

# Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country

A Guide for Victorian Schools



**Published by the Department of Education and Training**

Melbourne

February 2015

© State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training)

The copyright in this document is owned by the State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training), or in the case of some materials, by third parties (third party materials). No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 the National Education Access Licence for Schools (NEALS) (see below) or with permission.

NEALS is an educational institution situated in Australia which is not conducted for profit, or a body responsible for administering such an institution may copy and communicate the materials, other than third party materials, for the educational purposes of the institution.

Authorised by the Department of Education and Training,  
2 Treasury Place, East Melbourne, Victoria, 3002.

This document is also available on the internet at

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/wanniklearning.aspx>

**Contents**

---

Introduction	4
The Purpose of Ceremony	5
Engaging with Community	6
Acknowledgment of Country	7
The Aboriginal Flag	8
Contacts and Calendar	9

---

# Introduction

The Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF) 2014–2018 provides the overarching framework and strategies for developing strong social, cultural and economic foundations for current and future generations of Aboriginal Victorians. The VAAF recognises that:

---

“Stronger appreciation and awareness of Aboriginal culture can foster confidence and resilience, as well as connections and respect across the Victorian community”

---

In the Victorian context, a Welcome to Country or an Acknowledgement of Country ceremony demonstrates respect for Koorie people and acknowledges the spiritual, physical and cultural connection their ancestors have with their 'country' as the first people of the land now known as Victoria.

This Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country Guide has been developed in partnership between the Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI).

The Guide will support Victorian schools to become familiar with the basic protocols involved in conducting a Welcome to Country and/or Acknowledgement of Country as a fundamental first step in developing positive and meaningful relationship with their local Koorie communities.



# The Purpose of Ceremony

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country ceremonies provide opportunities for formal recognition of the Traditional Owners of the land on which schools are located. Such recognition helps to supports relationships and communication between schools and Victorian Koorie communities.

## Who can perform the ceremony?

### Welcome to Country

A Welcome to Country can only be given by a Koorie Traditional Owner of the land on which the event or meeting is taking place. The welcome is usually performed by an Elder or can be made by a nominated representative.

Significant events celebrating or focussing on local, state or national Indigenous cultures should, where possible, be opened by an Elder who can perform a Welcome to Country ceremony.

### Acknowledgement of Country

Where an Elder is not available to support celebrations of significant Indigenous cultural events, an Acknowledgement of Country can be made. The Acknowledgement of Country does not need to be an elaborate ceremony, simply a few words at the opening of a meeting, event or assembly. The Acknowledgment of Country can be made by any member of the community who wishes to pay their respects to the Koorie Traditional Owners of the land on which the event or meeting is taking place.



## Engaging with Community

When planning for Indigenous cultural events, it is important to establish open and positive communication with Elders and the local Koorie community who may be able to provide guidance and assistance.

This communication may also help to establish if there are any special requirements for the ceremony or if particular members of the community would be required to perform services. For example, there may be a gender specific element that would be determined either 'Men's Business' or 'Women's Business' according to Koorie protocols.

Schools needing assistance to find a suitable Elder or representative from the Koorie community to perform a Welcome to Country are advised to contact their regional Koorie Education Coordinator or VAEAI.

### Remuneration of Elders

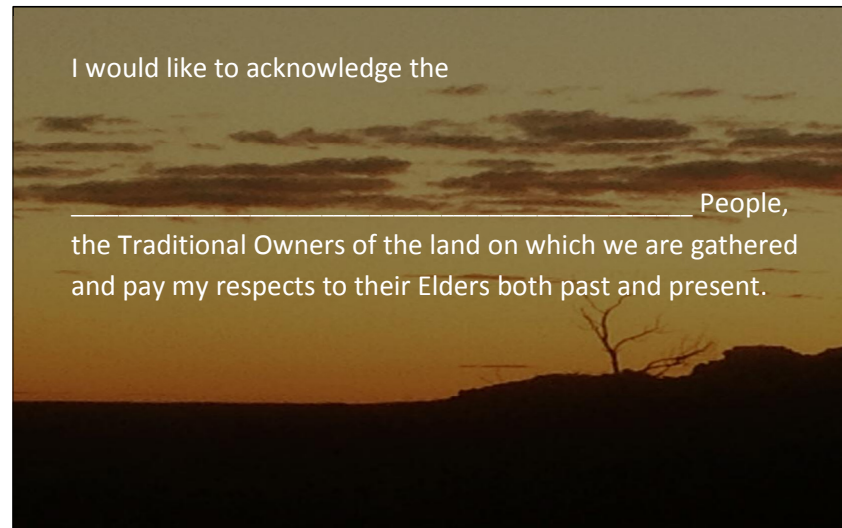
Inviting an Elder to perform a Welcome to Country ceremony or conducting an Acknowledgement of Country is a meaningful way in which schools can show respect for their local Koorie community.

Schools with close ties to their local Koorie communities may be able to secure the services of an Elder at no charge. It is, however, a sign of cultural respect that Elders are paid or otherwise remunerated for their cultural knowledge and authority within their community.

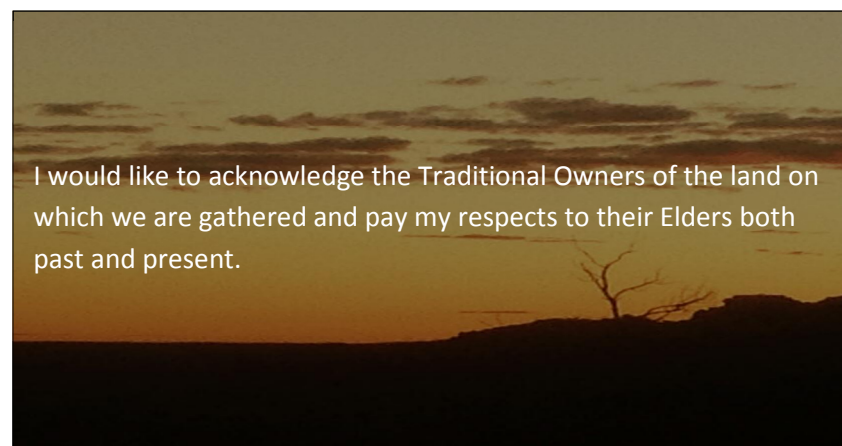


## Acknowledgment of Country

The Acknowledgement of Country example below may be used in circumstances where the Traditional Owners of the land are known.



The alternative form of the Acknowledgment to Country below may be used if for example, the Traditional Owners of the land are not known.





# The Aboriginal Flag

## History of the Aboriginal Flag

The Aboriginal Flag was recognised by the Federal Court of Australia in July 1995 under s.5 of the Flags Act 1953. Harold Thomas, a Luritja man from the Northern Territory, designed the Aboriginal Flag in 1971. The flag has become a recognised national symbol of unity for Indigenous people throughout Australia.

## Flying the Aboriginal flag

All Victorian government schools have been provided with and are encouraged to fly the Aboriginal flag. Flying the Aboriginal flag when holding Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country ceremonies, demonstrates respect for the meaning of these ceremonies. Flying the Aboriginal flag need not be restricted to only these ceremonial occasions.

It is important to fly the Aboriginal flag the correct way - Black at the top and Red at the base as follows:



Information on protocols for flying flags can be found at [www.itsanhonour.gov.au/symbols/flag.cfm](http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/symbols/flag.cfm)

## What the colours represent

Black represents the Aboriginal people of Australia, Red represents the red earth and the spiritual relationship to the land and Yellow represents the sun, the giver of life.





# Contacts and Calendar

## Contacts

### Department of Education and Training

Koorie Unit  
Level 2, 33 St Andrews Place  
East Melbourne  
Phone: 9637 3529  
[www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/wanniklearning.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/wanniklearning.aspx)

### Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEI)

144 Westbourne Grove  
PO Box 113, Northcote VIC 3070  
Phone: 94810800  
Email: [vaeai@vaeai.org.au](mailto:vaeai@vaeai.org.au)  
[www.vaeai.org.au](http://www.vaeai.org.au)

VAEI may also assist schools with information on their Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG)

### Koorie Heritage Trust

295 King St  
Melbourne  
Phone: 8622 2600  
[www.koorieheritagetrust.com](http://www.koorieheritagetrust.com)

### Native Title Service Victoria

Phone: 9321 5300  
[www.nts.vic.gov.au](http://www.nts.vic.gov.au)

## Calendar

The VAEI Koorie Education Calendar has been framed around significant dates and events throughout the calendar year. The calendar will assist schools to plan for key events and locate information about Victorian Koorie cultures, histories and perspectives.

See [VAEI Koorie Education Calendar](#).

