



University of  
**Southern**  
**Queensland**

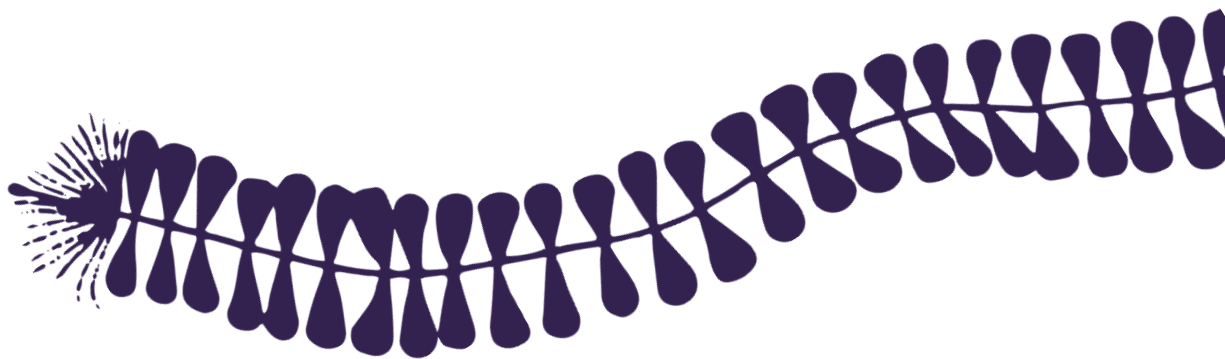
# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols

Forging Connections, Building  
Relationships, Showing Respect



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## Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and honour the Giabal and Jarowair peoples of Toowoomba, Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul peoples of Springfield and Ipswich, Gadigal people of the Eora Nation at Sydney, Kambuwal peoples of Stanthorpe, Yamatji peoples of Geraldton and Bidjara peoples of Charleville, as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways where the University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) is located.

Further, we acknowledge the cultural diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay respect to Elders past and present. We celebrate the continuous living cultures of First Nations Australians and acknowledge the important role played by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian society. The University respects and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff, Elders, and visitors who come from many Nations across Australia.

## Overview

UniSQ recognises, respects, and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', histories the deep-seated connection to land, cultures, and heritage. All Australians can be proud to learn of and share in these unique histories and cultures.

The University acknowledges the profound disruption through the processes of colonisation, dispossession of lands and cultures and the removal of individuals from families and communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities are complex entities, and the practices of colonisation has had and continues to have impact on our lives. For those non-Indigenous peoples who enter our lives and communities and become *awash with the swirl* of our histories, societies, communities, it is respectful to enter with caution. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities have long histories of uninvited and unwanted *help* that has manifested as neglect, interference, interruption, disruption, division, and oppression. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being, knowing and doing is ultimately the business of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the nuance of this business is best read by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

With deep and ongoing respect for Elders past and present is a key underpinning value, the University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) supports and encourages staff and students in promoting respect and understanding. The University aims to empower all staff and students toward Indigenous Cultural Safety by acknowledging and implementing cultural protocols as ethical principles that guide our conduct.

## Purpose of Cultural Protocols

The UniSQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols represent an important step towards understanding, respecting, and representing the worldviews of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, encouraging culturally safe working practices, and valuing the cultural diversity that enriches, motivates, and moves UniSQ forward.

The purpose of the Protocols is to:

- assist all staff and students at UniSQ to observe culturally safe practices that recognise and pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, peoples, communities, and cultures,
- communicate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices within UniSQ and to the broader community to promote learning, respect and understanding,
- demonstrate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are ongoing, living and enduring through the maintenance and practice of ceremonies, traditions, and cultural protocols,
- demonstrate the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and connection to land, and through this, assist in building ongoing relationships and partnerships.

The protocols identified in this document address Welcome to Country, Acknowledgement of Country, Engaging with Elders and Community, Cultural Service and Performances, Sorry Business, Cultural Media Warnings, Smoking Ceremonies, Flag Raising, Graduands, Terminology, and Significant Dates.

## Welcome to Country

A **'Welcome to Country'** is an official ceremony performed by an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person, preferably an Elder, belonging to the Country, that is, the Traditional Owners, in which the event is being held. A 'Welcome to Country' is performed at the commencement of the event prior to all other matters. The Welcoming Ceremony continues the tradition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups welcoming visitors to their Country as a practice of respect for that Country, the peoples of that Country and the sacredness of that Country. When planning an official event, staff are in the first instance, directed to consult with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners of the Country in which the event is being held and if further assistance is required, contact the College of First Nations. For example, if the event is being held at Stanthorpe then the organisers should speak with the Kambuwal Traditional Owners through contacting the local Elders group or an appropriate organisation such as the local Aboriginal Medical Service to provide a Welcome to Country.

A remuneration for the member of the Traditional Owner groups who undertakes this important service for the University is required. Please refer to the section in this document titled Engaging with Elders and Community for further information.

## Acknowledgement of Country

An **'Acknowledgment of Country'** is a means by which all people can show respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and heritages and the ongoing relationship with the land.

An 'Acknowledgment of Country' is used at formal functions, committee meetings, lectures, seminars, forums, and workshops where there is a gathering of participants. This includes video- conference activities where the Traditional Owners at all the virtual locations should be included in the acknowledgement. On such occasions, a Chair or Speaker may begin by acknowledging that the event is taking place on the lands of the Traditional Owners. For example, a public lecture held at the Ipswich campus would acknowledge that the lecture is being held on the lands of the Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul peoples.

As a sign of respect an 'Acknowledgment of Country' can also be provided in the signature line of emails.

An example of an 'Acknowledgment of Country' is provided below.

*EXAMPLE:* I would like to acknowledge the Giabal and Jarowair peoples of Toowoomba, Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul peoples of Springfield and Ipswich, Gadigal people of the Eora Nation at Sydney, Kambuwal peoples of Stanthorpe, Yamatji peoples of Geraldton and Bidjara peoples of Charleville as the keepers of knowledge where UniSQ campuses and hubs have been built and whose cultures and customs continue to nurture this land. I also pay respect to Elders past and present.

## Engaging with Elders and Community

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ceremonies and practices differ from Country to Country and community to community. When the involvement of the local community is sought in an official UniSQ event, care must be taken to ensure that appropriate levels of consultation, including arrangements for remuneration for a Welcome to Country is undertaken with the Traditional Owners, locally recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Elders, or Community member(s). It is appropriate that at least 4-6 weeks prior notice to the official event be provided for these consultations. The consultations may consider providing full information of the event-day, such as date and time of the event, numbers participating, ages of audience, location, venue, transport requirements to and from the event of the Elder or other Community members, designate a staff member to receive the Elder and/or Community representative and ensure that general comfort and cultural safety is considered.

The University may at any time engage with Elders and members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities from various Countries. Informed continuous contact and respectful engagement is critical if the University is to have a sustained relationship that is reciprocal for UniSQ and the First Nations Elders and Community.

## **Payment for Cultural Service and Performances**

It is appropriate that the University provide remuneration for cultural services and performances performed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The following are examples of cultural services and performances – A Welcome to Country performed by an Elder or a Traditional Owner, dance and other cultural performances at events, Smoking Ceremonies and Cultural Knowledges workshops. In working with Elders and other members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, the University needs to acknowledge the familial, cultural and Community responsibilities and obligations that continue to exist outside of the organisation of the University event. The University should understand that these responsibilities and obligations will take precedence. Respect of this situation will strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

When working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists it is important for the University to provide appropriate remuneration and clear understandings in the consultative process and matters of copyright and intellectual property ownership will need to be discussed. It is important that a true value be offered for the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts, images, cultural works, designs, songs etc. The University needs to respect that Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property Rights resides with the author/creator/designer.

Additionally, in media engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the University will respect practices and processes that are ethical and culturally safe.

## **Sorry Business**

In the event of a death, it is important to acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups have differing practices for the passing of Community members. In some Communities it remains that a significant period is given to mourning. It is also the situation in some Communities that the name of the person who has passed cannot be spoken for a period of time. In the Torres Strait, Tombstone Openings, occur approximately one (1) year after a death to signify that mourning can cease and a celebration of the life that has passed can begin.

## **The Passing of an Elder or valued Persons**

It is important that the University acknowledges these different practices and should consult with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities or College for First Nations for the most culturally safe response to the passing of an Elder or significant Community member. For example, it may be inappropriate for the University to continue to use the photograph of a deceased Elder, or other members of the Community in documents or promotional material for a specific period.

## **Cultural safe media warning**

When accessing media that includes an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person that has passed, permission must be sought from their family and accompanied with a cultural warning. An example of a safe warning may be “Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People are advised the content may include media of deceased persons”.

It is also important for the University to recognise that the poor health status of 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 responsibility. This sad reality impacts upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## **Smoking Ceremonies**

Smoking ceremonies are used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for cleansing and renewing people and the land. Given its significant nature, smoking ceremonies are usually only performed at major and special events and when important spaces and the people who work in those spaces need to be cleansed. Smoking ceremonies are only to be conducted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with specialised cultural knowledge.

It is important to always seek safe advice and assistance from the College for First Nations as appropriate

levels of consultation and remuneration will need to be arranged prior to the smoking ceremony.

## **The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flag Protocols**

The Aboriginal flag was recognised as an official flag of Australia in 1995. This flag was designed by Luritja and Wombaya Elder Harold Thomas in 1971. The top half of the flag is black to represent Aboriginal people. The red in the lower half represents the earth (the relationship to the land). The circle of yellow represents the sun (giver of life).

The Torres Strait Islander flag was also recognised as an official flag of Australia in 1995. This flag was designed by Bernard Namok from Waibenne (Thursday Island). At the center of the flag is a white Dhari (headdress) with a five-pointed star symbolising the five island nations. The green stripes represent the land, the top green for connection to Papua New Guinea and the bottom green for connection to Cape York Peninsula, with the black stripes represent the people, and the blue represents the sea.

As an ongoing sign of recognition and respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags should fly in conjunction with the Australian flag on all UniSQ campuses daily.

With the passing of Elders and/or Valued Members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities with which the University has an engagement, the flags need to be lowered to half-mast as a sign of respect and remain in this position until the funeral of the Elder and/or Valued Member has occurred.

## **Graduands**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students eligible for graduation are entitled to wear a stole identifying cultural heritage under the approved academic dress. This means that an Aboriginal graduand will have a red, black, and yellow stole. A Torres Strait Islander graduand will have a white, blue, green, and black stole. A graduating student whose heritage is both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander will wear a stole that encompasses both heritage that is red, black, yellow, and white, blue, green, and black.

The University acknowledges the significance of graduation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families, and Communities. Graduation is a day of pride and celebration. The wearing of the stole by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduands signals an expression of that pride and celebration.

## **Terminology, Language and Naming**

All staff and students of the University rely heavily on language to exchange information and to communicate ideas. Language, however, is also a vehicle for the expression of discrimination and prejudice as cultural values and attitudes are reflected in the structures and meanings of the language used. This means that language cannot be regarded as a neutral or an unproblematic medium and can cause or reflect discrimination due to its intricate links with society and culture. Language has power and it is important to understand the historical context of its use.

The following clarifies appropriate language use for the histories, societies, naming and cultures of First Nations peoples. Whilst many aspects of terminology in this area are contested, every effort should be made by the University to adopt terms and phrases that do not offend Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## **Naming First Nations Peoples**

In the naming of First Nations peoples the University can use the following interchangeable terms – Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Indigenous and First Nations. Such terms however are constructed within non-Indigenous communication systems. Where it is known the preferred term for naming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Communities should be used. For example, the Giabal and Jarowair are the Traditional Owners of Country in the Toowoomba region. It is not appropriate to use terms such as ‘the Aborigines’, where it is appropriate to use terms such as Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal Nations, or Aboriginal language groups.

## Classifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

In the past, governments tried to classify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people according to location, parentage, blood quantum and skin color. The use of these inappropriate terms became fixed in the ways in which non-Indigenous peoples then historically engaged in relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For example, Aboriginal peoples from rural, remote, and isolated communities in Central and Northern Australia have been considered 'more traditional' and therefore more cultural than First Nations peoples who live in the cities. The assumption here is that if you identify as a Torres Strait Islander person and live in Toowoomba for example, that you do not have connection to your cultural traditions and Communities and are 'less' of a Torres Strait Islander person.

The practice of determining the identification of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person based on skin pigmentation is both harmful and hurtful. Terms and phrases such as 'half-caste', 'quarter-caste' and the questioning of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person's identity particularly based on historically disproved genetic understandings is culturally unsafe and should not be used.

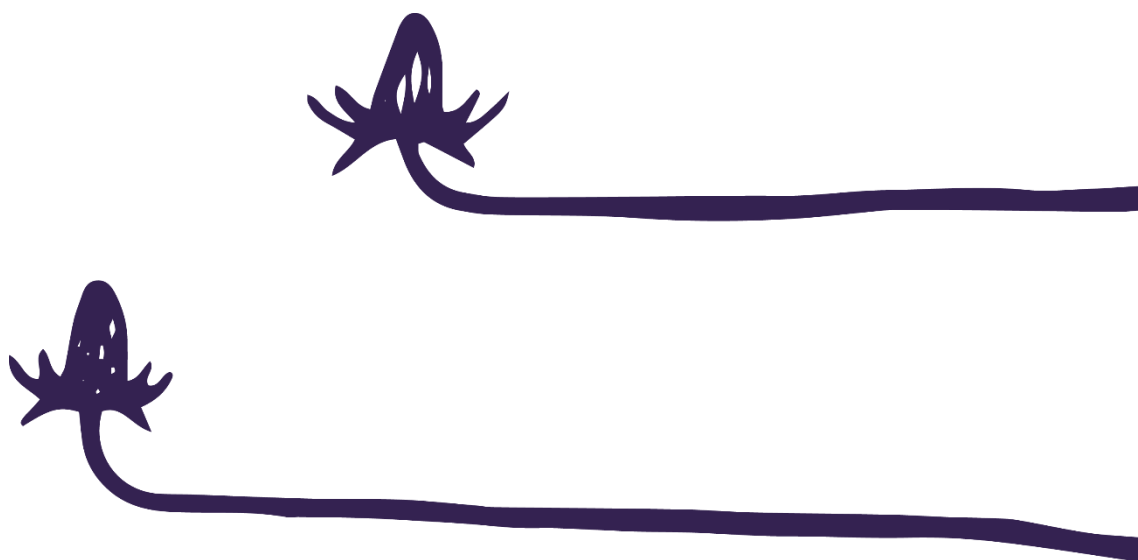
It must also be remembered that the Commonwealth legal definition for identification of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person has adverse implications for individuals and families who have not been able to show connectedness to a Country (the land which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people identify with) or a Community because of the past policies of forcible removal, the deliberate breaking up of families and the dispossession from land.

## Referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

The use of pronouns such as 'they', 'them' and 'those' should not be used as substitutes for the phrasing of First Nations peoples. The use of pronouns is a communication practice that objectifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and creates a social distance for non-Indigenous peoples wanting a meaningful relationship. Additionally, the acronyms 'ATSI' and 'A&TSI' are inappropriate when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## Reference to Language Terms in Common Use

First Nations peoples will, in communication, refer to common language terms and Anglicised words that have Indigenous meanings. The speaking of these terms and words in public spaces, however, does not give permission for non-Indigenous peoples to make use of such terms and words out of these contexts. When used out of contexts the authority of its use is questioned by First Nations communities.





## Significant Dates

UniSQ includes calendar dates that are of significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The University encourages staff, students, and the broader community to show their support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities by acknowledging these dates and attending events.

Significant dates include:

Significant Date	Event
26 January	<b>Survival Day or Invasion Day</b> – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples choose to mark Australia Day as a day to highlight the invasion of Australia by Europeans and to acknowledge the survival of their cultural heritage.
13 February	<b>Apology Anniversary</b> – On 13 February 2008, the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd moved a Motion of Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples in the House of Representatives, apologising for past laws, policies, and practices that devastated Australia’s First Nation’s peoples. The anniversary of this event is now celebrated annually.
20 March	<b>National Close the Gap Day</b> – Since 2006 this day has provided a way for all Australians to join together and remind our political leaders of their commitments to close the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation.
26 May	<b>Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum</b> – Australians voted overwhelmingly to amend the constitution to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the census and allow the Commonwealth to create laws. While by 1967 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had the right to vote (granted in 1962) and citizenship (by virtue of the repeal of relevant discriminatory federal and state laws by that time), the 91% ‘yes’ vote in the 1967 referendum launched Australia on the path to reforms which would eventually achieve better rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
3 June	<b>Mabo Day</b> – This day commemorates the anniversary of the 1992 High Court decision in the case brought by Eddie and others (Reverend David Passi, Ceuia Mapoo Salee, Sam Passi and James Rice), which recognised the existence in Australia of Native Title rights. Specifically, the case recognised the land rights of the Meriam people, traditional Owners of the Murray islands in the Torres Strait. On the tenth anniversary of this day in 2002 there were many calls for the day to become a public holiday, an official National Mabo Day.
1 July	<b>The Coming of the Light</b> – Torres Strait Islander peoples of all faiths come together each year to acknowledge Christianity through Island communities during the late nineteenth century.

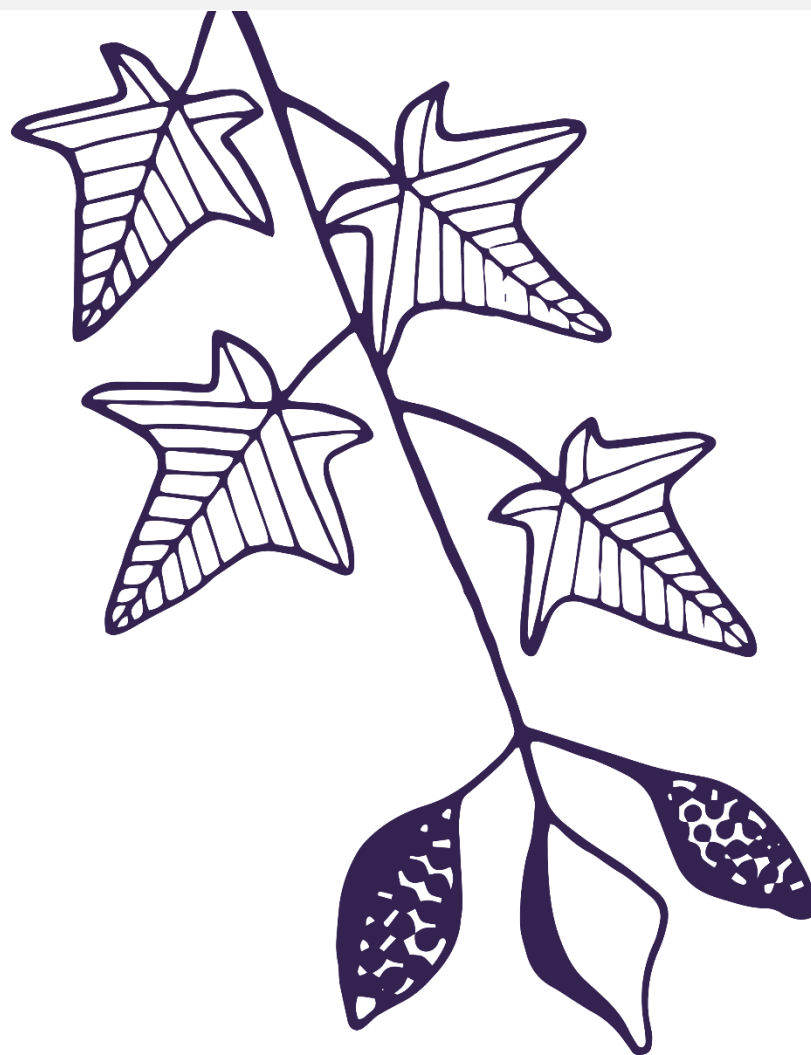


**First week of July**

**NAIDOC Week** – The first Sunday of July sees the beginning of a week dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to celebrate NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Day Observance Committee) Week. It is a celebration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' survival. It is also a time for all Australians to celebrate the unique contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions and cultures and to bring issues of concern to the attention of governments and the broader community.

**4 August**

**National Aboriginal and Islanders Children's Day** – This day was first observed in 1988 and each year it has a special theme. The aim of the day is to raise awareness and strengthen family relationships for the health and well-being of Indigenous children. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care produce a poster to celebrate the day.







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