking on Country means walking on ground that has cultural and spiritual significance for First Nations people. You should seek prior permission before walking on Country. For example, when planning to undertake engagement on Country with a First Nations community, you should phone ahead and speak to an appropriate community member. You could contact the local Aboriginal Lands Council or other Aboriginal corporation and seek prior permission to undertake engagement and enter Country. If you wish to look at a place of cultural significance, you should also seek prior permission. You may need to be guided while on Country and, in some instances, you may need to go through a smoking ceremony before entering Country. You should be aware that after asking, you may be denied permission to walk on Country as there may be important cultural reasons for denying you permission, such as special Men's or Women's business sites.

A famous example of a sacred Women's Business site is a large area of Uluru that is permanently closed to tourists. Women's business (including childbirth) occurs in this place and only First Nations women who live in this area are permitted on the site. You should always be mindful of the fact that regardless of the response, asking for permission is respectful.

The beneficial relationships held between First Nations people and their Country are encapsulated in sayings such as *'healthy Country, healthy people'* and *'if you look after the country, the country will look after you'*. Caring for Country (Griffiths and Kinnane 2010).

## Sorry Business

Sorry Business is when a family or community member has passed away and includes the mourning process associated with the passing of the family or community member. Ceremonies and protocols vary greatly among communities. It is common in communities to stop 'doing business', to allow for mourning, therefore many local individuals and businesses will not facilitate engagement with community during this time.

Sorry Business happens far too often. MDBA staff need to acknowledge that Sorry Business will result in last-minute cancellations to attend events. If you have a First Nations community meeting and you are told there is Sorry Business, cancel the meeting and reschedule. This is your only option. When scheduling meetings that may be back to back, build this into your planning: 'How will we handle Sorry Business if it happens?'

There are different protocols around Sorry Business but as a rule Sorry Business will last for a minimum of 2 weeks to one month. During this time there will be time for mourning, time for remembering, time for celebrating and time for preparing the soul for the next life. During Sorry Business it is imperative that the name of the deceased is not spoken as this can confuse the spirit and bind it to the earth.

Appropriate staff - Director level and above - will contact relevant parties to convey MDBA staff condolences and there should be no contact from agency staff with affected community members during this time.

First Nations kinship systems mean that a person can have many mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and cousins. This complicates time away from work under a Western work and policy system. If Sorry Business affects an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff member directly under your supervision,

please contact the MDBA Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officer or the People and Culture team for assistance with the appropriate support and leave options.

## Speaking for Country

Only a First Nations person who is a knowledge holder, recognised by their Nation or community can speak for their people's Country with cultural authority.

**Fictional example:** You are facilitating a community meeting and asking for advice on a water related fish stocking matter that affects the local township. You have heard from the local shop owner that when the water is low it also slows the amount of trade from people who come to fish in the river. A local First Nations man also speaks up and tells you that the water hole that they are all fishing in is a sacred site and they should only be allowed to fish for Goodoo (Murray Cod) in that place in the warmer months, as the Goodoo breed in the winter and spring.

You need to establish if this man has the cultural authority to speak for Country, the statement above says he is local but he may be from a different mob and living on someone else's Country, in which case he does not have the cultural authority to speak for Country. However, if this man is a knowledge holder with the cultural authority to speak for Country and recognised by his community, you need to listen and take on board what he is telling you. You would also need to consider that this information may be culturally significant. Are there intellectual property rights to this information?

## Speaking for another's Country

A Traditional Owner cannot speak for another's Country. If the subject matter is specific to, or in relation to someone else's Country, you cannot speak for another's Country. If asked something that is non-specific to one place, then a Traditional Owner can speak to that. First Nations peoples can only talk about other Nations from their Nation's perspective and cultural obligations to neighbouring Nations.

For example, a Gomeroi Traditional Owner can't speak to the importance of a culturally significant Men's Business site on Wiradjuri Country, but he can speak to the cultural significance of Men's Business.

## Recognising the effects of trauma

First Nations people experience ongoing trauma caused by past government policies and decisions about the well-being and management of First Nations people. When attending or facilitating First Nations community engagement, you may experience a Traditional Owner 'putting you in your place' or otherwise shutting down your efforts to engage. This may happen for many reasons, for example, you used the wrong word, or you didn't acknowledge particular people in the correct way. It is important to reflect and understand why this may have happened. You need to look beyond what you are experiencing and look at what is really going on there and try to understand the underlying issues.

First Nations people have suffered terribly at the hands of Europeans and now Australians. They have lost important connections to their homelands and are no longer able to carry out much of their

traditional cultural obligations. While there is great change happening in Australia to address the wrongs of the past, there is still present-day trauma associated with those wrongs. At times, the process of putting you in your place is a symptom of this trauma. They are 'levelling the playing field' and establishing a position of power which you need to respect.

## Cultural sensitivities

First Nations people in Australia have a diverse and unique culture. Some cultural sensitivities that may not seem offensive to the wider Australian community can be seen as highly offensive within First Nations communities.

Segregation of genders in First Nations culture is common. Traditionally men and women followed strict lore around the roles of men and women in society. When interacting with men and women in community, if you are not known to a community, men should speak with men and women should speak with women, until you have been accepted and introduced to the opposite gender. Once proper introductions have been made or if pre-existing relationships have been established it is acceptable to talk with either men or women but be mindful to include all.

Direct eye contact - some people will look you in the eye, testing your authenticity, others will avoid eye contact until they establish trust and respect. In either situation, be comfortable to mirror the behaviour but do not mimic or challenge by staring directly into the eyes, as this can be seen as a threat. Be strong, hold your gaze momentarily then look away. This shows you have respect and are not a threat.

If a First Nations person is not looking into your eyes, then do not look directly into theirs. Sometimes a good way of doing this during conversation, is to look into the distance and from time to time monitor their comfort. The use of body language, such as looking to your feet or hands, brings you closer to the person until they feel comfortable that you are not a threat. Always thank them for their time and let them know, that you really appreciated the chat.

## Nation Business

There are at times, differences of opinion between individuals from the same Nation. This is Nation Business and it is not your place to get involved in it. It is not your place to fix things for others even when you can clearly see the solution. The best way out of differences of opinion between individuals is to reiterate this point by saying 'this is Nation Business and it is not my place as a Government official to be involved'.

**Fictional example:** During a meeting, 2 different family groups disagree on the Nations that represent and can speak for Country. One is Tatti Tatti and the other is Tatti Tatti, Lattji Lattji. They disagree on the families that traditionally used a billabong and there is a heated debate in the room, one family is pressing you to take a side and listen only to them. By saying, "this is Nation Business and as a Government official it is not my place to be involved," you are respectfully putting the responsibility on the Traditional Owners to come to a resolution.



## Knowledge sharing

When relationships have been built over time you may be taken into a position of trust where cultural knowledge is shared with you. This is yours to keep but it is not yours to share. If you share this knowledge with others that position of trust will be broken. The safest option is to ask, “am I able to share this knowledge?”. If you are told ‘no’ then this knowledge must never be shared under any circumstances. It is considered a great honour to be a knowledge holder.

## Style guide

This style guide is an evolving document and will be updated regularly. The MDBA uses as its authority the [Australian Government Style Manual](#). For reference there is a section called [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#).

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies has [a thesaurus for language groups and people](#).

## Aboriginal vs Indigenous vs First Nations, Traditional Owner and Traditional Custodian

The term First Nations started in North America and is becoming more widely adopted by Indigenous peoples across the world. Some of the Basin’s Traditional Owners are electing to be referred to as First Nations, while others prefer to be referred to as Aboriginal or Traditional Owners. Each situation will be different, the best way to gauge how Traditional Owners wish to be referred to is to ask before your meeting. This will allow you time to amend PowerPoint presentations and/or any reference material.

- **Indigenous** is a term given to Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by modern Australians. The definition of indigenous is: originating or occurring naturally in a particular place; native.
- **Aboriginal** is an English term to describe the original inhabitants of a place, broken down Ab (of) and original (first).
- **First Nations** is the term chosen by some of Australia’s first people.
- **Traditional Owner** is a First Nations person that is recognised by their community.
- **Traditional Custodian** signifies that First Nations people are part of their Country and their role is not one of ownership but of custodianship, looking after Country to benefit all living entities.

## Terms to avoid

The National Museum of Australia (2007), Amnesty International (2011), and the Indigenous Communications and Engagement Support section of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2015) suggest avoiding the following words:

- **Aborigine.** Aboriginal by itself i.e. you need to say Aboriginal people rather than Aborigines.
- **Koori, Murri, Noongar.** Although these terms are used by First Nations people to identify themselves, it can be considered insensitive if used by non-First Nations people unless you are well known within the community.
- **ATSI** or other similar acronyms. Always spell out the words.
- **black, white**
- **blackfella.** First Nations people may refer to themselves as blackfellas, but this term can offend if not used carefully.
- **dialect.** This can suggest that it is not a real language.
- **Dreamtime.** Use Dreaming instead or use the appropriate word if known e.g. Tjukurpa, Ungud, Wongar. Dreamtime implies something that happened in the past or is just a story. Dreaming is more complex and incorporates lore, religion, stories and relationships (see Christine Nicholls, 2014).
- **full-blood, half-caste, quarter cast or native**
- **walkabout**
- **tribe and tribal,** use instead Nation, clan, group
- **'discovered,'** as it can create a false impression.

It is also important to be careful with tense. If you refer to people only in the past tense, or only use images of ancient sites, you can make it seem like First Nations people no longer exist or do not have an active role in managing their land today.

The National Museum of Australia recommends using the word 'colonise' when referring in the broad sense to Europeans' arrival in Australia, rather than 'settled'.

Explain unusual terms if you use them e.g. two-way schools, talking circles, avoidance names, NAIDOC.

## The Aboriginal Map with shared boundary explanations

Unlike state, territory and council boundaries Aboriginal Nations often share boundaries. Think of this as a grey area either side of the boundary line which were looked after by both Nations. This doesn't fit the Western system of ownership and often causes problems now between Nations groups.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies map of Aboriginal Australia attempts to represent all the language and Nation groups of the Aboriginal people of Australia. Aboriginal Studies Press allows print and digital reproduction of the map, but you need to seek permission each time you use the map in a different form.

For example, if you have permission to use the map in a presentation and decide that you would like to publish it on your website you will need to seek permission for this additional use. Permission will be granted to the applicant only and cannot be shared with other parties.

Some fees and conditions apply, [Copyright and reproduction permission AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia | AIATSIS](#).

## Aboriginal flag

The Aboriginal flag was designed by Harold Thomas in 1971. It is divided into two equal halves. The top is black, the bottom is red and there is a yellow circle in the centre. The black half symbolises First Nations people past, present and future. The yellow circle is the sun, the giver and renewer of life. The red half of the flag is the earth. It also represents red ochre symbolising spiritual attachment to the land. An easy way to remember what order the colours go is to think of Aboriginal people standing on a red earth.

The flag was first flown at Victoria Square in Adelaide on National Aborigines Day, 12 July 1971. It was later used at the Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972, when First Nations people were seeking national justice, including land rights, education, health and legal rights.

The image of the Aboriginal flag is now in the public domain,

The Aboriginal Flag is now freely available for public use after the Morrison Government completed negotiations with Harold Thomas. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the Aboriginal Flag copyright has been transferred to the Commonwealth.

“We’ve freed the Aboriginal flag for Australians,”

For more information [Free use of Aboriginal Flag secured for all Australians | Prime Minister of Australia \(pm.gov.au\)](#)

## Publishing stories and ideas

The use of traditional stories in publications should be discussed with the custodians of the stories before publication, especially if the traditional story is being published for the first time. There may be more than one group that has custodianship of a story.

*‘Using knowledge as part of the general spread of ideas is a concept that often sits at odds with Aboriginal notions of holding and disseminating knowledge because it is a right given to people based on their standing in an Aboriginal society’.* ([Beyond Guarding Ground](#). Terri Janke (2009).

Once publicly released, it is difficult to control how a story might be re-used. There are also legal limits in being able to control the general expression of First Nations stories and knowledge once the copyright period expires.

## Intellectual property considerations

The MDBA takes First Nations people’s intellectual property and cultural rights seriously. Intellectual property includes a wide range of intangible property that is a result of the creative and intellectual

effort of individuals. For First Nations people this can include objects and sites as well as knowledge, languages, spiritual knowledge, myths, legends or other similar material, illustrations, music, song, poetry and art.

## Copyright

Copyright is an important form of intellectual property right and is governed by law. *Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)*. The Act grants automatic rights to the creators and owners of literary, dramatic, artistic or musical works and other subject matter such as films and recordings. First Nations people who are the copyright owners of their works have the exclusive right to prohibit or do certain acts such as publish, reproduce, communicate and adapt their work.

Copyright owners may exercise any of their rights. Alternatively, they may permit others to do so, for example, by a licence.

## Agreement to use creative content form

Whenever you are collecting data whether as narrative, quantitative or qualitative, always use the [Agreement to use creative content](#) form. This is designed for individuals and groups who appear in photographs, video, audio or graphic materials obtained by or on behalf of the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) See the [Photo consent information sheet](#)

The MDBA publishes all material according to Creative Commons Attributions 4.0 licence <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. This means that we need to acknowledge those in any photos, videos or voice recordings and note if any changes were made to it.

## Privacy

The MDBA must comply with the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth.)* (the Privacy Act) and the Australian Privacy Principles (the APPs), which set out how the MDBA must collect, use, disclose and secure personal and sensitive information and how to allow access to or correct records containing personal information.

Very broadly, under the Privacy Act and the APPs, the MDBA may only use or disclose personal information for the same purpose for which it was collected (the Primary Purpose). Use of personal information for other purposes (Secondary Purpose) is permissible in limited circumstances including where:

- the individual has consented
- where the Secondary Purpose is related to the Primary Purpose and the individual would reasonably expect the MDBA to disclose the information for the Secondary Purpose.

Please contact the MDBA's Privacy Officer at [Privacy@mdba.gov.au](mailto:Privacy@mdba.gov.au) if you have any questions or are in any doubt about how to collect, use or disclose personal information.

## Recognising culturally sensitive information

From time to time while working with the Basin's First Nations people, you may find yourself hearing culturally sensitive information. If you feel that what you have been shown or told is culturally sensitive information, tell the person that you feel it may be culturally sensitive information and ask them, "is this something you would share with other Australians or foreigners?" If they would not share it, then it is culturally sensitive. Let them know you are happy to record the information and return it to them, but you won't be writing it down for others to see and use.

A fictional example of culturally sensitive information:

"You see that plant over there the one with the broad green leaves that's a medicine plant we call it Gumbi Gumbi, you know we boil him up and drink him like a tea, very good for healing sickness, all kinds too, tummy upset, aches and pains, good for the old people you know, with the arthritis and that."

If you published this and people found out the properties of this plant, how long would it last before they were all stripped bare? This is culturally sensitive information. By recording it but not keeping it and returning it to the person who told you, you're helping to keep this information alive and sacred. See Guidance Note: [Handling of culturally sensitive information](#).

## Oral history

A lot of published work about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is based on oral history accounts. The principles outlined by the University of NSW; [Bringing Them Home Oral History Project](#) should be followed.

These include:

- Retain the flavour of the spoken word rather than edit the interview to a standard expected of well-written literature.
- The original word order should not be changed, nor should more suitable words be substituted.
- Recorded speech should be treated with the same respect as statements quoted from written sources, and editorial changes clearly marked.

**Example:** In *The Little Red Yellow Black Book (2008)* Bruce Pascoe advises that editors working with First Nations people should retain their phrases and outlooks, as they add to the richness which is their life and creation. Certain words can be loaded with symbolism and embedded in the culture.

## Different word meanings

Be aware of different meanings given to some words, for example in *Nourishing Terrains*, Deborah Bird Rose defines the word 'Country':

Country in First Nations English is not only a common noun but also a proper noun. (See below).

*People talk about Country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to Country, sing to Country, visit Country, worry about Country, feel sorry for Country, and long for Country. People say that Country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy. Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place, such as one might indicate with terms like 'spending a day in the country' or 'going up the country'. Rather, Country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life. Because of this richness, Country is home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind, and spirit; heart's ease.*

The use of the capital letter in the word Country is to show that it is recognised (as) equally as important as a person's name would be.

## Images

One of the main cultural considerations for publishing images is that some First Nations people do not like to see images, or the names, of people who have passed away. Others don't mind. The safest approach is to avoid potential offence by not publishing images of people who have passed away.

If there is doubt, for instance if you are using an old image from the image gallery you should provide a warning in the front of the publication, for example in the MDBA annual report we say: 'This report may contain photographs or quotes by Aboriginal people who have passed away.'

There are also some situations where the family or community may give permission to use the image and name of someone who has passed away. But this would only be on a case by case basis and in discussion with the Aboriginal Partnerships team.

Some images may depict a sacred site of Men's or Women's Business, in which case the image should not be seen by the opposite gender. When using landscape images please ensure you know where the image is from and if there are any cultural sensitivities attached.

Permission should always be sought before any image of a First Nations person is used. If you are sourcing new images, please discuss this with the Aboriginal Partnerships team to make sure we are not contacting the same person or community several times.

There is a First Nations specific [Agreement to use creative content form](#) that should be downloaded and used when obtaining new photo and/or media material and an [information sheet](#) for further guidance.

## MDBA Acknowledgements

Approved text for acknowledgements applicable to different contexts.

### Email



‘In the spirit of strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the MDBA acknowledges the Traditional Owners as the Custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We recognise the ongoing connection to land, water and community held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We offer our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging’.

## Publications

‘The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) acknowledges and offers respect to the Traditional Owners, and their Nations, of the Murray–Darling Basin, who have a deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to their lands and waters’.

The MDBA understands the need for recognition of Traditional Owner knowledge and cultural values in natural resource management associated with the Basin. The approach of Traditional Owners to caring for the natural landscape, including water, can be expressed in the words of Darren Perry (former Chair of the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations):

*‘The environment that Aboriginal people know as Country has not been allowed to have a voice in contemporary Australia. Aboriginal First Nations have been listening to Country for many thousands of years and can speak for Country so that others can know what Country needs. Through the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations and the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations the voice of Country can be heard by all.’*

It can also be expressed through the words of the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations Board (NBAN) and endorsed by The Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN).

*‘As the First Nations peoples (Traditional Owners) we are the knowledge holders, connected to Country and with the cultural authority to share our knowledge. We offer perspectives to balance and challenge other voices and viewpoints. We aspire to owning and managing water to protect our totemic obligations, to carry out our way of life, and to teach our younger generations to maintain our connections and heritage through our own law and customs. When Country is happy, our spirits are happy.’*

## General meetings

Good morning/afternoon,

‘I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land/s upon which we meet today the [insert Traditional Owner Nation name/s]. I offer my respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. And I extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people with us today’.

## Access cards

‘In the spirit of strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the MDBA acknowledges the Traditional Owners as the Custodians of the lands on which we live and work, the [insert Traditional Owner Nation name].

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ongoing connection to land, water and community. I offer my respect to Elders past, present and emerging. And I extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people with us today’.

## PowerPoint

# Acknowledgement



The MDBA acknowledges the Traditional Owners as the Custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We recognise the ongoing connection to land, water and community held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We offer our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

The MDBA understands the need for recognition of Traditional Owner knowledge and cultural values in natural resource management associated with the Basin.

## Style guide at a glance

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies has a thesaurus for language groups and people, which can be accessed through its website, [www1.aiatsis.gov.au/](http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/).

The MDBA uses as its authority the [Australian Government Style Manual](#). Refer to the section [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#).

### A

**Aboriginal people.** This term is preferred over Indigenous people, unless talking about Indigenous people around the world. However, the term **First Nations people** is the most preferred term. When talking about First Nations people in the whole of Australia, use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and spell it out in full. Use the name of the specific Nation if known.

**Aunty.** This is a term of respect and can be used, particularly if you are known by the community. If in doubt say, for example, Mrs Smith.

**Australia Day.** Also known as Survival Day or Invasion Day.

### C

**Capitalisation.** Use capitals for Elder, Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Australians, First Nations, Nation, Traditional Owner, Country, Dreaming and forms of address such as Aunty and Uncle.

Use capitals for the names of Nations or language groups e.g. Wiradjuri, Gamilaroi, Ngunnawal, Ngarrindjeri.



## D

**Dates.** Use ‘years ago’ in preference to ‘BCE’ ‘BP’, ‘BC’, or ‘AD’.

When referring to how long First Nations people have been in Australia, say since time immemorial. As First Nations people know, their people have been in Australia since the Creation time.

## F

**First Nations people.** The term generally preferred by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, rather than Aboriginal people or Indigenous people.

## I

**Indigenous.** Avoid this term if you can. If talking about Australia as a whole use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. If talking about the Murray–Darling Basin, use First Nations people.

**Italics.** The National Museum of Australia uses italics to show words that belong to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language. If the word is commonly used in English (for example, if it appears in the latest edition of the Macquarie Dictionary) it should not be italicised.

## M

**MLDRIN.** This is an acronym for Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations. In 2020 the Chair is Rene Woods (Nari Nari Nation).

**Mob.** This is one of those words that is probably fine to use if you are known by the community, or work with First Nations people. Check with the First Nations group you are working with as opinions may vary.

## N

**NAIDOC week.** This is the National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Commemoration, mostly expressed as the acronym. It starts on the first Sunday in July except in 2020 when it was delayed until November.

**Nation** — use this word in preference to ‘tribe’. There are more than 46 Nations in the Basin including: Barkindji (Paakantyi), Barunggam, Bidjara, Bigambul, Budjiti, Dhudhuroa, Dja Dja Wurrung, Euahlayi, Gamilaroi, Githabul, Gunggari, Gwamu (Kooma), Jarowair, Kambuwal, Kunja, Kwiambul, Latji Latji, Maljangapa, Mandandanji, Maraaura, Mardigan, Murrawarri, Mutti Mutti, Nari Nari, Ngarrindjeri, Ngemba, Ngintait, Ngunnawal, Ngambri, Nyeri Nyeri, Ngiyampaa, Tatti Tatti, Taungurung, Wadi Wadi, Wailwan, Wakka Wakka, Wamba Wamba, Waywurru, Wegi Wegi, Wergaia, Wiradjuri, Wolgalu, Wotjobaluk, Yaitmathang, Yita Yita, and Yorta Yorta.

National Reconciliation Week is held each year on 27 May to 3 June. It marks the 1967 referendum which was held on 27 May and the final day is 3 June, the anniversary of the 1992 Mabo decision.

**NBAN.** This is an acronym for Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations. In 2020 the Chair is Fred Hooper (Murrawarri Nation).

## R

**Reconciliation action plan (RAP).** This is a business plan developed by an organisation that documents what they will do within their sphere of influence to contribute to reconciliation in Australia. RAPs outline practical actions that will build strong relationships and enhanced respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. The [RAP program](#) was launched in 2006 by Professor Mick Dodson and former Prime Minister John Howard.

## U

**Uncle** — this is a term of respect and can be used, particularly if you are known by the community. If in doubt, say for example, ‘Mr Smith’.

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**Office locations**

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