

## Council Policy

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### 1. Policy Objective

The City of Mandurah (the “City”) is committed to acknowledging and respecting the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, the Bindjareb people of the Noongar Nation. The City recognises that valuing and respecting Aboriginal cultural protocols appropriately can help increase mutual understanding and respect for cultural practices between Aboriginal Australians and the wider community.

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear guidance to ensure cultural protocols are undertaken appropriately and consistently as a sign of respect that acknowledges the cultural significance of Country and the Bindjareb people.

### 2. Applicability

This policy applies to all City of Mandurah Elected Members and employees.

This policy applies to all City of Mandurah events, meetings, official functions, and public gatherings organised by or involving the Council or City.

### 3. Policy Statement

The City of Mandurah (the ‘City’):

- Acknowledges the Bindjareb people of the Noongar Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which the City of Mandurah has been established;
- Is committed to observing appropriate protocols for acknowledging this custodianship;
- Is committed to fostering cultural practices and facilitating relationships that promote respect, understanding and opportunity;
- Acknowledges the importance of paying respect to the traditional custodians of the land, their Elders past and present and the continuing cultural and spiritual practices of local Aboriginal People;
- Acknowledges the value of local Elders and Traditional Owners and their intellectual cultural property;
- Will provide Elected Members and City officers with opportunities to learn about the cultural protocols, including Welcome to Country, Acknowledgment of Country and others with availability of training and provision of information.

Recognising cultural protocols enables the wider community to share Aboriginal culture and heritage, promote understanding and support reconciliation.

### 4. Details

#### 4.1 Welcome to Country

##### 4.1.1 Definition of ‘Welcome to Country’

A ‘Welcome to Country’ is a formal cultural protocol conducted by an Elder, Traditional Owner or a recognised representative of the traditional custodians to welcome visitors to Country at notable occasions. It is a significant cultural protocol that acknowledges the traditional custodianship, ancestral

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lands and enduring connection to the land by Aboriginal people. The welcome of visitors to the land is intended to offer safe passage and protection, wellbeing and the sharing of cultural knowledge related to the land and its significance.

### 4.1.2 Who can conduct

Welcome to Country can only be conducted by an Elder, Traditional Owner or a recognised representative of the traditional custodians Traditional Owners, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been given permission from Traditional Owners to welcome visitors to their Country.

The City will maintain a 'Welcome to Country Register' of individuals and groups who are recognised and permitted by the Bindjareb people to deliver a Welcome to Country, and who can be contacted by City officers to engage for this purpose.

There is no exact wording when delivering a Welcome to Country. The content of the Welcome should be agreed to between the City of Mandurah and Bindjareb Elder or designated person.

### 4.1.3 When to observe a 'Welcome to Country'

Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of a notable event and can take many forms including spoken word, song, dance, traditional instruments, performance, storytelling, smoking ceremony and/or a speech.

A Welcome to Country is suitable on occasions that are considered significant or noteworthy.

Occasions that are significant or notable in the City change from year to year. As a guide, examples where a Welcome to Country is considered appropriate include, but are not limited to:

- Notable large-scale or significant civic events or public events, such as Crab Fest or Mandurah Arts Festival.
- Events with a direct connection to Aboriginal culture, such as NAIDOC Week, Reconciliation Week or launch of a major artwork by an Aboriginal artist.
- Significant events, programs, conferences or initiatives with national, state or regional importance.
- Openings of major new City facilities, significant public open space developments, major public artwork or other large scale capital projects, such as a new sporting clubroom or community facility.
- Launches of major strategies endorsed by Council that are accompanied by an event, such as the Reconciliation Action Plan or Environment Plan.
- Citizenship Ceremonies
- Launch of a building or place receiving a dual name.

In circumstances where it is not possible to engage a traditional owner to undertake a Welcome to Country (for example they are unavailable), then the most senior person available from the City of Mandurah, or other host organisation should give an Acknowledgement of Country.

### 4.1.4 Approval

The Chief Executive Officer, Directors and Executive Managers have authority to approve the booking of a Welcome to Country via the Approval Form. This approval should be sought before making contact with a Traditional Owner regarding an engagement.

### 4.1.5 Schedule of Fees

Providing cultural services such as Welcome to Country, artistic performances or Smoking Ceremonies involves Aboriginal people's intellectual property. It is customary to respect the time and knowledge of

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the Elder or representative by providing appropriate remuneration for their contribution. This acknowledges the value of their cultural role and the importance of their participation.

The payment and level of service should be agreed in advance of the Welcome to Country being undertaken, with the fee dependent on factors such as the scale of the event, significance of the occasion, time commitment and complexity of the Welcome. Once the Welcome has been approved, payable fees will be consistent with the City's associated policies and practices for the procurement of goods and services.

### 4.1.6 Organising and undertaking a Welcome to Country

The following process should be followed for arranging and delivering a Welcome to Country:

- Prior to engaging a person to undertake a Welcome, an employee should complete and submit the "Request for Welcome to Country" engagement form, preferably minimum eight weeks prior to the engagement taking place, seeking approval from Chief Executive Officer, Director or Executive Manager.
- Where it has been determined that a Welcome to Country is appropriate, the City officer can seek to engage an individual or group to deliver the Welcome. Discussion will take place about the nature of the Welcome, what it is to include and whether the City needs to make any specific provisions to accommodate the Welcome (such as space for dance).
- To enable the person giving the Welcome ample opportunity to prepare, City officers will provide them with key details about the specific engagement such as name of contact person from the City, venue, date, time of Welcome, run sheet, type of event, purpose of event, target audience, expectations and any other key details. The City officer will provide this information on the "Welcome to Country – Engagement Confirmation" form in advance of the event taking place.
- The person delivering the Welcome to Country will be given the opportunity to display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags in the space where the Welcome is delivered if they choose to.
- The Welcome to Country should occur at the beginning of official proceedings.
- The facilitator or MC should introduce the person delivering the Welcome to Country.
- At the conclusion of the Welcome to Country, the facilitator or MC should thank the person who delivered the Welcome. For example, "Thank you [name] for welcoming us. I respectfully acknowledge the past and present Traditional Owners of this land on which we are meeting, the Bindjareb people. It is a privilege to be standing on Bindjareb Country."
- Approval via exemption from Department Fire and Emergency (DFES) is required for Smoking Ceremonies between 1 December to 31 March. A burning permit is required through the City Chief Bushfire Control Officer at other times.

### 4.1.7 Welcome to Country with Smoking Ceremony

On some occasions, a Smoking Ceremony may form part of the Welcome to Country. A Smoking Ceremony is a cultural ceremony intended to cleanse the area and the people of bad spirits, and promote the protection, and well-being of visitors. The smoke and its various elements are believed to bring blessing and healing, connecting those involved with Country and each other. The smoke is important in the ceremony as well as how the fire is lit and what is used to make it. Guests may be invited to participate, such as walk through the smoke.

Given the significant nature of the ceremony, a Smoking Ceremony is usually only performed on special occasions. As a guide, examples where a Smoking Ceremony is considered appropriate include, but are not limited to:

- Welcome ceremonies for visitors or notable dignitaries

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- Significant occasions, such as clearing land for a new public building or the opening launch of a new facility.
- Healing and mourning ceremonies, to provide comfort and solace during times of grief.
- Cultural celebrations and gatherings to reinforce connections to heritage and ancestors.

A Traditional Owner may choose to undertake a Smoking Ceremony if they are engaged to deliver a service or community program, such as a Cultural Walk or educational workshop. In this instance, the ceremony would be at their own discretion or delivered as part of the City program.

## 4.2 Verbal Acknowledgement of Country

### 4.2.1 Definition of 'Acknowledgement of Country'

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for anyone to show awareness, understanding and respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country. It is informal and involves visitors acknowledging the Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the land as well as the long and continuing relationship between Aboriginal people and their Country.

### 4.2.2 Who can deliver an Acknowledgement

An Acknowledgement of Country can be delivered by any person in the wider community to demonstrate respect for Aboriginal people, culture and connection to land. It can be provided by any individual, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, participating in an occasion of any kind.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be provided by any Elected Member or employee, preferably the designated 'lead' for the gathering or the most senior person attending. Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training is provided and encouraged to support understanding of Bindjareb culture which should assist in delivering a respectful Acknowledgement.

A person may decline to give an Acknowledgement if it does not feel authentic. If it's an important event, the host would be encouraged to ask another person to make a genuine Acknowledgement that matches the City's desire for reconciliation and mutual understanding.

### 4.2.3 When to undertake an 'Acknowledgement of Country'.

An Acknowledgement of Country is suitable on occasions that are considered important. There are not strict rules about which occasions are suitable for an Acknowledgement, and it can be flexible for the host around what feels relevant for the specific occasion and right for them. As a guide, examples where an Acknowledgement is considered appropriate by the City of Mandurah include, but are not limited to:

- Council meetings and other meetings where external stakeholders or public are present.
- Small to medium gatherings or public events, such as Music in the Park, Junior Council, exhibitions, programs, Seniors Week, business breakfast.
- Attendance by local or regional guests, such as OAM recognition event.
- Participation in official proceedings by employees other local governments, state government or federal government.
- Openings of small to medium facilities, minor works, small public artwork or launching small scale capital projects.
- Launches of operational plans, action plans, significant policy or project launches
- Whole of organisation functions
- Formal gatherings, functions and ceremonies.

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### 4.2.4 Approval

Elected Members and employees do not need to seek approval to provide an Acknowledgement of Country.

### 4.2.5 Schedule of Fees

There are no fees associated with the delivery of an Acknowledgement of Country.

### 4.2.6 Undertaking an Acknowledgement of Country

When providing an Acknowledgement of Country, the following applies:

- The person providing the Acknowledgement should have a good understanding of the purpose of the occasion.
- The Acknowledgment of Country should occur at the beginning of official proceedings (but after practical information such as toilet locations or emergency evacuation procedures).
- It is important that an Acknowledgement of Country is delivered sincerely and genuinely. It should not be delivered in a way that feels rushed, read verbatim without personal connection, or presented as formality only. The intention should always be to honour its significance, not just to fulfill a procedural requirement.
- The Acknowledgement should be in the individual's own words, heartfelt and meaningful. At minimum, it should cover the following:
  - o Acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the Bindjareb people of the Noongar Nation
  - o Pay respect to Elders past and present
  - o Express gratitude for being on Country
- Personalising an Acknowledgement of Country is encouraged. For example, referencing the current Noongar Season or connecting the purpose of the gathering to a reconciliation message.
- An Acknowledgement can use Noongar language, such as beginning with "Kaya" meaning "hello".
- If there are multiple speakers within a program of events, it is not necessary for every new speaker to provide an Acknowledgement.
- If giving an acknowledgement online when there are people from different lands, acknowledgement should be made to the Country that you are on personally as host, and respect offered to all those online and the traditional custodians of their land, wherever they may be.

The City will make training available to Elected Members and employees to support them provide an appropriate Acknowledgement of Country.

### **4.3 Written Acknowledgement of Country**

The City's approved wording for a written Acknowledgement of Country is:

"The City of Mandurah would like to acknowledge the Bindjareb people, the Traditional Custodians of this land, and pay respect to all Elders, past and present. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this City and the region."

This wording can be modified depending on the purpose of the written document and with approval of the Chief Executive Officer.

The City will include a written Acknowledgement of Country in certain circumstances, for example:

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- Endorsed Strategies, Plans and publications
- Agendas and Minutes of public meetings (not necessarily for every meeting with external stakeholders)
- Elected Member and employee email footers
- City website
- A statement displayed within public buildings such as in the Council Chamber, customer service area and facilities.
- Printed materials where it is considered an Acknowledgement is suitable.

#### 4.4 Cultural Protocols to be observed

The City of Mandurah recognises that certain Aboriginal cultural traditions are important. Observing cultural protocols may include respecting confidential matters specific to gender, such as Men's Business or Women's Business. It also includes being respectful around flag protocols, mourning protocols and other observances.

The City will promote respectful communication by engaging with Bindjareb representatives to ensure their cultural knowledge and contributions are sought to inform key decisions, especially those that affect land, culture, and community.

City of Mandurah Elected Members and employees will hold good intentions to be respectful with culturally appropriate language, behaviours and actions. The City is committed to ongoing discussion with Bindjareb people about applying appropriate cultural protocols.

The City will continue a commitment for making cultural training available to staff in an effort to promote mutual respect, understanding and reconciliation.

#### Legislative Context

Nil

#### Review

At a minimum, this Council Policy will be reviewed every two years.

#### Related Documents

Policy POL-CMR 08 Aboriginal Connection to Country (Land) Policy  
City of Mandurah Reconciliation Action Plan  
Welcome to Country Register  
Request for Welcome to Country (form)  
Welcome to Country – Engagement Confirmation (form)

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**Responsible Directorate:** Place and Community

**Responsible Department:** Community

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**Reviewer:** Director Place and Community

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