

# Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country

## A Guide for Victorian Schools



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#### Acknowledgement

This Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country Guide for government schools was developed in partnership between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEA).

## Introduction

The Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework identifies that long term improvements are required for Victorian Koorie families and communities. To ensure that the Victorian Government education system is consistent with these aspirations, in 2008 the Minister for Education launched Wannik: Learning Together, Journey to Our Future, the government's education strategy for Koorie students.

Wannik strongly emphasises the need to encourage Victorian government schools to celebrate and embrace Koorie culture through:

- Repositioning the education of Koorie students within all our schools through strong leadership that creates a culture of high expectations and individualised learning for Koorie students
- Creating an environment that respects, recognises and celebrates Koorie history and cultural identity through practice and curriculum
- Celebrating Koorie culture and identity in all schools for all students

DEECD in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) has developed this Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country guide.

For Victorian schools, becoming familiar with the basic protocols involved with conducting a Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country is a fundamental first step in developing a positive and meaningful relationship with the local Koorie community.

In the Victorian context, a Welcome to Country or an Acknowledgement of Country ceremony demonstrates respect for Koorie people and acknowledges the spiritual, physical and cultural connection their ancestors have with their 'country' as the first people of the land now known as Victoria.



## Why should schools be encouraged to observe these protocols

Inviting an Elder to perform a Welcome to Country ceremony or conducting an Acknowledgement of Country is a meaningful way in which schools can show respect for their local Koorie community. Many Victorian Koorie people feel, or have previously felt, that non-Koorie people in Victoria have often not acknowledged that they were the first people living in Victoria or that they maintain strong cultural and spiritual connections to country.

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country ceremonies provide an opportunity for formal recognition and can lead to stronger local relationships and communication avenues being forged between schools and Victorian Koorie communities.

## When should schools conduct Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country ceremonies

Significant events celebrating or focussing on local, state or national Indigenous cultures should, where possible, be opened by an Elder who can perform a Welcome to Country ceremony. An Acknowledgement of Country can be used for all other significant school events.



## Who can perform a Welcome to Country

A Welcome to Country can only be given by a Koorie Traditional Owner of the land on which the event or meeting is taking place. The welcome is usually performed by an Elder and can also be made by a nominated representative.

## Who can perform an Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country can be given by any member of the community who wishes to pay their respects to the Koorie Traditional Owners of the land on which the event or meeting is taking place.

The Acknowledgement of Country does not need to be an elaborate ceremony, simply a few words at the opening of a meeting, event or assembly.

## Taking the first step to approaching your local Indigenous community

If schools wish to make a request for an Elder or representatives from the Koorie community to make a Welcome to Country the first step is to contact the local Koorie community for advice. There is a list of Victorian Indigenous organisations on the back page of this guide which may be able to provide advice on the most suitable way of securing the services of a local Elder.

This communication will also help you to establish if there are any special requirements for your event that may determine which members of the community will be able to perform services. For example, there may be a gender specific element that by Koorie protocols would be determined either 'Men's Business' or 'Women's Business'. It is important to establish open and positive communication with Elders and the local Koorie community who may be able to assist you by providing guidance.

If schools need assistance to find a suitable Elder or representative from the Koorie community to perform a Welcome to Country, contact your regional Koorie Education Coordinator or VAEAL.

## Do schools have to pay Elders for a Welcome to Country

Schools which have close contact with their local Koorie communities may be able to secure the services of an Elder at no charge. It is, however, a sign of cultural respect that Elders are paid or otherwise remunerated for their cultural knowledge and authority within their community.

## Should schools fly the Aboriginal flag when holding these ceremonies

All Victorian government schools have been provided with an Aboriginal flag. Schools are strongly encouraged to fly the flag, such as those outlined in the back of this guide.

## Examples of an Acknowledgement to Country

I would like to acknowledge the

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People, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are gathered and pay my respects to their Elders both past and present.

Or

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are gathered and pay my respects to their Elders both past and present.

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## History of the Aboriginal Flag

The Aboriginal Flag was recognised by the Federal Court of Australia in July 1995 under s.5 of the Flags Act 1953. Harold Thomas, a Luritja man from the Northern Territory, designed the Aboriginal Flag in 1971. The flag has become a recognised national symbol of unity for Indigenous people throughout Australia.

## What do the flags colours represent

Black represents the Aboriginal people of Australia, Red represents the red earth and the spiritual relationship to the land and Yellow represents the sun, the giver of life.

## Flying the Aboriginal flag

It is important to fly the Aboriginal flag the correct way

Black at the top  
Red at the base



## Aboriginal Victorian Timeline

Schools are encouraged to visit the link below. It was produced by the Koorie Heritage Trust, and provides an overview of Aboriginal Victoria from the pre-contact period through to the present.  
[www.abc.net.au/missionvoices/](http://www.abc.net.au/missionvoices/)

## Contacts

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development	
Address	Wannik Unit, 33 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne 3002
Telephone	9637 2000
email	<a href="mailto:wannik@edumail.vic.gov.au">wannik@edumail.vic.gov.au</a>
Web	<a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/aboriginal/wannik/">www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/aboriginal/wannik/</a>

Please contact your regional Koorie Education Coordinator through your regional office for further information and support

## Indigenous Education Organisations

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc (VAEAI) & Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs)	
Address	355 High Street, Northcote 3070
Telephone	9481 0800
Web	<a href="http://www.vaeai.org.au">www.vaeai.org.au</a>

Koorie Heritage Trust	
Address	295 King Street, Melbourne 3000
Telephone	8622 2600
Web	<a href="http://www.koorieheritagetrust.com">www.koorieheritagetrust.com</a>

## Aboriginal Community Co-Operatives

State wide support services and advice	
Web	<a href="http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/findingyourstory/FindingYourStorySec05.pdf">www.prov.vic.gov.au/findingyourstory/FindingYourStorySec05.pdf</a>

## Native Title Services Victoria

Peak body representing Native Title claimants groups in Victoria	
Telephone	9321 5300
Web	<a href="http://www.nts.com.au">www.nts.com.au</a>

## Indigenous Community Events and Key Dates

Date	Event
13 February	Anniversary of Prime Minister's National Apology
May - June	National Reconciliation Week
3 June	Mabo Day
First full week July	NAIDOC Week
Early August	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day



