

# Indigenous Australia

## Best practice guidelines

### Definitions

'**Indigenous Australians**' refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people originating from or native to Australia. This is a blanket term used to identify people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. In actuality, prior to European settlement, it is estimated that there were over 500 different clan groups, with distinctive languages, dialects, customs, beliefs and kinship structures.



Source: AIATSIS 2021

It is recommended that you avoid using 'Indigenous' when describing individuals. There are many people that don't like the term and prefer to be described as either Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or First

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Nations Person—but respecting the individual preferences of the people you interact with is key. 'Aborigine' and 'Native' are also insensitive terms with racist connotations that refer to Australia's colonial past. It is more appropriate to use the individual's clan name. Example: John is a Gubbi Gubbi Man from the Sunshine Coast region or John is from the Gubbi Gubbi Nation.

Depending on the different clan structures, individuals may identify through either their paternal or maternal lineage. In some nations, it is appropriate to identify both parents. Example: Susan is a Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi Woman.

## Historical context

Australia was federated as a nation on January 1, 1901. Prior to this, 'Australia' consisted of several colonies built atop lands stolen from the myriad Aboriginal nations. This period of colonisation began with the arrival of the First Fleet on January 26, 1788—a date commemorated in contemporary history as Australia Day. Given the context of this date—and the atrocities that followed—many Aboriginal people have conflicted or wholly negative feelings, choosing instead to name January 26 as Invasion Day. Because the legacy of colonisation still impacts Aboriginal people to this day, Invasion Day is often a day of mourning and protest. Be mindful of the common refrain 'Happy Australia Day', as for many First Australians, Australia Day is the day where theft, enslavement, and attempted genocide are celebrated by the descendants of the perpetrators.

The **Stolen Generations** refer to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were removed from their families by Australian Federal and State government agencies and church missions between 1910 and 1970 through a policy of assimilation. Assimilation was based on a belief of white superiority and black inferiority, and presumed that "full-blood" Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would naturally die out. It proposed that children with Aboriginal and white parentage, who were termed 'half-caste' (now considered an extremely derogatory term), should be assimilated into white society. The forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families had a profound impact that's still being experienced today. This led to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people suffering a loss of identity and culture, and families living with intergenerational trauma in a cycle of abuse and violence.

## Country

You might hear an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person talk about Country. This refers to their ancestral lands and society, which they hold a deep spiritual connection with. It incorporates people, plants and animals. It embraces the seasons, stories, songlines and creation spirits. 'Country' is both a place of belonging and a way of being.

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## Publishing and protocols

There are a number of protocols that need to be followed when displaying any form of content depicting First Nations People. Communications can include various mediums used for public and in-house distribution such as: promotional materials, posters, website content, video and sound recordings, photographs, presentations, reports and publications. Cultural beliefs, practices and protocols can be very strict and will vary for each family or community. Therefore, familiarising yourself with the local Aboriginal cultural group(s) and engaging with the community is a valuable tool for avoiding mistakes.

It is also advisable and respectful to seek permission from the family and/or community for appropriate protocols before publishing any form of content, particularly if the media contains information or images of a deceased person. The protocols can include, but are not limited to:

- Not using the name of a person who has passed away
- Not broadcasting the voice of a person who has passed away
- Not displaying artworks of a person who has passed away
- Prohibition to display the image of the deceased person

You cannot anticipate the passing of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person; therefore, all forms of publication may include a warning so the reader/viewer can decide whether it is appropriate for them to view the content.

### **Multimedia warning example**

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this (publication / website / video etc.) may contain the (images / voices / names) of people who have passed away.

### **Acknowledgement**

It is appropriate to acknowledge First Nations people in all media and correspondence made on Aboriginal land. For example: (Your Business Name) acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past and present.

## Acknowledgement of / Welcome to Country

When organising gatherings, meetings or other activities where people are invited to congregate, it is important to verbally acknowledge the First Nations People as the Traditional Custodians of the land (see above for wording). This acknowledgement may be performed by a member of your company or group. However, it is recommended that, where possible, a First Nations Person be invited to perform a



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'Welcome To Country'. This is where a representative of the clan where the gathering is taking place, performs a Welcome address that provides agreeance to the gathering occurring on their ancestral lands. This may or may not be accompanied by a Welcome Dance. It is important to note the distinction between these two approaches: a welcome can only be performed by an appropriate member of the local Aboriginal cultural group—typically an elder. Welcome to Country ceremonies cannot and should not be performed by Aboriginal people unaffiliated with the area the ceremony is taking place.

## Supporting First Nations people

Many First Nations people carry additional cultural obligations that may not be obvious or expected of another person. One of the most common examples of this is 'Sorry Business'—a period of time devoted to family and community following a death. Sorry Business is not reserved only for immediate family but includes extended family and members of the broader community. A blood relationship is not a prerequisite for involvement in Sorry Business. Be mindful of the fact that Sorry Business may include more than just attendance at a funeral, including several days of obligations and events. Do not 'police' the number of funerals attended or fall into the common trap of 'counting the grandparents' to search for a lie or deception.

## Questions to avoid

Non-Indigenous people can sometimes ask Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people insensitive and inappropriate questions, perhaps out of ignorance. Avoid asking questions like:

- What percentage of Aboriginal are you?
- Why can't you just get over it?
- What free stuff do Aboriginal people get?

## Resources

### **Common Ground: Stolen Generations**

<https://www.commonground.org.au/learn/the-stolen-generations>

Learning resource about the Stolen Generations in Australia.

### **SNAICC: Sorry Business**

<https://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/connecting-to-culture/sorry-business/>

Information about Sorry Business, specifically targeted towards carers and caregiving.

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## References

AIATSIS. 2021. 'Map of Indigenous Australia'. AIATSIS. Accessed 5 June 2021 from <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>

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