

1. PURPOSE

This policy sets out guiding principles for Council, its committees and officers, to observe the appropriate protocols for acknowledgement of the original inhabitants of this land.

2. INTRODUCTION

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have been part of Aboriginal culture for thousands of years. Aboriginal groups had clear boundaries separating their Country from that of other groups. Crossing into another group's Country required a request for permission to enter – like gaining a visa – and when that permission was granted, the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering them a safe passage.

Acknowledgement of our Traditional Owners is a way that all people can show their respect for the traditional custodians on which significant Council events are taking place. It is a demonstration of respect for the local Aboriginal culture and heritage, and the ongoing relationship that the traditional owners have with the land.

The five Traditional Owner groups of this land are the Wotjobaluk, Wergaia (Were-guy-ya), Jupagulk, Jaadwa and Jadawadjali people.

2.1 Acknowledgement of Country

Horsham Rural City Council has close links with the local Aboriginal community and, following an extensive community consultation process, adopted the following Acknowledgement of Country statement on 24 November 2008:

“The Horsham Rural City Council acknowledges the five Traditional Owner groups of this land – the Wotjobaluk, Wergaia (Were-guy-ya), Jupagulk, Jaadwa and Jadawadjali people.

We recognise the important and ongoing place that all Indigenous people hold in our community.

We pay our respects to the Elders, both past and present, and commit to working together in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect for the benefit of the broader community and future generations.”

Following several planning workshops with partner agencies, a shortened version of the Acknowledgement of Country statement was developed by the Wimmera Primary Care Partnership as part of the Closing the Gap project in 2012.

Shortened version: *“I would like to acknowledge that this meeting/event is being held on the traditional lands of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia (Were-guy-ya) and Jupagulk people, and I pay respects to their elders, both past and present.”*

The Acknowledgement of Country statement or the shortened version should be read at the start of the event. It can be delivered by any person, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

2.2 Welcome to Country

The Welcome to Country ceremony is performed by representatives from the Traditional Owner group (usually senior representatives/Elders), welcoming people to their land.

2.3 Flags

In 1998, Horsham Rural City Council resolved to display the Aboriginal flag alongside the Australian, Victorian and Horsham Rural City Council flags at all significant Council events.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to The Mayor and Councillors of Horsham Rural City Council, Horsham Rural City Council Officers and Consultants and contractors who deliver services on behalf of Council.

Council meetings and significant events where members of the public, Government representatives and/or the media are present, major Council events such as significant building openings, significant launches, significant civic functions and significant events involving the State or Federal Government and Councillors and Officers speaking at other events in the municipality organised by other parties.

4. PRINCIPLES

4.1 Acknowledgement of Country

The Acknowledgement of Country statement adopted by Horsham Rural City Council will be delivered at the commencement of:

- Council meetings
- Citizenship ceremonies
- Civic receptions

This statement can be delivered by any person, but is usually delivered by the Mayor or Chief Executive of the Horsham Rural City Council.

The shortened version of the Acknowledgement of Country statement may be delivered at:

- Significant events where members of the public, State or Federal Government representatives and/or the media are present including forums, briefing sessions, workshops, conferences and seminars; or
- Where the Mayor, Councillors and Officers are speaking at events in the municipality organised by other parties.

4.2 Welcome to Country

A Welcome to Country ceremony may be performed at major Horsham Rural City Council functions such as:

- Events involving the local aboriginal community
- Significant civic events involving the State or Federal government
- Welcome events for international visitors
- Welcome events for representatives of sister cities

The Welcome to Country ceremony must be delivered by traditional Aboriginal custodians of this land.

4.3 Flags

The Aboriginal flag will be displayed with the Australian, Victorian and Horsham Rural City Council flags at all significant Council events. At events where these flags are displayed, and in accordance with Australian Government Flag Protocols, they will be placed from left to right from the audience in the following order – Australian flag, Victorian flag, Aboriginal flag, Horsham Rural City Council flag, with the exception of NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week, where flags will be placed in the following order – Australian flag, Aboriginal flag, Victorian flag, Horsham Rural City Council flag.

In conjunction with the Australian flag, the Aboriginal flag will also be displayed on a flag pole at Roberts Place in Horsham. Upon request from local Aboriginal organisations such as Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative and Barengi Gadjin Land Council, the Aboriginal flag will be lowered to half-mast as a sign of respect on the death of a local Aboriginal Elder or on the day (or part of the day) of their funeral. When this occurs, all other flags will be joined at half-mast as a sign of respect and solidarity.

4.4 Recognition of Traditional Owners as Stakeholders

It is important to recognise that Traditional Owners are a stakeholder group in their own right, for all policies and operational activities that have the potential to impact on their people and Country. As part of the recognition of Traditional Owners being the first peoples of the municipal area, Council will, when appropriate, seek the views of Traditional Owners by engaging with the Barengi Gadjin Land Council.

5. COMMUNICATION

This policy will be available on the Horsham Rural City Council intranet, website and docs on tap. Details of this policy will also be placed in the staff newsletter.

6. RESPONSIBILITY

Policy Owner: Chief Executive Officer

7. DEFINITIONS

Definition	Meaning
Aboriginal Flag	A flag that represents Aboriginal Australians. It is an official flag of Australia and holds special legal and political status, but it is not the Australian National Flag.
Acknowledgement of Country	A statement of acknowledgement and recognition of the traditional owners of the land which is read at the start of the event. The Acknowledgement of Country statement can be delivered by any person, but is usually delivered by the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer of the Horsham Rural City Council.
Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation	The prescribed body corporate under the <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> (Cth). The Barengi Gadjin Land Council acts as the Trustee for the Native Title rights and interests of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples as recognised by consent determination in December 2005. Barengi Gadjin Land Council is the body that has the authority to speak on behalf of all Traditional Owners within the municipality.

Traditional Owners	Descendants of the original inhabitants that occupied the land before European settlement. Traditional Owners have ongoing spiritual and cultural ties to the land and waterways where their ancestors lived.
Welcome to Country	A ceremony where traditional Aboriginal custodians welcome people to their land by providing historical and cultural information to those in attendance. This is a significant recognition and formal process and enables traditional custodians to give their blessing for the event. Ceremonies can vary from speeches of welcome to traditional dance and smoking ceremonies. The Welcome to Country ceremony is delivered by a representative from the Traditional Owner group.

8. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Document	Location
Victorian Local Government Act (1989)	Internet
HRCC Acknowledgement of Country Statement	Intranet/Website
Australian Government It's An Honour Website	www.itsanhonour.gov.au
Closing the Gap Project – Wimmera Primary Care Partnership	www.wimmerapcp.org.au

9. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version Number	Approval Date	Approval By	Amendment	Review Date
01	24 November 2008	Council		
02	3 August 2015	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original policy was the statement of recognition only • The policy has been reviewed to ensure that Council observes appropriate protocols for the acknowledgement of Traditional Owners 	3 August 2019