

Yurirka: Respectful Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

2026



Contents

Acknowledgment	2	Protocols	16
Foreword	3	Welcome to Country	16
Tirkangkaku.....	4	Acknowledgement of Country.....	16
Respectful Engagement	4	Acknowledgement in written documents.....	16
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Worldviews	5	Honorarium.....	16
Why do we need a guide?	6	Use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language.....	17
Relationships	6	Sorry Business.....	17
Respect	6	Smoking Ceremonies.....	17
Listening.....	6	Men's and Women's Business	17
Obligations.....	6	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags.....	18
Communication.....	6	Ownership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	
Elders	6	Knowledge and Intellectual Property	19
Terminology	7	Research	19
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	7	Contacts	20
First Nations	8	Acknowledgments.....	20
Indigenous	8		
Language Principles	9		
Elder.....	9		
Country	9		
Caring for Country	9		
Kinship	10		
Culture.....	10		
Dreaming – Creation	10		
Shame	10		
Deadly.....	10		
Individual and Collective terms	11		
'First Nations' and 'First Peoples'	11		
Traditional Owner.....	11		
Nation	11		
Clan	11		
Mob	11		
Community	12		
Offensive terms	13		
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identity	14		
Who is Aboriginal?.....	14		
Stolen Generations	14		
Diversity: ancient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities.....	15		
Self-identifying terms.....	15		

Acknowledgment

We respectfully acknowledge the Kaurna, Boandik and Barngarla First Nations Peoples and their Elders past and present, who are the First Nations' Traditional Owners of the lands that are now home to our combined campuses located in Adelaide, Waite, Roseworthy, Mount Gambier, and Whyalla. We extend this acknowledgement to the Traditional Owners of other First Nations lands across Australia where we conduct business, recognising their enduring cultures, heritage and connections to Country.

Foreword

This interim guide has been prepared to assist users to engage respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures represent the oldest recorded histories and cultures known to the world; however, colonial histories do not acknowledge this fact. Instead, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have been ignored, and the terra nullius myth has had a devastating impact. It is time to improve engagement with First Nations, and to redress past injustices.

This guide aims to highlight the significance of the terms and phrases we use when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; and to promote a way of using language which acknowledges and honours Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their land, cultures and knowledges, and which deeply respects connection to Country.

This guide provides the opportunity to advance and improve the way we speak, write, and think about the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal peoples.

Adelaide University encourages relationships which are built on respectful engagement and aspires to create an environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal peoples work collaboratively in the spirit of reciprocity for mutually beneficial outcomes in research, teaching, learning and engagement. Written into the [Adelaide University Act 2023](#) are commitments to:

- Support the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples;
- Recognise and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges;
- Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges in education, research and engagement;
- Foster respectful, two-way relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples that will ensure active engagement.

Non-Aboriginal staff and students often seek guidance on how to engage with First Nations Peoples. This guide informs the use of proper terminology and respectful engagement with First Nations Peoples and is consistent with best practice and preferred approaches.

As this interim guide builds directly on Yurirka, Adelaide University has intentionally retained the Kaurna name in recognition of its cultural significance and the extensive community engagement that underpinned the original resource.

It is important that the University recognises the origins of this refreshed guide. We thank everyone who has contributed to its development over the multiple iterations; and especially recognise Bradley Distinguished Professor Irene Watson, the Purkarninthe Elders Group, and members of the former Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership and Strategy for their leadership and work in Yurirka's foundation and delivery.

The University will initiate a full review, update and re-release of this interim guide within 12 months. Initial plans include provision for more robust and active consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community during the guide's development and delivery – emulating the engagement that underpinned and informed the creation of Yurirka previously. More information will be shared in due course.

Tirkangkaku

Tirkangkaku was gifted by the Kurna People as the Aboriginal name for Adelaide University. It means place of learning and honours Adelaide University's connection to Country and commitment to ensuring the transformative potential for all.

Adelaide University is the first university in Australia to have provision for an Aboriginal name in its founding Act. The name emerged through collaboration, proposed by Senior Kurna Elder, Dr Uncle Lewis Yarlupurka O'Brien AO, in consultation with Aboriginal staff, the Purkarninthe Elders Group, and Uncle Rod O'Brien. Cultural consent was received from Kurna Warra Karrpanthi.

New guidelines for the use of Tirkangkaku are under development and will be released in due course. In the interim, please note that the use of Adelaide University brand identifiers should align with University branding requirements and any additional guidance issued by International and External Engagement (I&EE). Where proposed naming or branding has cultural, reputational or strategic implications, consultation with I&EE and the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor First Nations may be required.

Respectful Engagement

For thousands of years, the continent which is now known as Australia would have sustained a healthy pre-invasion population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, whose lives and cultures were and remain as diverse as the Australian lands and environments. More than 270 Aboriginal languages were spoken and many of those languages impacted by colonialism are being revived across the continent. The language of the Kurna, Barngarla and Boandik Peoples, the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the University campuses in Adelaide, Whyalla, and Mount Gambier are built, were once declared extinct. Now, Aboriginal languages are being revitalised and spoken again, there is a resurgence and continuity of Aboriginal culture and language.

Adelaide University has seven city campus sites — City West, City East, North Terrace, Magill, Mawson Lakes, Roseworthy and Waite — that are located on the lands of the Kurna People.

Adelaide is situated on the Adelaide Plains, Tarntanyangga, which means the home of the red kangaroo whose Creation story speaks of Kurna protocols that came from the Land which is the Law. There are Kurna stories of land, laws and culture which have survived the impact of colonisation, just as there are stories of land, laws and culture of every First Nation across Australia. We respect the authority of the Elders to retell those stories in a way that is proper and respectful. More information is available at [Kurna Yerta Aboriginal Corporation](#).

Our Mount Gambier campus lives on the lands of the Boandik People; this place is known as Berrin. It is where our ancestor Craitbul came to live more than 4,000 years ago when volcanoes were cooling, and the formation of the Blue Lake was taking place. More information is available at [Burrandies Aboriginal Corporation](#).

Our Whyalla campus lives on the lands of the Barngarla People, and like many other Aboriginal Nations they share their own localised Seven Sisters Creation story which follows vast tracks across the countries of many Nations. It is a law story which connects earth and sky, through the many sacred sites of the Seven Sisters and their resting place in the Pleiades constellation. More information is available at [Barngarla Determination Aboriginal Corporation](#).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Worldviews

Kaurna Senior Elder, Dr Uncle Lewis Yarlupurka O'Brien AO, when asked to speak about Aboriginal worldviews and protocols, said "Kaurna had conferences in this area (Adelaide) called Panpapanpalya; we were a great society". It was at these conferences where Elders in community had the opportunity to discuss and work towards ethical engagement, reciprocity and consensus ways of managing and caring for Country. Panpapanpalya provided the opportunity to demonstrate the diversity of Aboriginal worldviews and was education in action.

A worldview is a set of beliefs and cultural values held by a People. In understanding the common foundations of Aboriginal worldviews, it will help to engage and communicate effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. It is important to note that while there are common principles shared by all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, we are also diverse, just as the landscape is different, there are also different ways of being amongst First Nations. Some of the shared principles include:

- Relationships between Kin and Country are interrelated and connected and are valued more than material possessions.
- Respect and responsibilities to kinship groups and communities are core values.
- Sharing and caring, terms frequently used amongst First Nations to highlight an Aboriginal way of life, in which obligations are just as important as rights and privileges.
- Reciprocity, the practice of exchange and the balance of all things.
- Belonging is important; it provides a sense of identity, family, culture and spirituality. We belong to the Land and the Land is sacred to our survival as Peoples.

Proper engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples will promote understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews. This understanding will then contribute to positive communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and enable a shift from past deficit models of engagement.

Why do we need a guide?

The guide will provide advice to inform and address internal and external communication processes and activities to support proper engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Relationships

Relationships are a core principle in enabling good engagement. Making time to engage is essential because it takes time to develop relationships with individuals, families and communities. Allow time for collective decision-making processes. In the past, relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples developed out of an imposed deficit model, and in some contemporary cases, this continues. However, this position needs to shift, and it is shifting.

Respect

Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews. Being open and honest, clear and transparent and delivering on promises made will facilitate engagement.

Listening

Listening to the advice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, for example, 'no means no', particularly when 'no' is coming from an Elder, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons who are culturally grounded and have authority to speak for community. It is important to listen to advice and work with it, particularly when that advice is critical and may not support your position or ideas.

Obligations

Obligations which arise from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldview, for example, relationships to family and the depth and extent of those relationships are important to understand. Obligations also extend from relationships to Country. Relationships create obligations in this worldview context. It is important to take responsibility to ensure that engagement and consultation are done in accordance with the protocols of the local community.

Communication

It is important to communicate respectfully and appropriately, particularly in the development of research proposals, ethics applications, manuscripts, reports, publications, social media content and media releases, and in all general engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. It is important to understand how worldviews impact communication and that the level of trust and commitment to a relationship can determine proper engagement. In getting it right it is important to understand the significance of Elders and that their advice is critical and should always be treated with respect.

Elders

Elders are the knowledge holders of culture and are highly respected and recognised in their community for their cultural knowledge, wisdom and contributions. They are responsible for making decisions in and with their communities. Age alone does not make someone an Elder.

When negotiating with Aboriginal Peoples, ensure that Aboriginal community recognised Elders are involved.

Defining Elders

- Elders are defined by their Community or Nation.
- Elders have cultural authority.
- Elders are acknowledged for their behaviour, experience and knowledge.
- Elders often speak for their Nation and are a wise teacher.
- Elders are not defined by age or self title, nor by the government.
- Elders and Aboriginal Peoples will often be in discussion on the question of 'who is an Elder?'

Terminology

The provision of a guide on terminology is one step towards getting it right; it is also a guide to the journey ahead, building respectful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Adelaide University recognises that language is central to respecting the identities, cultures, and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Preferred terminology has been informed through consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students, Elders and community representatives to ensure cultural authority, relevance, and responsiveness.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

First Nations are often referred to as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; however, there is significant diversity within these two groups, and there is no single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity.”

‘Aboriginal’ is used to refer to the original Peoples of the land we now call Australia, and their descendants. ‘Aboriginal’ is a broad term that refers to Nations and Traditional Owners of mainland Australia and most of the islands, including Tasmania, Fraser Island, Palm Island, Mornington Island, Groote Eylandt, Bathurst and Melville Islands.

‘Torres Strait Islander’ is a broad term grouping the Peoples of at least 274 small islands between the northern tip of Cape York in Queensland and the south-west coast of Papua New Guinea. Many Torres Strait Islander Peoples live on the Australian mainland. There are also two Torres Strait Islander communities at Bamaga and Seisia, in the Northern Peninsula Area of Queensland.

There is a wide range of Nations, Cultures and Languages across mainland Australia and throughout the Torres Strait. Given this diversity, respectful language use depends on what different communities determine to be appropriate.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is the primary terminology for Australian contexts, recognising the diversity of Nations, Cultures, and Languages across the continent and surrounding islands.

The term should be used as an **adjective** and accompanied by an appropriate **common noun**.

Examples

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Example usage

- ‘Our aspiration to be a university of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples...’
- ‘The University supports the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’.

Capitalisation

‘Peoples’ is specifically capitalised.

First Nations

First Nations is the preferred terminology in broader, strategic or international contexts and is the standard naming convention for University functions, portfolios, services and role titles.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is the primary terminology for Australian contexts, recognising the diversity of Nations, Cultures, and Languages across the continent and surrounding islands.

The term should be used as an adjective and accompanied by an appropriate common noun.

Examples

- First Nations Portfolio
- Deputy Vice Chancellor, First Nations
- Pro Vice Chancellor, First Nations Education
- First Nations Student Support

Example usage

- The First Nations Portfolio leads the University’s strategic engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- The Deputy Vice Chancellor, First Nations provides leadership across research, education and community engagement initiatives.

In broader contexts, First Nations may be used interchangeably; however, Australian contexts should default to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Capitalisation

Capitalisation is always used for the first letter of formal names of functions, portfolios, services, and role titles.

Indigenous

New initiatives and communications should avoid the use of **Indigenous** in favour of the preferred terminology in the previous section, to respect localised feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples that ‘Indigenous’ does not fully capture the cultural identity and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Indigenous should only be used where required for:

- Government reporting
- Legislative or statutory purposes
- Established external programs or schemes (such as the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP)).

Where existing terminology cannot be changed due to external arrangements (e.g., contracts, external agreements, research grants, government programs) the term may be grand-parented.

Capitalisation

Capitalisation of Indigenous is always used when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The lowercase word ‘indigenous’ is only used when referring to people originating in more than one region or Country, so is not used in an Australian context.

Language Principles

The following principles should always be applied for respectful and consistent application of terminology across Adelaide University:

Abbreviations

Terms should never be abbreviated (e.g., ATSI).

Example:

- ✔ **Correct:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- ✘ **Incorrect:** ATSI students

Adjectival Use

Terms should function as adjectives, not nouns.

Example:

- ✔ **Correct:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- ✘ **Incorrect:** The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student

Capitalisation

Capitalisation should be used for specific terms relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, as it is considered culturally appropriate and respectful. Always capitalise:

- Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Peoples
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges
- First Peoples
- ‘Peoples’ when referring collectively to Nations, communities, or groups.
- Elder / Elders
- Country

Where it must be used, always capitalise Indigenous.

Pronoun Substitution

Do not replace ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Torres Strait Islander’ with pronouns such as they, them, their, or those.

This risks objectifying Peoples.

Possessive

Do not use terms like “**our** Aboriginal people”. This implies ownership over people and can be paternalistic, and undermine self-determination and independence of First Nations communities.

Terms

Elder	Uppercase should always be used for ‘Elder’.
Country	Geographic communities may also consist of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples who do not know their cultural identity as a direct result of the ‘policy of assimilation’. Community is also about connection and belonging to Country and is central to Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples may also belong to more than one Country and community. Country is also about ancestral, cultural, spiritual and social connections to that land. Country is a place of connection and access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and learning. Being ‘on Country’ means that you are on your traditional lands. Country in this context should always start with a capital C.

Caring for Country	Aboriginal Peoples have diverse relationships and connections to their natural world. Many relationships are based on the traditional knowledge and practices passed on generationally while other relationships are affected by the negative impacts of colonisation, including dispossession from Country and restrictions on cultural practices, language and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. The term 'Country' is often used by a First Nation to describe family origins and associations with parts of Australia and most importantly the connections of blood-lines back to these locations. Connection to Country forms Aboriginal identity and strong bonds and relationships to Country, including cultural and spiritual relationships with the land, sea and waterscapes, the seasons, the flora and the fauna.
Kinship	Kinship is a system of family and social organisation which defines where a person belongs in an extended family and community. It describes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person's family connections and social relations and determines their rights, responsibilities and behavioural expectations. Aboriginal values, beliefs, identity and language are developed and nurtured within the family. Keeping the family strong and healthy, both physically and spiritually, is important to the continuance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society. Children learn early that to refer to their 'family' is to refer to the extended family. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family might include mother, father, several children, numerous aunts, uncles and cousins, grandparents and several grandchildren.
Culture	Culture refers to the accepted customs, understandings and social behaviours shared by members of a group or community. Culture consists of Country, language, spirituality and relationships to the land, artistic expression, ways of living and working, relationships and identity. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia has always been multicultural. It is respectful to refer to cultures in the plural as it reflects the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. It is offensive to refer to Aboriginal culture as primitive, native, simple, pre-historic, or stone age. Those references imply inferiority to European cultures.
Dreaming – Creation	Dreaming is a European concept which has been used to explain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews and spirituality. Dreaming refers to a time, in the beginning, when ancestral beings created the natural world, but it is also an ongoing time. Dreaming - Creation stories are the basis of Aboriginal culture and law and form relationships and identities for Aboriginal Peoples. Words which translate Dreaming – Creation are embedded across all Aboriginal languages and are often the preferred reference. It is offensive to refer to Creation stories as myth, folklore, or legend; they are terms which imply the Dreaming - Creation is not real, occurred in the past and is not an ongoing condition.
Shame	'Shame' refers to the discomfort and sense of humiliation which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples often feel when they are singled out, feeling awkward and/or self-conscious. The experience of shame is not limited to negative causes such as being ridiculed, criticised or behaving in a foolish way. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples can also feel shame if they are publicly praised or appear to be better than other people, particularly other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Shame is a valid feeling and must be respected and accepted.
Deadly	'Deadly' is an in-group word used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the same way as 'excellent' or 'very good.'

Individual and Collective terms

‘Peoples’ is used to acknowledge the plurality and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and that there exist hundreds of different Nations, languages, cultures and territories. ‘First Peoples’ is a collective name for the original Peoples of Australia and their descendants and is often used interchangeably with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

‘First Nations’ and ‘First Peoples’	Are terms which recognise the international law status and the ongoing un-ceded sovereignties of First Peoples.
Traditional Owner	‘Traditional Owner(s)’ is an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person or group of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples directly descended from the original inhabitants of a culturally-defined area of land or Country, and has a cultural association with this Country which derives from their connection back to Country, traditions, observances, customs, beliefs or history of the area. Adelaide University recommends that all formal meetings, presentations and other gatherings should be opened with an acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of the land on which the gathering is taking place.
Nation	Refers to a culturally distinct group of People associated with a culturally- defined area of land or country. Each Nation has boundaries that cannot be changed, and language is tied to that Nation and its country. ‘Nation’ may be used to refer to a culturally-distinct Aboriginal People and their associated country. The boundaries of some Aboriginal Nations transcend state borders. First Peoples or First Nations is used interchangeably to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples both domestically and internationally. The name of language groups refers also to the Nation of Peoples.
Clan	Clan is generally accepted as a subset of Nation and refers to a local descent group, larger than a family, and is based on common ancestry.
Mob	Mob is often used to describe who you are and where you come from as a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, in relation to country. ‘Mob’ is generally used between Aboriginal Peoples and is considered inappropriate for non-Aboriginal people to use, unless there is consent and it is known to be acceptable. The word ‘Mob’ has been reclaimed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, as a act of decolonising a history in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples were considered one homogeneous mob.

Community	Community can represent several perspectives on what a ‘community’ is. In defining a ‘community’, consideration is given to the survivors and descendants of the Stolen Generations. A community may comprise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples from many areas of Australia, whereas Traditional Owners of the land have a relationship with the land, one that existed prior to invasion and those same relationships exist today. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples may belong to more than one community – including where they come from, where their family is located, and what organisations they belong to. From an Aboriginal worldview community is about relationships to Country, (extended) family relationships, and shared experience. Community is about inter-relatedness and belonging and is central to Aboriginal cultures. It is generally acceptable to use the term ‘community’ to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples living within a geographical region. However, the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within a community should be considered, including for example mixed unions or families. The Kurna Nation for example, consists of Aboriginal People from a diversity of Nations, including Narungga, Ramindjeri, Yaraldikald, Tanganekald, Ngarrindjeri among other Nations.
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Offensive terms

The word **Aborigine** originates in Latin *ab origine*, meaning ‘from the beginning/first appearance’ and its first known use was in the 1500s. **Aborigine** was applied to describe Aboriginal Peoples, and our name as Peoples, for example, the Kurna at first contact, invasion and colonisation of South Australia. **Aborigine** is considered an improper word to describe and identify Aboriginal Peoples, largely because of its association with colonisation.

Savage, native, barbarian, backward and tribe, are terms that have been used across Australian history to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. These terms are linked to *terra nullius*- the falsehood that the land belonged to no-one, and if there were occupants, they were deemed so low in the societal hierarchy that they did not exist, as Peoples. They are terms linked to social- Darwinism, and theories of natural selection. Aboriginal Peoples were discussed as being less evolved than Europeans and destined to become extinct. *Terra nullius* and social-Darwinism were used to justify dispossession, genocide and assimilation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Aboriginality criteria should not be based on colour of the skin, lifestyle, or social indices. Terms which are linked to Australia’s colonial history and were used to categorise Aboriginal Peoples are offensive. The following terms are offensive and should not be used in any context, including social media:

- mixed blood
- half-caste
- quarter caste
- full-blood
- part-Aboriginal
- Aboriginal blood quantum
- Aborigines
- Aborigine
- What percentage Aboriginal?
- How Aboriginal are you?

Stereotypes and myths about who is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person should not be used. These include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples only live in remote regions of Australia.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are all the same.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have dark coloured hair, skin and eyes.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are sporty.

Deficit constructs of Aboriginality should not be normalised, as they contribute to a negative culture profile. For example, myths that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples:

- Have poor education outcomes, due to learning capacity.
- Are alcoholics and drug addicts.
- Are prone to family violence.
- Have poor parenting skills.
- Have sexual health issues, promiscuity and transmitted diseases.
- Have large families living in the same household.
- Are unusually prone to teenage pregnancies.
- Are incarcerated because of criminality and are generally delinquent.
- That once ‘disconnected’ from Country, culture is ‘lost’ and people are no longer ‘truly’ Aboriginal.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identity

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity is both complex and diverse. It is complex due to its own internal structures, but also the impact of colonisation, and the consequences of dispossession and removal of Aboriginal Peoples from their lands and families.

Where we belong constitutes Aboriginal identity and when an individual is unable to locate where they belong, and whom they belong to, lives may be left disrupted and traumatised. For some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, identity is often difficult to locate due to the impact of colonisation and removal from land and families.

Aboriginal identity is also diverse because there are over 500 different First Nations identities belonging to the continent of Australia.

The right to be self-determining was largely compromised and, under British law, denied following British Lieutenant James Cook's arrival on the east coast of Australia more than 250 years ago. Since then, Aboriginality has been defined through Australian law and policy, contributing to ongoing complexities and challenges relating to identity.

Who is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander?

A three-part definition of Aboriginal identity was introduced in Commonwealth legislation: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989 (Cth) s 4 (1). Note also that under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005 s 4 an 'Aboriginal person' means a person of the Aboriginal race of Australia, which means they:

- are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person
- are accepted as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander by the community in which they live (or have previously lived).

This definition has been adopted by all federal, state and territory governments to confirm Aboriginality for access to equity-based programs and positions. It also plays a role in Land Rights and Native Title claims. Similar requirements are placed on Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Stolen Generations

The term 'Stolen Generations' is used to describe the forcible removal of children from their families and communities. Fairer-skinned Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were considered easier to assimilate into white Australia and were targeted by governments, churches and welfare bodies. As many as **one in three** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were stolen from their families and communities. This practice occurred between the late 1800s and in some places, was continued into the 1980s. Today the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continues at high rates as part of child welfare policies. Children were and continue to be institutionalised under the Out of Home Care policy. The institutionalisation of children has caused the trauma of extreme physical, mental, cultural and spiritual abuse. The transgenerational effects of these policies are collectively felt by individuals, families and their communities who continue to be traumatised.

Diversity: ancient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have the oldest continuous living culture on earth and have the oldest systems of law and governance. These facts are contrary to colonial views at the time of invasion in 1788 and throughout the 19th and 20th century. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge is becoming more familiar to science and is now acknowledged for having records of geological events, such as sea rising and volcanism, astronomical events such as novae and meteorite strikes and many other phenomena.



Figure 1. Map showing the distribution of the Aboriginal Nations of Australia [cartographic material] by Norman B. Tindale. This map includes more than 500 Ancient Aboriginal identities, in connection to language and land. This map was included in Yurirka: Propa Engagement with Aboriginal Peoples, with permission sought, and kindly received, from the South Australia Museum at that time.

Self-identifying terms

Aboriginal Peoples use their own language words to identify themselves, which are used by Aboriginal People from specific areas. The following are examples.

Term	Area
Nunga	South Australia
Anangu	Central Australia
Koori	South East Australia – NSW and Victoria
Palawa	Tasmania
Goori	Northern NSW
Murri	Queensland and North West NSW
Noon-gar	Western Australia, South West
Yolngu	Northern Territory/North East Arnhem Land

The above terms should only be used in accord with the appropriate direction and advice of Aboriginal Peoples. It should also be noted that there is a growing trend towards decolonisation and the adoption of traditional names. For example, identifying as Kurna, Boandik or Barngarla.

Protocols

Welcome to Country

Welcoming visitors to Country has been practised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for many thousands of years. First Nations who travelled across land into another Nation or language groups' Country were required to seek permission to enter. Once permission was granted by the Traditional Owners, a Welcome to Country would be conducted. This may have included the offering of a safe passage and protection of spiritual well-being during their journey through the Traditional Owner's Country.

While visitors were provided with a safe passage, there was also an obligation to show respect for the local protocols while on another Nation's Country. In contemporary Australia, the Welcome to Country ceremony has been adapted to suit contemporary life. However, the gesture and meaning of Welcome to Country ceremonies for example, welcoming visitors and offering safe passage, remain the same today.

Welcome to Country ceremonies are appropriate for significant events and occasions, such as major University ceremonies, significant openings and launches, major conferences, and events of particular cultural or strategic significance. A Welcome to Country may involve a smoking ceremony, singing, dancing, or a speech in traditional language and/or English.

A Welcome to Country should be conducted by an Aboriginal Traditional Owner and custodian of the Country on which the event is being held. Often Elders will do a Welcome to Country, and First Nations have different practices regarding who can provide a Welcome to Country. Advice from Traditional Owners should be sought as to the most suitable representative to conduct a Welcome to Country.

Acknowledgement of Country

Since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have experienced a long history of colonialism and its impact, including social and political exclusion, and the failure to acknowledge Aboriginal Peoples existence and experiences.

Recognising Traditional Owners and their connection to Country is an important and respectful protocol. An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for staff and students to show respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to Country.

If the opening of an event does not have a Welcome to Country, a formal Acknowledgement of Country should be given. The Acknowledgement of Country protocol applies for Adelaide University public events, meetings or events being held in various locations across South Australia.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be made by anyone and the following text is recommended by Adelaide University:

We respectfully acknowledge the Kurna, Boandik and Barngarla First Nations Peoples and their Elders past and present, who are the First Nations' Traditional Owners of the lands that are now home to our combined campuses located in Adelaide, Waite, Roseworthy, Mount Gambier and Whyalla. We also acknowledge other First Nations lands across Australia with which we conduct business, their Elders, ancestors, cultures and heritage.

For locations outside of Adelaide, the above Acknowledgement of Country can be used replacing the Kurna Peoples with the local and appropriate Traditional Owners and custodians for Country.

Acknowledgement in written documents

Adelaide University Strategic Plans, Annual Reports and other official documents should incorporate an Acknowledgement of Country which identifies the Traditional Owners; the Kurna, Boandik and Barngarla Peoples.

Honorarium

An honorarium should be provided for all services offered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and community.

Providing a sitting fee for Elders is common practice that signals respect and is an act of reciprocity in valuing the advice of Elders. Elders are the repository of knowledges, which holds great value, and this is a small gesture towards an acknowledgement of their input and support.

Payment to an Elder or Traditional Owner for a Welcome to Country is usual and will be at the discretion of the Elder or Traditional Owner themselves. Payment should be made promptly on the day or as soon as possible.

Other examples of services include: cultural or musical performance, smoking ceremony, presentation, talk, lecture, keynote address, walking tour and cultural activity.

Use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language

The speaking of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages was impacted by colonial laws and policy which prohibited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples from speaking their languages. Colonial policies targeted the speaking of language in attempt to assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. There were hundreds of Aboriginal languages originally spoken at the time of colonisation, and as a result of colonialist policies, the numbers were drastically reduced.

Today there is a movement to revitalise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, and that is happening amongst our host nations Kurna, Boandik and Barngarla. We frequently engage with the language committees of our host Nations and follow their protocols as to the use of language, particularly in the naming of our University buildings, scholarships and awards. The permission and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages should be negotiated with authorities such as Elders and/or the language committees of First Nations Peoples.

Sorry Business

‘Sorry Business’ is a term sometimes used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to describe the passing or death of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples often have a cultural obligation to attend funerals of family, relations and Elders. It is important that the University and its staff recognise that the adverse health outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples coupled with the wide kinship networks that constitute family will mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples will attend and be involved in many funerals, with varying degrees of obligation.

These obligations may require support and understanding of the responsibilities Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students have. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff might require support and time to participate and to meet cultural obligations involving Sorry Business.

Applications for cultural leave will be given fair and proper consideration and treated with respect, sensitivity, and cultural understanding.

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples may have a protocol for when someone passes, that is, the use of their name, image and voice may no longer be used. Families may retract this at a time appropriate to them. Compliance with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols should be respected and followed.

In the event of a death, it is important to acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have different practices for Sorry Business. It is important that the University acknowledge different practices and should consult with Traditional Owners for the most appropriate and respectful response to the passing of an Elder or significant community member.

Smoking Ceremonies

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have a holistic view of health and wellbeing. The health of an Aboriginal person’s connection to Country, community, culture, kinship, spirituality, as well as their physical and mental health, contribute to their wellbeing. Smoking ceremonies are used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for cleansing and renewing People and the Land. Smoking ceremonies should be conducted by Traditional Owners who have specialised cultural knowledge. It is important to seek appropriate advice and assistance from Traditional Owners.

Men’s and Women’s Business

‘Men’s and Women’s Business’ is commonly understood as the practice of men and women discussing gender-specific issues separately. This is only one aspect of Men’s and Women’s Business. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures there are certain knowledges, practices, customs and places which are gender specific.

Men’s and Women’s Business refers to these gender-based practices collectively. Respect for gender balance, and men’s business/law and women’s business/law should be acknowledged and not trivialised. A form of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authority is aligned with the maintenance of non-hierarchical processes where men and women are equal, and Elders have authority.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags

Flying the Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islander flags demonstrates respect and recognition of the First Peoples of a place we now call Australia. As a sign of respectful engagement with Elders and other Aboriginal Peoples, Adelaide University should fly the flags all year round and in particular during NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week. At the time of Sorry Business for Elders and significant Aboriginal persons, the flags should be lowered to half-mast until the conclusion of Sorry Business.

Aboriginal flag

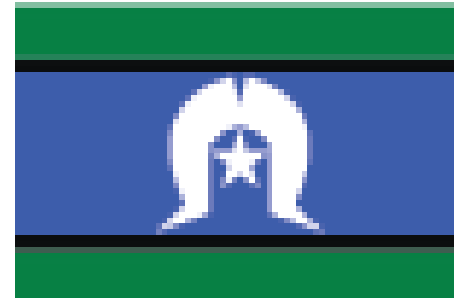


The Aboriginal flag was designed and first flown in Adelaide in 1971 and it continues to hold great symbolic meaning for Aboriginal Peoples and their identity. Along with the Torres Strait Islander flag, it was proclaimed an official flag of Australia under the Flags Act 1953 on 14 July 1995.

Flags must always be flown in line with flag protocols. There are three colours in the flag: red, black and yellow.

- Black represents the Aboriginal Peoples of Australia.
- Red represents the earth.
- Yellow represents the sun.

Torres Strait Islander flag



The Torres Strait Islander flag was first flown in 1992. Along with the Aboriginal flag, it was proclaimed an official flag of Australia under the Flags Act 1953 on 14 July 1995.

There are four colours: green, white, black and blue.

- Green represents the land.
- Black represents the Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- Blue represents the sea.
- White represents the Nations.

Ownership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge and Intellectual Property

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems are the first knowledge systems of Australia. It is important for the University to recognise and respect that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges continue as living systems. Aboriginal knowledge systems are complex and provide deep understandings of the world, both physical and spiritual, and are maintained through story, law, song, dance and ceremony, and other contemporary ways.

A key aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems is that such knowledges are communally held, and the sharing of knowledge is based on a system of relationships which have been established since the beginning of time. For this reason, Aboriginal knowledges cannot be owned or licensed by any one person.

Access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges is framed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols and ethics which may run counter to non-Aboriginal systems of intellectual property, ethics and protection. The University should respect the communal nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems.

The University should ensure copies of research data and outputs produced are stored, archived, published and made available to the public strictly in accordance with the terms agreed to by the Traditional Owners of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge.

Research

Research is an activity undertaken by the University for producing new knowledge. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, communities and societies have historically been viewed as a source of research for non-Aboriginal researchers. This has not always benefitted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. To obviate harmful practices, research conducted by University staff and students should be respectful, and ethical. The Adelaide University [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Strategy](#) provides guidance on engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their communities. In addition, *The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* and the *National Health and Medical Research Council* have produced guidelines for ethical research:

1. [AITATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies](#)
2. [NHMRC Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities](#)

Other helpful resources include Adelaide University's [Intellectual Property Policy and supporting Procedure](#); and Reconciliation Australia and Terri Janke and Company Lawyers and Consultants [Respecting and Protecting Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property Guide](#).

Contacts

Questions may be referred to [Adelaide University's First Nations Portfolio](#).

Acknowledgments

- Bradley Distinguished Professor Irene Watson and the Purkarninthe Elders Group for their leadership and contributions to the original Yurirka guide and the updated and refreshed version for Adelaide University.
- Adelaide University Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who provided feedback on the refresh of this guide; and
- Participants of workshops and forums conducted by foundation University of South Australia, namely:
 - SA Elders Forum (Nov 2019)
 - Adelaide community workshop (March 2019)
 - Mount Gambier community workshop (Sept 2018)
 - Whyalla community workshop (Nov 2018)

Further enquiries

First Nations Portfolio

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