

*Indigenous
Employment
Network's
Acknowledgement
to Country*

Introduction

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) is the State peak body for tourism and is housed in Brisbane. The organisation is a not for profit membership organisation representing the interests of both large and small members.

In 2009, QTIC recognised that Queensland tourism employers needed support and strategies to engage Indigenous employees. As part of the support structure QTIC initiated an 'Indigenous Employment Champions Network' which was funded by the Queensland Government. The project was the first of its kind in Australia and aimed to increase operators' awareness of how to encourage and maintain increased participation of Indigenous Australians within mainstream tourism businesses.

The network of Indigenous Employment Champions was selected from around the State and represents a cross section of industry and business sizes. All of the Champions have successfully employed Indigenous staff and are committed to furthering the engagement of Indigenous Australians within the tourism industry.

The Indigenous Employment Champions with, the support of QTIC, has developed an Employer Education and Awareness Strategy that has been delivered to industry colleagues through a series of networking events and opportunities.

Acknowledgements

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) wishes to acknowledge the contributions made from:

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This document was designed for on screen reading.

Please think of our great land before printing.

Project Rationale

Welcome to Country

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a unique relationship to the land and waters of their country. This relationship embraces a certain responsibility to look after the spiritual and environmental wellbeing of country. Responsibilities include acknowledging and paying respect to the spirit of ancestors who created the land and introduced customs and languages. Responsibilities to care for country are defined through traditional law.

Although creation beliefs and customary practices vary greatly across Australia, they are all based on the journeys of ancestral beings and events which took place during the creation period. This is often referred to as the 'Dreaming' or 'Dreamtime'.

A 'Welcome to Country' is a small ceremony where Traditional Owners, usually elders, welcome people to their land. This is a significant recognition and is made through a formal process, although it's up to the elder how they decide to carry out the ceremony. It also depends on the location of the event and the practice of the Aboriginal community. This can vary greatly according to region.

During a 'Welcome to Country' the elders welcome those in attendance, guests, staff and students to their country. It might be just a simple speech or a performance of some sort, like a song, traditional dance, a didgeridoo piece or any combination of these.

Recently, the validity of an Indigenous 'Welcome to Country' has been the topic of considerable conversation. In Victoria, the Premier decided to scrap a requirement for Ministers and departmental staff to acknowledge traditional owners in May 2011.

This matter was brought to the attention of the Indigenous Champion's Network where the following concerns were articulated:

1. The perception that a 'black face' was a mandatory requirement at all Queensland events
2. That some Traditional Owners were seeking significant financial return for the delivery of 'Welcome to Country'

3. The lack of traditional content conveyed in 'Welcome to Country' messages
4. Continued requests for non-traditional owners to deliver 'Welcome to Country' addresses
5. The potential that the Victorian Government's decision will influence 'others' to follow 'suit' and discontinue the 'Welcome to Country' protocol

In response to the concerns outlined above, the Indigenous Employment Champions Network decided to develop a standardised 'Acknowledgement of Country' message that can be delivered by any Queensland, Indigenous or non - Indigenous, to pay respect to the fact that one is on Aboriginal land.

A word of caution - it is important to gain advice regarding the correct local Traditional Owners and the pronunciation of 'tribal' names. Sometimes areas are a moving feast as land is often in dispute and borders naturally move. As a starting point it would be useful to refer to the' QTIC Directory of Indigenous Services and Programs' found at www.qtic.com.au

Acknowledgement of Country

An 'Acknowledgement of Country' is a simple way that all people can show respect for Aboriginal culture and heritage, together with the ongoing relationship the traditional owners have with their land.

It is a demonstration of respect dedicated to the traditional custodians of the land (or sea) where the event, meeting, school function or conference takes place.

Consider personalising and localising an 'Acknowledgement of Country' to make it as meaningful as possible.

By endorsing the practice of Acknowledgement of Country you complement an age old tradition and pay a deep respect to Elders past and present, most importantly you acknowledge their identity as the first Australians of this great nation.

Sample - Acknowledgement of Country where the tribe is not known:

I would like to show my respect and acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, of elders past and present, on which this event takes place.

Sample - Acknowledgement of Country using a specific tribe:

I would like to acknowledge the (Insert tribal name) people who are the traditional custodians of this land.

I would also like to pay respect to the elders past and present of the (insert tribal name) nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present.

Sample - 'Acknowledgement of Country'

Today we stand in footsteps millennia old.
May we acknowledge the traditional owners whose cultures and customs have nurtured, and continue to nurture, this land, since men and women awoke from the great dream.
We honour the presence of these ancestors who reside in the imagination of this land and whose irrepressible spirituality flows through all creation.

by Jonathan Hill
ABORIGINAL NSW POET