



Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council
Community Protocols Guideline

Contact:

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BACKGROUND

The Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) is a Land Council formed under the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act (ALRA).

Under ALRA, Land Councils are tasked to work for the benefit of Aboriginal people in NSW and in particular our member base and their families, and among our responsibilities are to;

- Take action to protect the culture and heritage of Aboriginal persons in the Council's area, subject to any other law;
- Promote awareness in the community of the culture and heritage of Aboriginal persons in the Council's area.

The Tamworth LALC's vision is:

To represent its members and the wider Aboriginal community in its aims to protect their heritage, preserve their culture and foster their best interests. We successfully accomplish this by creating our own opportunities and building pride, self-esteem, respect and financial stewardship for present and future generations whilst using the assets of land, people and culture.

PURPOSE

This document seeks to inform the wider community, and the Aboriginal community, of the protocols that are to be observed on Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeroi Country. The cultural protocols described in this document have been set down by Elders of our Nation, and are endorsed by the Board and membership of the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Aboriginal people hold a unique place in Australia's culture and history. The Tamworth LALC is committed to pursuing genuine recognition of the truth of Australia's history. Aboriginal people are the original owners of the land and it is important that this special position is recognised and incorporated into official protocol to enable the wider community to share in Aboriginal culture and facilitate better relationships between Aboriginal people and the general community.

KAMILAROI/GAMILAROI/GOMEROI COUNTRY

The Tamworth LALC covers part of what was traditionally known as Kamilaroi, Gamilaroi or Gomeroi Country. The traditional lands of the Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeroi people are thought to stretch from what is now known as the Upper Hunter Valley in the south, through to southern Queensland in the north, from the Great Dividing Range in the east through to the Walgett area in the west. Different pronunciations of the nation's name have stemmed from oral traditions and the sharing of knowledge through many generations, and are all recognised as correct.

Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeroi culture is a living, vibrant culture, with a wealth of knowledge of foods, stories, song, dance, language, arts, weapons, songlines and sites. Community structures and decision making, traditions and lore are recorded and practiced day-to-day.

Kamilaroi? Gamilaroi? Gomeroi?

Different pronunciations of the nation's name have stemmed from oral traditions and the sharing of knowledge through many generations, and are all recognised as correct.

Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeroi people refer to themselves as Aboriginal people¹ and as Murriss². The traditional language spoken here is Gamilaraay.

WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

In traditional practice, a group of Aboriginal people who wished to travel through Country that was not their own camped at the edge of the Country and awaited a welcoming party. The protocol allowed the visiting people to acknowledging the Traditional Custodians and seek permission to enter or use resources from the land and sea. The Traditional Owners in turn would welcome the visiting people, grant permission to enter their land, and grant protection from spirits who otherwise could cause difficulties for the visiting tribe according to Aboriginal spiritual beliefs.

In contemporary society, this traditional practice is honoured through a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country which is performed at the opening of a public event, ceremony or meeting. A Welcome to Country is performed by an Elder who is a member of the traditional custodians of the land on which the event is being held. There is no particular script for a Welcome to Country and how it is performed depends on the individual. Elders performing a Welcome to Country should always be seated with other dignitaries and speakers at the event.

For any major event, all efforts should be made to arrange for an Elder to Perform a Welcome to Country. At smaller events, such as regular meetings, an Acknowledgement of Country is often acceptable.

Welcome to Country

A Welcome to Country should be performed by an Elder. Elders are people within the Aboriginal community who have earned that title and have knowledge of the local heritage and culture. The Tamworth LALC maintains a list of appropriate people who can perform a Welcome to Country and can be a contact point for referral.

For any major event, all efforts should be made to arrange for an Elder to Perform a Welcome to Country. If enough people are available, and particularly for a very large or significant event, it may be preferable for a male and female Elder to perform the Welcome together.

Acknowledgement of Country

At smaller events, such as regular meetings, an Acknowledgement of Country is often acceptable. An Acknowledgement to Country is a way that non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people from other nation groups to show respect for the traditional custodians. An Acknowledgement to Country should be performed by the main dignitary or chair of the event and is always the first point of business at any meeting or gathering. There is no “correct” wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, but as a general guide the following may be used:

I would like to acknowledge that we meet today on the traditional lands of the Kamilaroi/ Gamilaroi/ Gomeroi people. I recognise their continuing connection to this land and pay my respects to Elders past and present and I extend that respect to any Aboriginal people present here today.

¹ Aboriginal as opposed to Indigenous; and Aboriginal as opposed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, although there are people living in the Tamworth region who have family links to the Torres Strait and identify as Torres Strait Islanders.

² Murriss as opposed to Kooris or Gooris which apply to people living in more southerly areas of NSW and toward the coast respectively.

ENGAGING ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS AND MEMBERS

Organisations and individuals wishing to work with, consult or provide services to the Aboriginal community need to follow certain protocols to build their relationships with the community.

The Tamworth LALC is a great resource to assist organisations and individuals to source contacts across the community and within its broad membership. The Tamworth LALC has a primary role in providing cultural and heritage information to the local Tamworth community.

Some simple rules to follow:

- Avoid one-off consultations and engagements, relationships need to be built on trust and maintained over time to get the most out of them;
- Don't rush consultation – allocating more time will help you gain a better understanding of the richness of our culture;
- Understand and appreciate where the Aboriginal community is coming from:
 - Be aware of cultural differences and expectations (eg eye contact),
 - Show courtesy and respect in the way you approach people,
 - Be respectful of time limitations,
 - Avoid bureaucratic jargon and acronyms,
 - Be aware that Murri people may have a different perspective to what you have, and
 - Be mindful that one Aboriginal person or even one group of Aboriginal people are not representative of the whole community;
- Get involved with the community and find out how you can participate in significant Aboriginal cultural events and celebrations on a regular basis.

Don't rush consultations with our community – rushing in and out is a lost opportunity in understanding the richness of the culture

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND PRIORITIES

Organisations and community groups often seek information about Aboriginal community priorities via consultation, community meetings, focus groups or similar events. While the involvement of Aboriginal people in program design and delivery is essential, the Aboriginal community is often unnecessarily burdened by the amount of consultation and survey work that they are asked to participate in.

The Tamworth LALC has a Community, Land and Business Plan in place that reflects the views, priorities and aspirations of its 650+ members and their families, and also hosts and participates in a range of regular meetings that organisations may participate in, by appointment, if their work is considered relevant to the meeting membership. Other Aboriginal organisations also have plans that guide their work and strategies within the Aboriginal community.

FLYING THE ABORIGINAL FLAG

The Aboriginal Flag was designed in 1971 by Aboriginal artist Harold Thomas who was a Luritja man from Central Australia. The flag was originally intended to be used for the Land Rights movement but its symbolism, significance to Aboriginal people and recognition amongst the wider population, grew to such an extent that it was granted status as an official flag under the Australian Flags Act in 1995. The Aboriginal flag is important and meaningful to the Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeri people as a consolidated symbol across all Aboriginal nations of Australia.

The symbolism of the Aboriginal flag is generally interpreted as follows:

- Black – represents the Aboriginal people of Australia,
- Yellow – represents the Sun, the giver of life and protector, and
- Red – represents the red earth, the red ochre used in ceremonies and Aboriginal peoples' spiritual relation to the land.

Agencies, organisations and individuals wanting to fly the Aboriginal flag do not need to seek permission from the local Aboriginal community. The flag should be included in flag raising ceremonies or in displays inside and outside buildings wherever it is appropriate. Flag flying protocols apply and should be consulted when planning the installation of flagpoles and displays.

A copy of the Australian protocols can be found here: www.itsanhonour.gov.au/symbols/flag.cfm.

ABORIGINAL CALENDAR OF EVENTS

There are lots of opportunities to get involved with the Aboriginal community. Join in and celebrate with us as often as you can.

There are a number of significant dates for Aboriginal communities that are celebrated or observed each year³. Community organisations and individuals can build their relationships with the Aboriginal community by participating in, or holding, events to recognise these dates. Below are some examples:

- **13 February** – Apology Day, the anniversary of the 2008 Apology to the Stolen Generations;
- **3rd Thursday of March** – Close the Gap Day, initiated as part of the Close the Gap campaign and aims to raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health issues and “close the gap” by 2030;
- **21 March** – Harmony Day, initiated in 1999 to coincide with the UN Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and aims to promote and celebrate our culturally diverse society
- **26 May** – National Sorry Day, initiated as a recommendation of the Bringing them Home report in 1998
- **27 May** – Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum which allowed for Aboriginal people to be counted in the Census and for the Australian Government to make laws for Aboriginal people
- **27 May to 3 June** – Reconciliation Week

³ A number of online resources maintain Aboriginal calendars of events or lists of Aboriginal dates of significance eg. <https://indigenousportal.eq.edu.au/resources/dates/Pages/dates.aspx>

- **3 June** – Mabo Day, celebrates the National High Court decision in 1992 in favour of Eddie Mabo and his descendants, that extinguished the myth of Terra Nullius and recognised Native Title rights
- **Sunday of the June Long Weekend** – Myall Creek Massacre Memorial, of particular significance to the Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeroi people and surrounding nations. The Memorial remembers the Wirrayaraay people who were killed on 10 June 1838. The subsequent trial and hanging of the perpetrators is historically and legally significant and the memorial is a significant event within the Reconciliation movement having been initiated by descendants of those murdered and the murderers.
- **NAIDOC Week – First full week of July** - celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal people and their contribution to the nation’s identity. A National NAIDOC committee sets a theme for each year’s celebration. The Tamworth Aboriginal community generally hosts a community and family day on Friday of NAIDOC Week.
- **4 August** – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day, initiated to put a focus on education and the role it plays in the strength and culture of Aboriginal children.
- **9 August** – United Nations International Day of Indigenous Peoples aims to strengthen international awareness and cooperation towards Human Rights, health, education and development.
- **September** – Aborigines Week (historical), from 1985 to 1992 National Aborigines Week was celebrated from the second Friday in September starting on what was known as National Aborigines Day. Some local communities still observe the date, and particularly cold-climate locations often hold their NAIDOC celebrations at this time due to the more favourable weather.

BOOKING INFORMATION

Organisations wishing to engage Aboriginal community members in official roles as part of local events and ceremonies can contact the Tamworth LALC for recommendations and contact details. Normal privacy law regulations apply to the sharing of information, and in some cases the Tamworth LALC will need to contact individuals on an organisations behalf rather than sharing contact information. Organisations should ensure in their planning that sufficient lead time is provided to engage a suitable person for the role, and after initial phone contact the arrangements for the event should be confirmed in writing wherever possible.

Fees for the engagement of Elders or cultural performers to undertake special cultural roles in local events and ceremonies should be negotiated on a case by case basis. Remuneration for costs such as preparation time and travel to and from the event should also be factored in.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please contact:

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