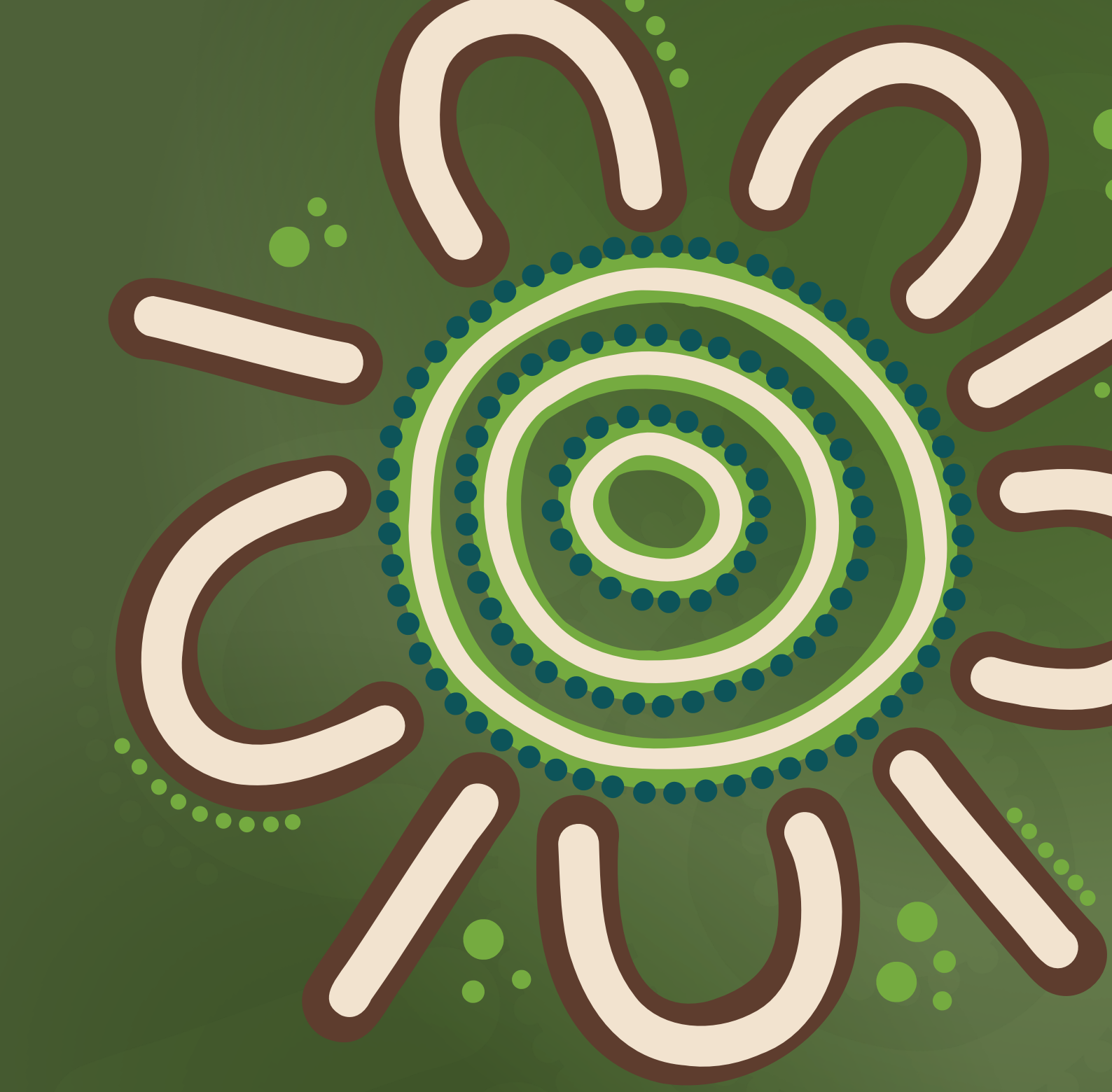

# ABORIGINAL CULTURAL INCLUSION

## GUIDE THREE: LANGUAGE & PROTOCOLS

How to engage respectfully with Aboriginal people while working in WA's tourism sector.

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA | Tourism WESTERN AUSTRALIA | WESTERN AUSTRALIA WALKING ON A DREAM | WAITOC.COM Ancient Tracks-New Journeys

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Tourism Western Australia and the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC) acknowledges Aboriginal people as the First Peoples of Western Australia. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal people in Western Australia, and we celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal people and honour their continuing connection to Country, culture, family, and community.

We recognise and appreciate the invaluable contributions made by Aboriginal people across many generations in shaping Western Australia as a premier tourism destination.

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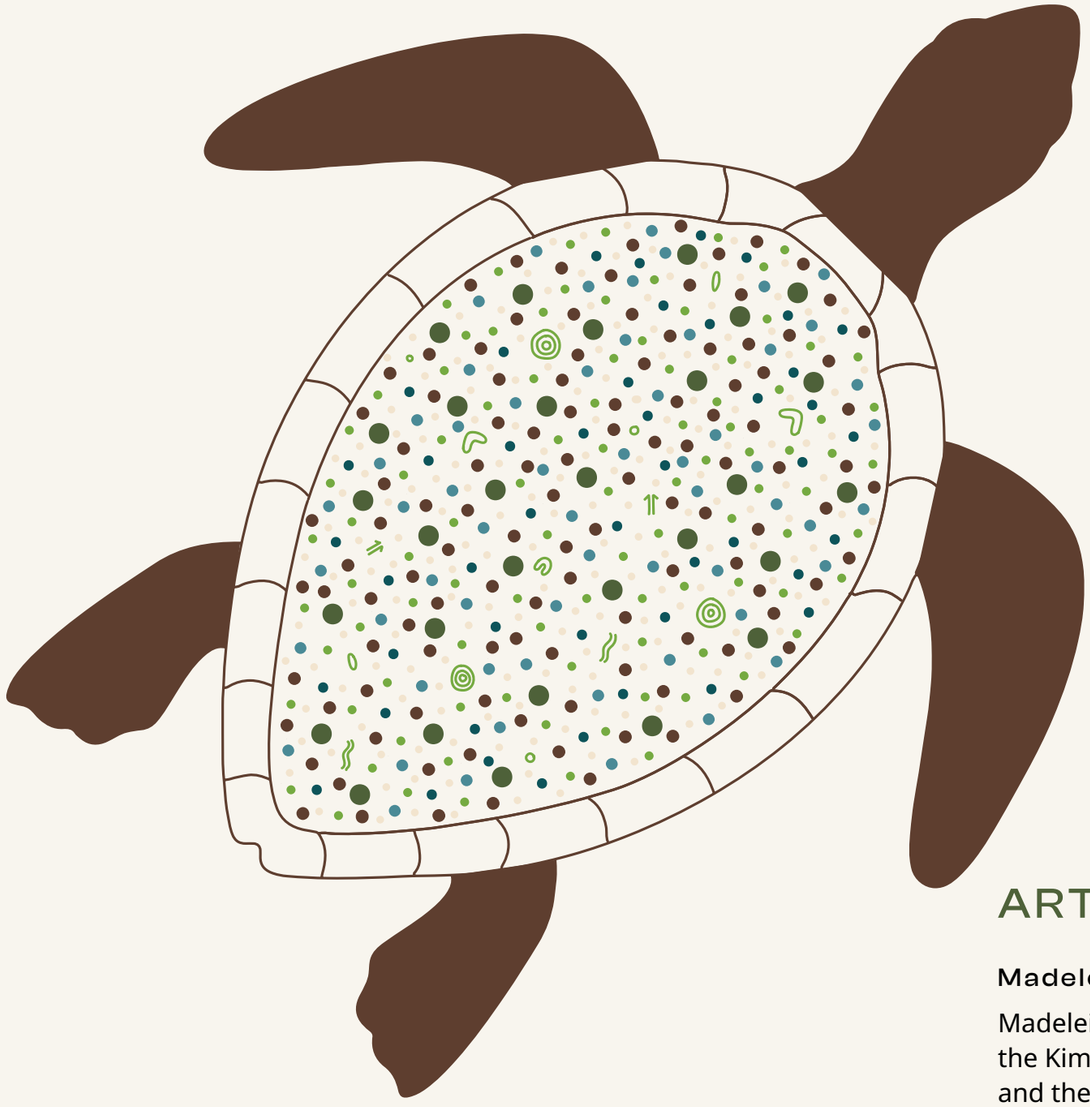
## LANGUAGE STATEMENT:

We recognise the diversity of First Peoples living throughout Western Australia. This document uses the term ‘Aboriginal’ in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original people of Western Australia. At a regional or local level, the traditional language group name is often used.

Across Australia through government, the term for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may be referred to as Indigenous peoples. The diversity of terms used to acknowledge peoples continues to alter. The diversity of acknowledgement includes Indigenous, First Peoples, First Nations, Traditional Owners, Traditional Custodians and identification by the traditional language groups.

Note: It is always best practice to ask Aboriginal people or groups how they would like to be referred to.





# ARTIST BIO

### Madeleine Edwards - Jalani Media

Madeleine Edwards is a Jaru woman from the Kimberley region of Western Australia and the founder of creative agency Jalani Media. She holds a Bachelor of Commerce (Major in Marketing) from the University of Western Australia. Madeleine seamlessly blends traditional and contemporary techniques, honouring her cultural heritage while embracing modern storytelling. Her practice spans digital art and acrylic paintings on canvas, where she draws upon the natural beauty of Jaru Country.

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Maddie designed the illustrations for each guide, drawing inspiration from its themes and content.

# GUIDE INTRODUCTION

This guide is an educational resource designed to assist non-Aboriginal tourism operators to engage and work respectfully with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal tourism businesses.

It is one of four guides that advocates for Aboriginal cultural inclusion within the tourism industry. The guides collectively aim to:

- Remove barriers from learning about Aboriginal culture.
- Inform the development of best practice protocols for your business so you can work respectfully with your local Aboriginal community.
- Highlight the importance of Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) and how to ensure ICIP is honoured throughout the operation of your business.
- Promote the cultural safety and inclusivity of Aboriginal people in all areas of the tourism industry.

These guides are a starting point for learning and are living documents that may evolve over time. We recognise that English words are used across these guides to describe Aboriginal concepts that, like any language, might not specifically fit the English understanding of that word.

**USE AS A HANDY REFERENCE GUIDE OR READ ALL GUIDES ONE TO FOUR CONSECUTIVELY TO MAXIMISE YOUR LEARNING OUTCOMES.**



# QUICK REFERENCE LINKS


| | |
|---|---|
| Understanding Language – key words and terms explained | 6 |
| Understanding Cultural Protocols – key words and terms explained | 9 |
| Demonstrating Inclusive and Respectful Language | 13 |
| Respect and Protection of Significant Sites and Objects | 14 |
| Frequently Asked Questions | 15 |
| Read the full Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Guides series | 17 |
| Want to take your cultural knowledge and understanding to the next level? | 17 |


## DISCLAIMER

The information contained in this guide is for informational purposes only and should not be regarded as legal advice on any matter. It is recommended that independent legal advice is sought for your business where appropriate.

# UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE – KEY WORDS AND TERMS EXPLAINED

Language referring to Aboriginal people respectfully can often be complex and, in some cases, changes with regards to context, locality, or over time. Some examples of key words and terms have been provided.

### 'ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER', 'INDIGENOUS', 'FIRST PEOPLES' AND 'FIRST NATIONS'

- In Western Australia the term 'Aboriginal' is used in preference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of Western Australia.
- It is also important to understand there are unique differences in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and generalisations of the two can cause offence. When referring to both cultures use the terms 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander', otherwise in all other circumstances use the term 'Aboriginal'.
- A more recent term of respect in reference to Aboriginal people is 'First Nations' which has been chosen as a reference to the fact that First Nations peoples occupied Australia before anyone else. 'Nations' makes two important statements: First Peoples formed nations, not small groups. As an expression of respect, always capitalise both words First and Nations.

The diversity of terms used to acknowledge peoples continues to alter. Acknowledgement may include Indigenous, First Peoples, First Nations, Traditional Owners, Traditional Custodians and identification by the traditional language groups.

Note: It is always best practice to ask Aboriginal people or groups how they would like to be referred to.



### TRADITIONAL OWNERS

- Traditional Owners (with a capital T and O) are terms often given to Aboriginal people in recognition of them as the descendants of the original inhabitants of Australia.
- Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Traditional Custodians of the land is central to demonstrating respect for Aboriginal people. This means understanding Aboriginal people have a continuing connection with land, waterways, seas, sites of significance and have traditional rights and interests which arise from this connection.

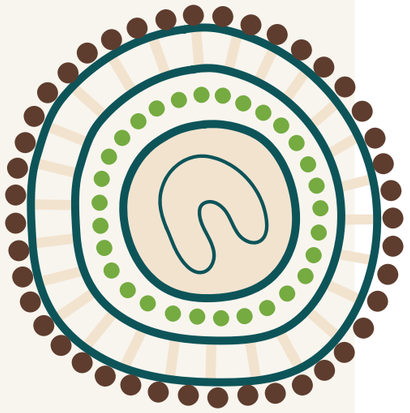
### ELDERS

- An Elder (with a capital E) may be acknowledged by their community as a Custodian of Aboriginal lore, custom and cultural knowledge, and may provide guidance on cultural matters and protocol.
- As deeply respected members and representatives of their community they may be cultural keepers by virtue of the respect and trust accorded to them.
- It is an important mark of respect to acknowledge Elders of the Aboriginal community at official activities.
- An acknowledgement of Elders (past and present) is commonly placed at the end of a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country.

**WHILST TRADITIONAL OWNERS AND CUSTODIANS ARE BROADLY USED TERMS, IT IS ALWAYS RECOMMENDED TO ASK ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OR GROUPS HOW THEY WOULD LIKE TO BE REFERRED TO AS THESE REFERENCES MAY CHANGE OVER TIME.**

It is important to note, some Aboriginal Elders do not practice traditional culture and therefore are not Knowledge Holders or representatives of their community.

More information about a Welcome to Country and an Acknowledgment of Country is provided in Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Guide One: Country.



### KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS

- A Knowledge Holder (also known as a Knowledge Keeper or Cultural Advisor) refers to an Aboriginal person who has been taught by an Elder or a senior Knowledge Holder within their community to hold traditional knowledge and teachings, how to care for these teachings, and when it is, or is not appropriate to share this knowledge with others.
- A Knowledge Holder may not always be an Elder, but is an entrusted, authorised member of an Aboriginal community or language group.

### AUNTY AND UNCLE

- Some Aboriginal people may refer to family members, leaders, or Elders as ‘Aunty’ or ‘Uncle’.
- It is recommended non-Aboriginal people check the appropriateness of their use of Aunty or Uncle as it may be inappropriate unless a strong relationship has been established.

### TOURISM TIP

Language and the affiliated cultural protocol becomes more complex when referring to Aboriginal family systems, for example, words such as ‘kinships’, ‘skin names’, ‘totems’ or ‘moiety’ which play a significant role in Aboriginal culture and community.

For a more in depth look at language - key words and terms used by Aboriginal people, register for a cultural education/training program with the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council or one of their members **here**, or discover more service providers in Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Guide Four – Action & Resources.



## UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL PROTOCOLS – KEY WORDS AND TERMS EXPLAINED

It is important to remember that Aboriginal cultural protocols differ between communities and regions and there is no one-size-fits-all for engaging with Aboriginal people.

- Observing cultural protocol demonstrates respect for the history and traditions of Aboriginal culture.
- Through acknowledgement and participation in Aboriginal cultural protocols, respectful and informed engagement may be achieved.
- Speaking with local Elders, Knowledge Holders or members of your local Aboriginal community is always encouraged as a responsible way to seek informed cultural knowledge in a respectful manner.

Some examples of key words and terms have been provided.

**Sorry Business**

- Sorry Business is a term describing the cultural responsibilities and obligations of Aboriginal people relating to the death or loss of immediate family members, extended family, or people with kinship or community ties. Examples may include participation in cultural practices, protocols, ceremonies, and rituals associated with bereavement and funerals for a deceased person. Not attending or participating could be regarded by the grieving family members and community as a sign of disrespect.
- There is no set time period for Sorry Business. Ceremonies and mourning periods vary depending upon community customs, status of the deceased person, or the nature of the relationship between the person taking part in Sorry Business and the person who has died.
- As a mark of respect to grieving family members, some Aboriginal communities, businesses, services, and employees may cease work or close from the time the person has passed until sometime after the funeral is held.
- When a colleague, product/service provider, family, or community you are engaging with is experiencing Sorry Business, it is important and respectful to provide space and time for their grieving process and cultural obligations.

Sorry Business may also take place in other circumstances. For example, if a family or community member is seriously ill, or to mourn the loss of a cultural connection to Country e.g. loss of a sacred site.

## DECEASED PERSONS

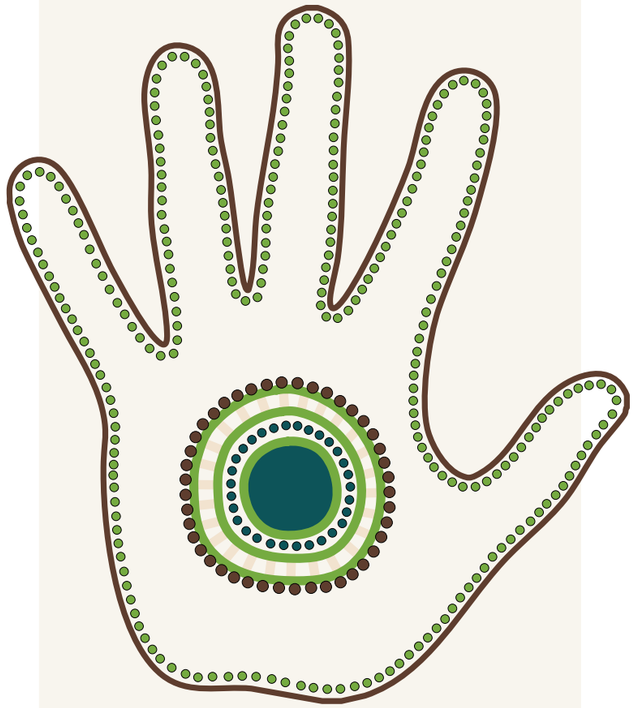
- It is generally considered disrespectful in Aboriginal culture to display or share images, video, vocal recordings, or the name of someone who has died.
- If someone else has the same name as the deceased person, it may be considered inappropriate to use their name until after Sorry Business has concluded (which can sometimes be several years). They might then be referred to as their second name, their initials or alternate name in the interim.
- Avoidance of referring to a deceased person by name in general communications directly after their death is also considered a mark of respect.
- Formal permission to display or share this information must be sought directly from the family and preceded with a content warning if authorised to do so.

## MEN'S BUSINESS

- Ceremonial practices or cultural activities exclusive to men.
- Young men (boys) are often considered as men if they have earned this right through ceremonial practices.

## WOMEN'S BUSINESS

- Ceremonial practices or cultural activities exclusive to women and girls.



Men's or Women's Business may impact on capacity to conduct certain tourism activities.

For example, with respect to Aboriginal tour guides, some stories, localities, and activities featured on a tour or cultural experience may only be suitable for delivery specifically from an Aboriginal male or female with the authority and permission to do so.



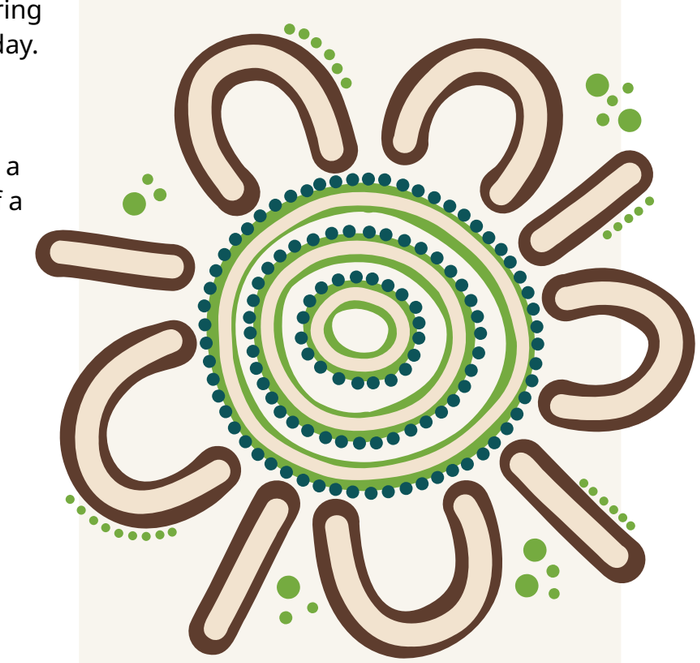
## STORYTELLING

- Storytelling is a way of communicating 'The Dreaming' and may be translated through mediums such as ceremonies, art, paintings, songs, dances and stories.
- It is a traditional teaching tool used to share knowledge and information about creation, culture, Country, lore, rules, kinship and community.
- Storytelling also focuses on other skills such as ceremonies, navigation, sourcing food, medicine and resources, life lessons, or simply for entertainment.
- Traditionally an oral culture, Aboriginal people have used storytelling to pass on stories and share knowledge throughout the generations.

## YARNING

- Yarning is a traditional way of sharing knowledge that continues to this day.
- To 'sit down and have a yarn' references a casual conversation that helps to build relationships in a safe place without the structure of a timeline or subject.

**The Dreaming** refers to how Ancestral spirits gave Aboriginal people their lores, customs and codes of conduct, and is the source of the songs, dances, designs, languages, and rituals that are the foundations of Aboriginal cultural expression today.



### SACRED SITES

- Sacred sites are places within the landscape, seas, and waterways that hold cultural values, spiritual meaning and family-based relationships to Country for Aboriginal people.
- Identified as a life force for people, flora and fauna, sacred sites (also referred to as 'secret sites'), hold a strong cultural significance through generations of hosting ceremonies, Women's Business or Men's Business, and the recreation of events that took place at the sacred site.
- Visiting or conducting business (e.g. a tour) at a sacred site without the permission of the appropriate Elder, Knowledge Holder, Custodian or community leader is considered disrespectful.
- Damage to, the destruction of, or the removal of objects (such as rocks, shells, sand, or artefacts) from a sacred site is considered highly offensive and hurtful.
- Registered Aboriginal Heritage Sites are protected by the Aboriginal Heritage Act in Western Australia.

  Find more information about the Aboriginal Heritage Act in Western Australia **here**.

In general, remember that it is important to 'tread lightly' and 'leave no trace' on Country. There is no need to disturb ecosystems and take anything from the natural environment.

Understanding cultural protocols is empowering to Aboriginal people and shows a sincere recognition of their distinct and ongoing cultures through the expression of informed, appropriate, and responsible cultural knowledge.

Further reading regarding the return of rocks from Uluru can be found **here**.

**TOURISM TIP**

For a more in depth look at Aboriginal Cultural Protocols, register for a cultural education/training program with the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council or one of their members **here**, or discover more service providers in Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Guide Four – Action & Resources.



# DEMONSTRATING INCLUSIVE AND RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE[1]

### CAPITALISATION

As capitalisation demonstrates respect, 'Aboriginal' or 'Torres Strait Islander' should always be capitalised. Capitalisation conventions are often also considered appropriate to extend to terms such as:

- First Peoples/Nations/Australians;
- Indigenous;
- Elders;
- Traditional Owners/Custodians;
- Knowledge Holders/Keepers;
- Country (and corresponding terms such as 'Land,' when it is used in place of 'Country'), as well as the names of particular Language Groups or geo-cultural communities; and
- Acknowledgement of Country, Welcome to Country, and the names of other cultural practices.

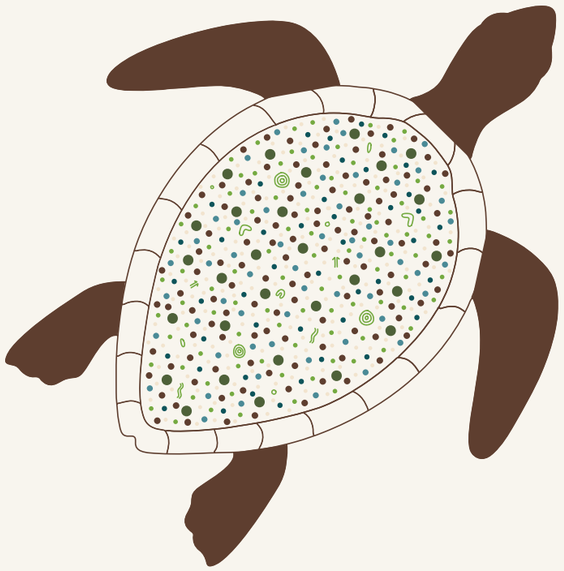
1 | RAP Drafting Resource, Reconciliation Australia www.reconciliation.org.au

# RESPECT AND PROTECTION OF SIGNIFICANT SITES AND OBJECTS

Aboriginal culture is the oldest living culture in the world, requiring recognition, protection, and preservation.

Aboriginal heritage holds significant value to Aboriginal people for their social, spiritual, historical, scientific, or aesthetic importance within Aboriginal traditions, and provides an essential link for Aboriginal people to their past, present and future - Aboriginal Heritage Act, Western Australia.

Protecting sites and objects of Aboriginal heritage aids in the preservation of Aboriginal culture and connection to land and the associated identities of Aboriginal people, while protecting the environment within these sites.



Incidents of disturbance, damage or removal are considered highly offensive and hurtful to Aboriginal people and in some cases, are unlawful under the Aboriginal Heritage Act, Western Australia. The violation of a sacred site's sanctity may be deemed dangerous to both the perpetrator and Custodians of the site due to strong cultural beliefs.

Violations could include; to disturb, damage or remove at a significant or sacred site:

- Ceremonial sites;
- Burial sites;
- Rock art;
- Ancient caves;
- Waterways;
- Scar trees; or
- Objects used in traditional Aboriginal life, past or present. These could be natural or artificial, such as:
  - Rocks
  - Shells
  - Sand
  - Artefacts.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**People in my community (Aboriginal and some non-Aboriginal) greet a local female Elder as 'Aunty'. Should I call her Aunty also?**

- Whilst it may be cultural protocol for Aboriginal people in your local community to respectfully greet their Elder as 'Aunty', it may be inappropriate for someone outside of the community (Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal) unless a strong relationship has been established, or the Elder has personally given you permission to do so.

**Can I share Aboriginal cultural stories and content if I am not Aboriginal?**

- No, or not without the express permission, or delivered in equitable partnership with the appropriate Aboriginal Elder or Knowledge Holder.
- It is considered inappropriate for non-Aboriginal people to be sharing Aboriginal cultural content, stories, or narratives such as traditional practices; customs; sacred sites; pre-colonisation history; or Dreamtime stories.
- Ownership of cultural content (or Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property – ICIP) is specifically held by an individual Aboriginal person, family, community, or language group, and is not considered an outsider's (Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal) story to tell, or information to share.
- When presenting historical (post-colonisation), general knowledge, and scientific information, it is recommended you state your sources and be respectful.

**Can any Aboriginal person deliver a cultural tour, talk, ceremony, or experience on Country for my non-Aboriginal business?**
For example, if the Aboriginal employee or contractor is from a different Country or Language Group to the place contractor from a Country or Language Group to the place in which you are working.

- No, unless appropriate permissions have been granted. It is considered inappropriate for an Aboriginal person who is not from the Country or Language Group on which you are operating on, to deliver a service of this nature, unless the relevant permission has been granted by an authorised Custodian and this person has the cultural knowledge and experience to accurately share this information (and is happy to perform this task).
- Respect gender protocols and recognise many Aboriginal communities distinguish between the roles of men and women, and the information and activities they may participate in and share.

**Can a non-Aboriginal business sell Aboriginal-made products?**
For example, artworks, bush foods, books, or photographs.

- Yes, however it is imperative consumers are not led to incorrectly believe you are an Aboriginal business or creator of these products.
- It is important to ensure the ethical support of Aboriginal owned businesses i.e. money from the procurement of Aboriginal-made products is going back to Aboriginal people and communities directly.

  The Indigenous Art Code is a great example of guidelines for Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) protection, ethical practices, and fair treatment. See more at **www.indigenousartcode.org**
- It is recommended a credit or acknowledgement is stated regarding the identity of Aboriginal creators of the product/s; formal permission to sell these items has been received; and agreed financial arrangements are in place with the supplier for the sale of this ICIP.

  Note: permission from families must be sought, or a content warning should be displayed on any materials connected with Aboriginal people who have passed away.

**Can a non-Aboriginal business present as an Aboriginal business through branding or employing Aboriginal staff to take advantage of opportunities created for Aboriginal owned and operated businesses?**

- No. This practice is known as 'black cladding'.
- Supply Nation considers 'black cladding' the practice of a non-Indigenous business entity or individual taking unfair advantage of an Indigenous business entity or individual for the purpose of gaining access to otherwise inaccessible Indigenous procurement policies or contracts.

  Unfair advantage involves practices and arrangements that result in the disadvantage or detriment to an Indigenous business, or that do not represent a genuine demonstrated level of equitable partnership and benefit.[2]
- Supply Nation's definition of an Indigenous business is at least 51% owned by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islands person(s). This definition is also applied by Australian Federal and State Government and most corporate organisations.

  Find more information or to learn how Supply Nation verifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses **here**.

2 | Supply Nation: What is Black Cladding? www.supplynation.org.au



## READ THE FULL ABORIGINAL CULTURAL INCLUSION GUIDES SERIES

How to engage respectfully with Aboriginal people while working in WA's tourism sector:

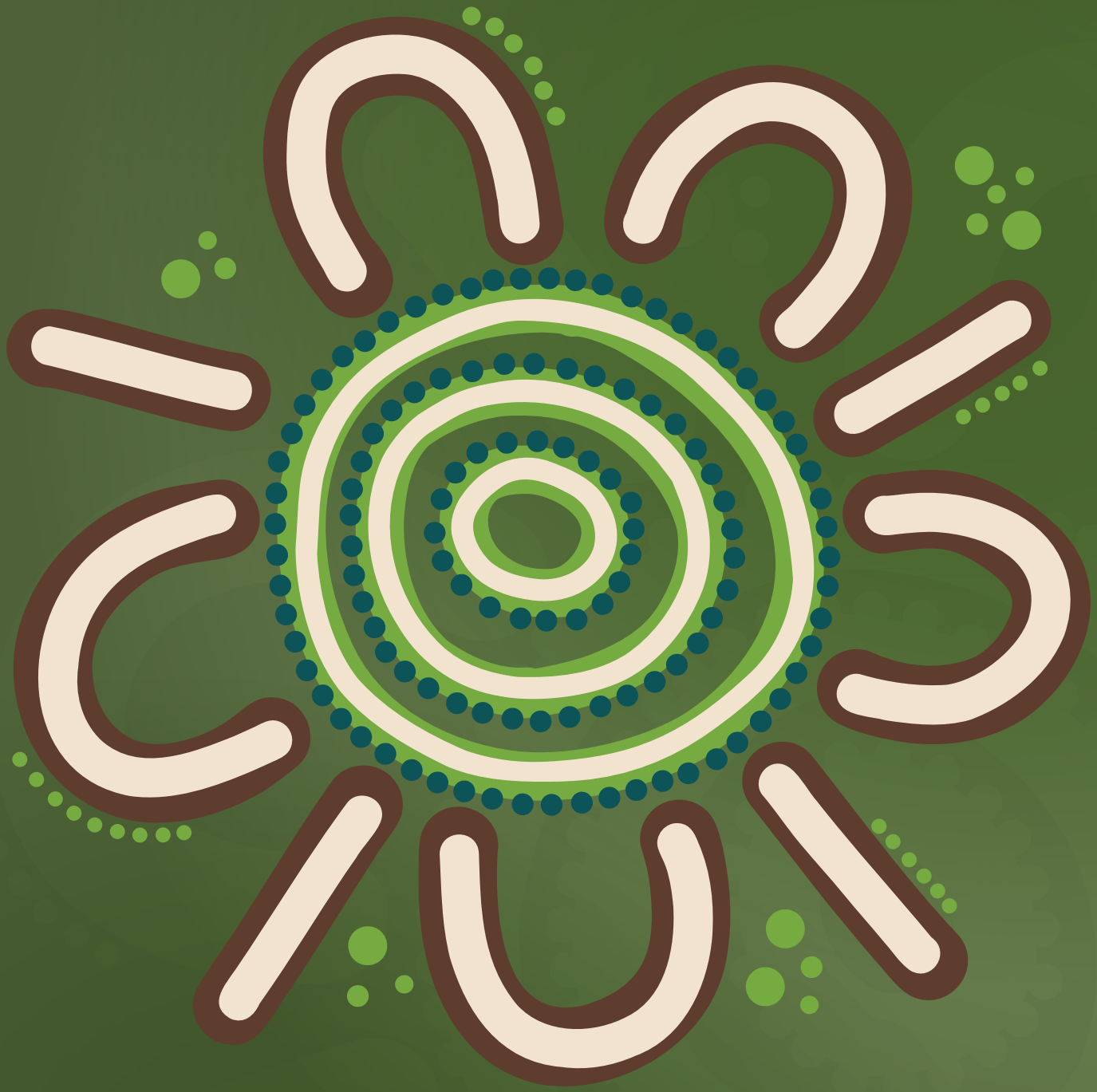
Access all four guides on the TCWA website.

CLICK HERE

## WAITOC AND TCWA TRAINING PROGRAMS

Want to hear about the **WAITOC and TCWA Advanced Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Training Programs**?
Please register your interest by emailing tcwa@tourismcouncilwa.com.au

CLICK HERE



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