

AFL CULTURAL PROTOCOLS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES



The AFL acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and play our game. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge we play our great game on this land and respect the cultures of all First Peoples, their contribution to our nation and contribution to the game of Australian Rules Football.

CONTENTS

- 3** Introduction and Purpose
- 4** Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country
- 7** Protocols and Demonstrating Respect
- 8** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags and Their Use
- 9** Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stakeholders
- 12** Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suppliers
- 13** Significant Events and Dates

Cover artwork

Art which is featured on the covers and throughout this document is by Kokatha man and champion of the game Gavin Wanganeen. The AFL thanks him for allowing us to use it.



INTRODUCTION

The AFL acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands where we work and play our game. Our vision for reconciliation is that the AFL community will be known as a place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are respected and celebrated, and that they have pathways to successfully and equitably participate at all levels, not only in our game but in a reconciled Australia.

To support this reconciliation vision, we want to establish the AFL as a workplace that is culturally safe and respectful, and where everyone feels like they can contribute to this vision.

PURPOSE

This cultural protocols and guiding principles document provides guidance for AFL staff to help ensure our work respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, beliefs, and practices. This includes some guidance on conducting an Acknowledgement of Country or arranging a Welcome to Country.

This document is intended to be an internal document to the AFL, and used by staff as guidance, but it is not an exhaustive list of advice. The Inclusion and Social Policy team are also available for additional guidance and advice.



WELCOME TO COUNTRY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

There are many ways to appropriately Acknowledge Country or arrange a Welcome to Country. This document outlines the importance of them, as well as key differences between the two protocols.

Incorporating an Acknowledgement of Country or Welcome to Country into meetings and events shows respect by upholding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultural protocols. Taking the time to learn about and include these protocols in our work reminds us that we all live, work, and play on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lands and waters.



Inviting an Elder to conduct a Welcome at your event is a way to recognise the unceded sovereignty of ancestral lands, demonstrate respect, as well as honour that person's heritage and their continuing traditions.

Welcome to Country

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have always been part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Boundaries were clear and crossing into another group's Country required acknowledgement. This is similar to knocking on a door of a house, indicating your arrival and stating who you are and your purpose. After permission to enter was granted, the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering safe passage and protection during their stay.

The essential elements of these protocols remain in today's Welcome to Country.

A Welcome to Country is delivered by Traditional Owners of Country, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been given permission from Traditional Owners, and it welcomes visitors to their Country. Inviting an Elder to conduct a Welcome at your event is a way to recognise the unceded sovereignty of ancestral lands, demonstrate respect, as well as honour that person's heritage and their continuing traditions.

Local Aboriginal Land Councils, some Local Councils or Native Title representative bodies can advise on organizing a Welcome to Country in your area. It should occur at the beginning

of a formal event, and can include speeches, singing, dancing, and/or smoking ceremonies. The Welcome will vary by location and Traditional Owner, so you should work with the person delivering the Welcome to understand what will be included.

If there are time constraints, such as timing for an event or broadcast, this will need to be communicated to the Traditional Owners in advance and agreement on adhering to these timeframes must be sought. There may be some sensitivities around the time the Elder will require to conduct the Welcome - these discussions should occur openly, and early in the engagement process, so that correct planning and considerations around the Welcome can take place.

Payment to the Traditional Owner/s for conducting a Welcome to Country will also need to be completed - the Traditional Owners or Land Council will be able to advise on payment amount and method.

Welcome to Country explained

Yuin man Jade Kennedy explains a Welcome to Country is about five different concepts: Country, kinship, culture, journey, connectedness.

"When I welcome you, when our uncles welcome you, our aunts welcome you, we are welcoming you to a place, but we're actually welcoming you to the intimate relationship we have to that place. But we're also welcoming you to our kin. We're welcoming you to the significant relationships we have with the people of our place. We're welcoming you to our roles, responsibilities, obligations, that keep us connected and bound through these people, to our place. We're welcoming you to our culture, the culture of this place and this people."

More information

To learn more about a Welcome to Country, and to better understand the cultural protocol, listen to Jade Kennedy's TedX talk "Deconstructing Welcome to Country."

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdYmSBzrL8>

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity to show respect to Traditional Owners by recognising the ongoing connection between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their Country.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be done by anyone, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, and is given at the beginning of a meeting, event, or speech. There is no specific wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, which can sometimes mean people feel a little uncomfortable delivering it. However, the most important thing to remember is to be sincere, think about the meaning of the protocol, and do some research on the Country you are acknowledging. This research may include things such as the correct pronunciation of the Country, or the name of the Traditional Owners.

Because the words can vary, we encourage you to reflect on an Acknowledgement that is specific to you and your place, to add your own voice to the Acknowledgement.

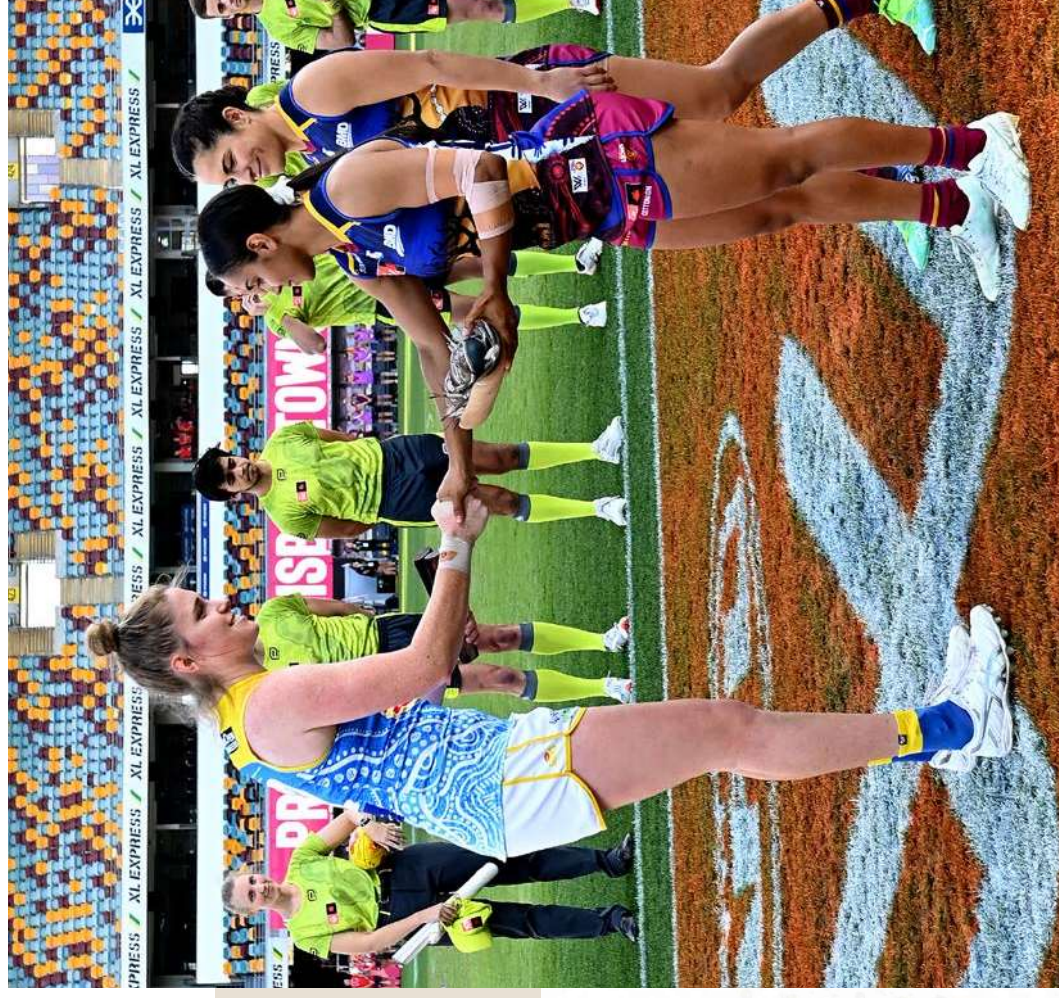
The official AFL acknowledgement is:

"I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land we are meeting on today. We acknowledge we play our great game on this land and respect the cultures of all First Peoples, their contribution to our nation and their contribution to the game of Australian Rules Football."

An Acknowledgement of Country can be used in different formats – for example, the AFL always has an Acknowledgement of Country at the bottom of our email signature blocks.

The **AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia** is a great place to start to better understand different Countries and Traditional Owners. Please note that boundaries can change so it is always best to check the Local Aboriginal Land Council website or with people you may know. Local council websites are also great resources.

The Welcome to Country app can also help to build your understanding of the local history and the Traditional Custodians of the land you're currently on.



More information

To learn more about an Acknowledgement of Country, and to become more comfortable with the practice of delivering a meaningful Acknowledgement, listen to Shelley Reys' 'TedX Talk

▶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zx018_7BDt4

PROTOCOLS AND DEMONSTRATING RESPECT

The AFL recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of Australia. An important aspect of this recognition is appropriate acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Elders at AFL events, forums, and discussions.

Protocol	Description	When to use it	Notes
Welcome to Country	A Welcome to Country is performed at the beginning of a forum/event and can only be performed by an Elder or appropriate member of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community to welcome people onto their land. A Welcome to Country can include speeches of welcome, dance, song, or smoking ceremonies.	Welcomes should be incorporated into the opening of major, special, or important internal and public events, meetings, and functions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak to the Inclusion and Social Policy team prior to arranging a Welcome, or members of the RAP Sub-Committee who can be found on the reconciliation intranet site on Tommy. Plan ahead to help ensure the appropriate person/people have availability to conduct the ceremony. A fee for travel costs, time, and the ceremony may be charged. Best to arrange this with a minimum of 6 weeks' notice wherever possible.
Acknowledgement of Country	Acknowledgement of Country can occur with or without a Welcome to Country. An Acknowledgement should be done by the first speaker at the event or meeting. Others may also do an acknowledgment throughout the event or meeting.	An Acknowledgment may be used at the start of an event, as a mark of respect for the custodians of the land where the event is taking place. Subsequent speakers may also choose to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anyone can conduct an Acknowledgement – they do not need to be an Elder, or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. Wording for an appropriate Acknowledgement is provided above, or at the reconciliation site on Tommy. Speakers should try to determine the name of the Traditional Custodians and the Country, but if you are uncertain a general Acknowledgement is acceptable. Speakers should try to use the correct pronunciation of the Traditional Owners and the Country they are on or broadcasting into. The Inclusion & Social Policy team have a list of phonetic spellings to assist with pronunciation.
Acknowledging Elders	The first speaker at an event or forum recognises and pays respect to Elders.	Acknowledging and paying respect to Elders usually follows the Acknowledgement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is important to acknowledge Elders in the room/at the event.
Acknowledging local sites of significance	The first speaker at an event should recognise cultural or historical nearby sites of significance.	When an event is held near a significant site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As an example, it may be appropriate for an Elder or leader to acknowledge the site of a traditional meeting place.
Acknowledging significant anniversaries	If appropriate, speakers at an event can recognise significant anniversaries or dates and connect the importance of the event to the anniversary.	When an event is held on or near a significant date or anniversary, such as those listed on page 13 in 'significant events and dates'.	

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FLAGS AND THEIR USE

The Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag are official flags of Australia. There are specific meanings in the design of each flag.



Aboriginal flag

The Aboriginal flag was designed by artist Harold Thomas in 1970 and was first raised on 9 July 1971. The flag's design consists of a coloured rectangle divided in equal halves of black (top) and red (bottom), with a yellow circle in the centre.

- The black represents the Aboriginal people of Australia
- The yellow represents the sun, the giver of life and the protector
- The red represents the red earth, and people's relationship to the land. It also represents ochre, which is used by Aboriginal people in ceremonies.



Torres Strait Islander flag

The Torres Strait Islander flag was designed by the late Bernard Namok from Thursday Island in 1992, winning a design competition that was held as part of a cultural revival workshop organized by the Islands Coordinating Council in January 1992. The colours represent the Torres Strait Islander people's connection to the land, sea, and sky.

- The colour green is for the land
- The black represents the people
- The blue is for the sea
- The white dharri is a symbol for all Torres Strait Islander people
- The five-pointed star represents the island groups, and stars are also used in navigation and so are an important symbol for the sea-faring Torres Strait Islander people
- The colour white of the star represents peace.



More information

Permission is no longer required to fly the Aboriginal or the Torres Strait Islander flags, and they are both recognised as **official flags of Australia**.

Images of the Aboriginal flag are now freely available for public use, such as using the image on a website or in

artwork. The flag should be represented respectfully and reproduced accurately.

The Torres Strait Islander Regional Council holds copyright for the Torres Strait Islander flag. Requests for permission to reproduce the Torres Strait Islander flag should be addressed to the **Record Officer of the Island Regional Council**.

ENGAGING WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STAKEHOLDERS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the right to own and control their cultural heritage, knowledge, and intellectual property.

General principles

Demonstrating respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, and practices is crucial to developing meaningful relationships and contributing to reconciliation at the AFL. All our staff are encouraged to respect that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the original inhabitants and Traditional Owners of Australia.
- It is important to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Country and custodians at the site of each event.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the right to own and control their cultural heritage, knowledge, and intellectual property.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are living cultures.
- There is great diversity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, varying from Country to Country and clan to clan.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to be represented by people of their choice.
- The cultural contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be valued, acknowledged, and remunerated.
- Local community protocols should be respected and observed.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world views and customary laws should be respected in contemporary life.

1. These insights on respect and protocols are sourced from: Writing cultures: Protocols for producing Indigenous Australian Literature, Terri Janke, Commonwealth of Australia 2002. You can read this full work of Terri Janke's [here](#).

Responsibility and contribution

Many non-Indigenous people want to know more, contribute to reconciliation, and have meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Sometimes people feel unsure where to start, so here are a few handy reminders (**some from Shannan Dodson**) on ways that everyone can contribute and engage.

▷ Educate yourself.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are constantly called upon to educate non-Indigenous people on issues of racism, discrimination, and Indigenous affairs. This happens both in and outside of workplaces, and adds to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultural loads. There are many ways non-Indigenous people can start educating themselves:

- Follow the Black Lives Matter movement, learn about how discrimination affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people daily, and how over **400 Indigenous people** have died in custody since 1991.
- Reconciliation Australia's **Share Our Pride** gives an overview of Indigenous Australia, complete with some 'you can't ask that' type questions.

▷ Find out who your local mob are.

- Follow many and varied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commentators, actors, musicians, activists, politicians, and sportspeople on social media, to hear directly about the issues and conversations important to people.
- Spend some time looking at the resources at the **Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies**.
- Review the AFLPA's 'AFL Players' Indigenous Map'. It is updated annually, the 2022 Map is available **here**.

▷ Read and consume Indigenous media, including books, movies, TV, and radio.

- NITV is a free-to-air network celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and stories.
- Indigenous X is an Indigenous owned/operated media company, challenging stereotypes of the Indigenous community, and talking about a range of issues that are important to people. Their Twitter has a new guest host every week, which is a great way to hear from a diverse range of people interested in a diverse range of issues.
- National Indigenous Times and Koori Mail are Indigenous-led newspapers, covering a range of news and topics.

- There are many organisations and peak bodies fighting for the rights of Indigenous people. Research those in your area to see where you can support.

▷ Show up, celebrate, and be seen at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events.

- At significant times in the calendar, special events will be held around the country.
- Consider holding an event for National Reconciliation Week, or finding a NAIDOC week event in your local area.
- With the ongoing conversation around the 26 January, and whether Australia Day should be celebrated on this day, you may feel comfortable going to an Indigenous-led event, like the Yabun festival in Sydney, or the Share the Spirit festival in Melbourne.

▷ Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and suppliers.

- More on this below - the AFL has a specific commitment to support the growth of Indigenous businesses.

▷ Support, donate, or volunteer with Indigenous organisations or causes.

- There are integral Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and organisations that accept donations, and there are many opportunities to volunteer.



Filming and photography

To promote mutual respect and understanding, it is advisable to request permission before taking a photograph, film, or sound recording.

Photography, filming, and sound recording of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, places, objects, sites, and cultural practices has occurred, and continues to occur, without appropriate consent. This has led to the exploitation of privacy, identity, and cultural heritage and practice, as well as the breaching of cultural protocols and restrictions.

Two underpinning principles should be used when working with Indigenous content and Indigenous communities, in **guidance provided by Terri Janke**:

- Respect for Indigenous culture and heritage, including recognition of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights, maintenance of cultural integrity, and respect for cultural beliefs; and
- Respect for Indigenous individuals and communities.

Before taking a photograph, film, or sound recording, it is generally advisable to:

- Introduce yourself to the person/s
- Inform them why you would like to take the image, video, or sound recording
- Request their permission
- Respect their decision if they refuse permission.

When working with children, please ensure consent is obtained from the child or young person's parent or carer before capturing or using any photographs or videos.

There may also be prohibition from Traditional Owners on filming or photographing certain places, objects, sites, or cultural activities. These protocols and prohibition must be observed at all times.

Further useful guidance can be found at:

- ▷ **Screen Australia Pathways & Protocols: a filmmaker's guide to working with Indigenous people, culture and concepts**, written by Terri Janke
- ▷ **The Australia Council for the Arts Protocols for using First Nations Intellectual and Cultural Property**
- ▷ **SBS Protocols and guidelines** to assist content makers in the production of content relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- ▷ **The Northern Land Council Protocols for Media on Aboriginal Land** provides specific guidance for working on Aboriginal land in the top end of the Northern Territory.



ENGAGING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SUPPLIERS

The AFL can use its purchasing power to buy goods and services from Indigenous businesses, demonstrating powerful support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises, and for reconciliation.

The AFL is committed to increasing procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, and this commitment is outlined in the AFL's Procurement Policy (available in full on Tommy), which is managed by the AFL's Head of Procurement. The policy aims to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurship and enterprises, by providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to be incorporated into the AFL supply chain.

Through this policy, everyone at the AFL can have a positive impact, as everyone is responsible for implementing the policy.

The procurement policy provides opportunities to consider engaging with Indigenous suppliers, to potentially subcontracting with existing partners to provide opportunities to smaller or less experienced suppliers, and to build positive relationships with Indigenous businesses.

Occasionally people aren't sure that there is an Indigenous business with the goods/ services they need. In this case, the AFL is also a member of **Supply Nation**. Supply Nation is Australia's largest database of Indigenous businesses, and has information on businesses around the country, in all different business categories. There's a good chance that there will be an Indigenous business in the space you're looking to purchase. The Supply Nation Indigenous Business Direct database is a great place to find an Indigenous business that can address your areas of need.

For more information on our relationship with Supply Nation, contact AFL Procurement.



SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND DATES

The AFL celebrates culturally significant dates throughout the year. As part of this, we encourage AFL staff to celebrate, attend, and acknowledge significant dates relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the calendar.

▷ 26 January – Survival Day (Australia Day)

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people choose to mark Australia Day as the day Australia was invaded by Europeans, and to acknowledge the ongoing survival of their cultural heritage.

Every year, there is an important, but at times hurtful, conversation in Australia about whether Australia Day should continue to be celebrated on January 26. The AFL does not yet have an official position on this, but we encourage all AFL staff to learn more and think about different perspectives. Some helpful places to start are:

- Reconciliation Australia's [26 January 'Let's Talk' factsheet](#)
- ['Australia Day, Invasion Day, Survival Day: What's in a name?'](#)

▷ 13 February – Anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generations

In 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologized to Australia's Indigenous people, particularly members of the Stolen Generations.

You can watch [the Apology here](#), or read more about the [significance of the Apology](#).

▷ 21 March – International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is observed annually and internationally on the day the police in Sharpeville, South Africa, opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid "pass laws" in 1960. The day calls on the international community to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

▷ 26 May – National Sorry Day

Sorry Day marks the anniversary of the 1997 tabling of the Bringing Them Home Report. The Report was the work of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families. National Sorry Day acknowledges and raises awareness of the history and continued effect of the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from their families, communities and culture.

▷ 27 May – Anniversary of the 1967 referendum

On 27 May 1967, Australians voted to change the Constitution so that like all other Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would be counted as part of the population and the Commonwealth would be able to make laws for them. A resounding 90.77 per cent of Australians voted 'Yes' and every single state and territory had a majority result for the 'Yes' vote. It was one of the most successful national campaigns in Australia's history.

▷ 27 May – 3 June – National Reconciliation Week

National Reconciliation Week is a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements, and to consider how we can continue to contribute to reconciliation in Australia. For the AFL, the Sir Doug Nicholls round(s) are played during this time, with all AFL teams wearing Indigenous guernseys. Learn more about National Reconciliation Week from [Reconciliation Australia](#).

▷ 3 June – Mabo Day

Mabo Day is marked annually on 3 June. It commemorates Mer Island man Eddie Koiki Mabo and his successful efforts to overturn the legal fiction of terra nullius, or 'land belonging to no-one'.

The Mabo case was heard over ten years, starting in the Queensland Supreme Court and progressing through to the High Court of Australia. Following the Mabo decision, Australia's Federal Parliament passed the Native Title Act 1993 which established a legal framework for native title claims throughout Australia by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

▷ **1 July – The Coming of the Light Festival**

The Coming of the Light Festival is a holiday celebrated by Torres Strait Islanders each year. It marks the arrival of the London Missionary Society in the Torres Strait Islands.

▷ **First Sunday-Sunday in July – NAIDOC Week**

In the week of the first Sunday-Sunday in July, NAIDOC is celebrated. It's a celebration of history, culture, and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and is celebrated by both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians.

Each year there is a different theme for NAIDOC, set by the National NAIDOC Committee, and the week is a great opportunity to participate in a range of activities and to support your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

▷ **4 August – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day**

This is a national day dedicated to celebrating the strengths and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children around the country. It is an opportunity to show support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as well as learn about the crucial impact that culture, family and community play in the life of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child.

▷ **9 August – International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples**

The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is observed on 9 August each year to raise awareness and protect the rights of the world's Indigenous peoples. This event also recognizes the achievements and contributions that Indigenous people make to improve world issues.





Contact

socialpolicyinclusion@afl.com.au

www.afl.com.au