# Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians Policy

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| Policy Number: | 2005/17 | Directorate: | | Connected Communities |
| Approval by: | Council | Responsible Officer: | | Manager, Community Wellbeing |
| Approval Date: | 22 July 2024 | Version Number: | | 5 |
| Review Date: | 3 years from meeting date | |  |  |

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to provide direction to Councillors and Council staff for the acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians at Council meetings, Council Committees, Council and Civic Events, Corporate Council documents and establishment of plaques on Council facilities. This Policy also includes Acknowledgement Guidelines to further expand, educate and contextualise how Council can respectfully acknowledge Traditional Owners and Country at events, meetings, in statements and significant occasions.

Council adopted the Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians Policy in 2004 as part of its journey towards establishing a Reconciliation Action Plan. Acknowledgement of Country is included on our gateway signage and documents.

1. Context

Wherever Councillors or Council staff meet, work, hold events or provide facilities in Knox, they are on the land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong people. The Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians is a way for Council to promote greater community awareness about the history of First Nations peoples, and to demonstrate leadership and respect for their continuing connection to the land.

There are a range of ways in which Council and/or Council staff may provide this Acknowledgement. This Policy aims to define the circumstances in which it is appropriate for Council to provide an Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians, and to outline the minimum expectations in how this is delivered.

Acknowledgment Guidelines (see Section 7 of this Policy) have been developed in partnership with the First Nations communities to provide additional support and guidance to Councillors and Council staff for a range of cultural ceremonies that properly reflects each situation or circumstance. This approach allows for the Acknowledgement of Country to be tailored and meaningful to a specific location or audience, in a way that is cultural-sensitive and supported by Elders.

While Knox includes two Traditional Custodian groups, all locations within Knox will either be the land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people or the land of the Bunurong people. Respectful practice in speeches, openings or plaques and other signage is to acknowledge the particular land one is speaking on by confirming the boundaries on the Registered Aboriginal Parties map (Victoria).

1. Scope

This Policy applies to staff and Councillors involved in Council meetings, Council Committees, Council and Civic Events and in the development of Corporate Council documents and plaques for new and upgraded Council facilities as described in Section 5 (Definitions) of this Policy.

Council staff and Councillors are encouraged to use at their own discretion an Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians at meetings and events that fall outside of this Policy.

1. References

4.1 Community & Council Plan 2021-25

* Connection, resilience and wellbeing
* Civic engagement and integrity

4.2 Relevant Legislation

* Local Government Act 2020 – Conflict and Interest Provisions
* Aboriginal Heritage Amendment Act 2016

4.3 Charter of Human Rights

* This Policy has been assessed against and complies with the Charter of Human Rights which protects the cultural rights of First Nations people, including the right to enjoy and express language, culture, customs, and heritage without discrimination.

4.4 Related Council Policies

* Council Committees Policy
* Council Meeting Structure and Cycle Policy
* Memorials Policy

4.5 Related Council Procedures

* Nil

1. Definitions

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| Council | Knox City Council, whether constituted before or after the commencement of this Policy. |
| Council staff | Staff that are employed by Knox City Council. |
| Council Meeting | Meetings of Council. |
| Council Committees | As defined in the Council Committees Policy and includes:   * Advisory Committees * Special Committees – as formally appointed under section 86 of the Local Government Act. Council currently has one Special Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee * Specific Purpose Committees * Working Groups |
| Council and Civic Events | Major events, festivals and openings hosted by Council, as follows:   * Major Festivals and events including - * Knox Community Awards; * Citizenship Ceremonies; * Knox Festival; * Carols by Candlelight; * Sorry Day Flag Raising Ceremony; * Pets in the Park; * And official Opening ceremonies. |
| Corporate Council documents | Important council documents and digital assets, which includes:  Tier 1:   * Municipal Strategic Statement; * Community and Council Plan 2021-25; * Council’s Annual Report; * State of Knox; * Structure Plans; and * Other Council implementation plans, action plans or strategies.   Tier 2:   * Knox City Council Digital Assets – Website home page and social media where appropriate; * Knox News; * Major Festivals and Events Programs; and * Council E-newsletter templates. |
| Plaques | Plaques developed for new and upgraded Council facilities. |

1. Council Policy
   1. Council and Council Staff will provide a verbal Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians at the commencement of Meetings of Council, Council Committee meetings and Council and Civic Events. At a minimum this could include:

“We acknowledge that Knox City Council is on the traditional land of the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation and pay our respects to elders both past and present.”

Further advice is provided under Section 7, Acknowledgement Guidelines including recommendations on tailoring the Acknowledgment to the place upon which the meeting or event is held. This could take the form of an additional sentence as follows:

“Today we meet on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung people”, or

“Today we meet on the traditional lands of the Bunurong people.”

* 1. Council will include a Statement of Acknowledgement in corporate Council documents as defined in Section 5 of this Policy (Definitions). This will be included as a stand-alone Statement, and at a minimum could include:

“Knox City Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the City of Knox, the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation.”

Council Staff are encouraged to refer to the Acknowledgment Guidelines, for further consideration on adapting this Statement to match the document’s purpose and role. Consideration may also be given to how the Acknowledgement is supported through the use of visual symbols as well as words.

* 1. Council will include a Statement of Acknowledgement on plaques displayed at Council facilities, when they are established or redeveloped. This plaque should be customised to the location of the facility and specify the Traditional Custodians of that land. At a minimum the plaque will read either:

“Knox City Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of this place, the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.”, or

“Knox City Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of this place, the Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation.”

1. Acknowledgement Guidelines

**Who are the Traditional Owners in Knox?**

Knox is located on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong country at the foot of the Dandenong Ranges (Mount Corhanwarrabul).

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation as Traditional Custodians of the land in Knox.

Council acknowledges the Knox Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities come from a variety of different Nations within Australia including the Torres Strait, the Traditional Custodians. We also acknowledge people and families who are part of the Stolen Generation.

We pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past and present, who have lived in the area and been an integral part of the region’s history.

**Acknowledgement of Country**

* **What is an Acknowledgement of Country?**

An Acknowledgement of Country is a way to show respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country.

* **Who can give an Acknowledgement to Country?**

An Acknowledgement of Country can be offered by anyone to show awareness and respect for the Aboriginal Traditional Owners of the land on which a meeting or event is being held.

* **When is an Acknowledgement of Country given?**

An Acknowledgement of Country is given at the beginning of a meeting event, speech, gathering taking place on land in Knox. It is important to mention the specific land you are meeting on, which is usually the Kulin Nation. Staff should view the [RAP boundary map](https://achris.vic.gov.au/weave/wca.html) to find out what Country the meeting or event is taking place on. This ensures the right Traditional Owners are acknowledged and uses the full name of the Country in the Acknowledgement.

* **Acknowledgement of Country example wording:**

The following is an example of an Acknowledgement of Country. Officers do not have to follow this script, however it is important to acknowledge the right Traditional Owners:

“Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation as Traditional Custodians of the land.”

Depending on the location:

“Today we meet on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people”, or “Today we meet on the traditional lands of the Bunurong people.”

“The Knox Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities come from a variety of different Nations within Australia and Torres Strait, including the Traditional Custodians. This also includes members of the Stolen Generation and their families.

As such, we pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past and present, who have lived in the area and have been an integral part of the region’s history.”

* **Past examples of wording used by Knox City Council include:**

Knox City Council - Annual Report 2024:

“Knox City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation as Traditional Custodians of the land in Knox. The Knox Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities come from a variety of different nations within Australia including the Torres Strait, the Traditional Custodians and Stolen Generation. As such, we pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past and present, who have resided in the area and have been an integral part of the region’s histories.

Located at the foot of the Dandenong Ranges (Mount Corhanwarrabul), Knox has many places of historic significance to the Kulin Nation. Important cultural and historical sites within Knox hold both the traditional knowledge of First Nations peoples and the traumatic stories of colonisation. The journey ahead for Knox involves the land, the Traditional Custodians, the local First Nations communities, the wider community and the Council itself. We will walk together and listen together to create a culturally safe and culturally rich community for all.

In 2021, Knox City Council announced an intention to promote a “whole of business” mindset, moving forward in its acknowledgement and respect of First Nations peoples, ensuring cross-functional collaboration as opportunities present themselves. In 2023, Knox Council adopted its first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) identifying six focus areas: health and wellbeing, recognition and respect, employment and economic development, civic participation, cultural heritage and voice and governance.”

Yana djerring ba ngarrnga djerring\* – Walking together and listening together.”

(\*Woi-wurrung language used with permission of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation)

**Welcome to Country**

* **What is a Welcome to Country?**

A Welcome to Country is a traditional ceremony performed for thousands of years by Aboriginal Traditional Owners for people visiting their Country.

It is a speech to welcome you onto the land, asks you to show respect to the land, offers you the use of resources while on the land, and offers to keep you safe while on the land. Traditional dance and smoking ceremonies can also follow a Welcome to Country ceremony.

* **Who can give a Welcome to Country?**

The Welcome to Country is usually conducted by a community Elder or representative of the Traditional Owner group. Anyone who is not a Traditional Owner of the land on which the event is taking place cannot give a Welcome to Country.

* **When is a Welcome to Country is held?**

Elders are invited to give a Welcome to Country at the commencement of, or during, significant public events, forums and functions.

* **How to organise a Welcome to Country:**

An Elder can be invited to attend significant events to deliver a Welcome to Country. This can be organised through external organisations [Wurundjeri](https://www.wurundjeri.com.au/services/cultural-practices-for-events/welcome-to-country/) or [Bunurong](https://www.wurundjeri.com.au/services/cultural-practices-for-events/welcome-to-country/) who provide cultural and educational services.

**Smoking Ceremonies**

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung description of Smoking Ceremonies:

“For thousands of years we have employed Smoking Ceremonies to cleanse places and people of bad spirits to promote the wellbeing of our people as well as guests on Country. Contemporary smoking ceremonies may involve a Wurundjeri Elder and/ or a younger Wurundjeri community member carrying a portable tarnuk (wooden dish) containing coals and wet leaves around assembled guests. Alternatively, guests may gather around a dedicated smoking site.

For full participation, those present will typically be invited to walk through the smoke for an individual cleansing. If requested, smoking ceremonies can form part of a larger Welcome ceremony.”

* **When is it appropriate for a Welcome to Country to include a Smoking Ceremony?**

A Smoking Ceremony is undertaken in Aboriginal communities in order to cleanse a space in which the ceremony takes place, so as to allow peace and recognise the importance of the occasion. The Smoking Ceremony is a purification ritual and is always undertaken by an Aboriginal Elder or an Aboriginal person with specialised spiritual and cultural knowledge. When conducted by the Traditional Custodian, the Smoking Ceremony is included as an addition of significance in a Welcome to Country.

It is not just the smoke that is important in the ceremony but also how the fire is lit and what is used to make it. Some Groups might only use a certain type of leaves or bark while others may interchange them depending on what the ceremony is for.

Given the significant nature of the ceremony, a Smoking Ceremony is usually only performed on special occasions or at major events, places of spiritual significance and at events regarded as appropriate by the Aboriginal community.

A Smoking Ceremony is not always appropriate for an event. Requests may need to be discussed with the Traditional Custodians or First Nations Community before confirmation is given.

The following events are where a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony may be considered (but is not limited to):

* + Significant events involving State or Federal Government representatives;
  + Significant civic functions and launches;
  + Openings of new buildings and parks/spaces;
  + Major festivals and events where the City of Knox has provided significant sponsorship or grant funding; and
  + Other events, functions, ceremonies and meetings as deemed appropriate.

Aboriginal people may request a Smoking Ceremony in a workplace where a death or other traumatic event has occurred. This request is of tremendous significance to them and should be respected: failure to do so may cause significant distress.

It should be noted that a Smoking Ceremony is more appropriate for outdoor occasions due to ventilation requirements and smoke detector isolation for building that may be affected is advisable.

1. Administrative Updates

From time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this Policy and Acknowledgement Guidelines. Where an update does not materially alter this Policy, such a change may be made administratively. Examples of minor administrative changes include changes to names of Council departments or positions, change to names of Federal or State Government departments or a minor amendment to legislation that does not have material impact. Where any change or update may materially change the intent of this Policy, it must be considered by Council.