

SCS-061 – Acknowledgement of Country Policy

TRIM Reference:	D22/107757	Due for Review:	September 2025
Responsible Officer:	Manager Community Support		

Purpose

This policy outlines Surf Coast Shire Council's commitment to ensuring respectful recognition is given to Traditional Owners, and all First Nations people who are part of the Surf Coast Shire community, by way of either a verbal or written Acknowledgement of Country.

The practice of acknowledging Traditional Owners and First Nations people at appropriate instances is an important step in recognising their deep connection with this land. It shows respect for them as the custodians and care takers of these lands from time immemorial, and acknowledges the resilience of the surviving family lines of today. This is one way to demonstrate Council's commitment to Reconciliation.

This policy assists Surf Coast Shire Council to ensure its representatives pay respectful acknowledgement to Traditional Owners.

This is in accordance with the cultural protocols developed through consultation with Traditional Owners and other First Nations people of the wider Surf Coast Shire community.

These protocols are outlined in Council's *Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country: Guidelines for Surf Coast Shire Councillors, staff and volunteers*.

Policy Principles

This policy provides a framework for people to give respectful acknowledgements. This is guided by the following principles.

Recognition

Acknowledgement of Country recognises the ongoing, unbroken connection that Traditional Owners have to the lands, skies, waterways and creatures of their Country. It recognises their care for Country; the custodianship and responsibility First Nations people have always had, and continue to have, despite the impact of colonisation and its ongoing effects. It recognises the rightful holders of responsibility and knowledge as the Elders of the past and present. It also recognises the future leaders who are learning the ways of their Ancestors in order to assume that responsibility for the next generation.

Respect

Acknowledgement of Country is an important way to show appropriate respect to the Traditional Owners and to their Country; as well as to all First Nations people. Respect should be demonstrated in this way whether or not a Traditional Owner or First Nations person is present. It is also a way to demonstrate these principles to the community, colleagues or associates, who are gathered or reading. It may also serve to educate others about who the Traditional Owners are of the Country they live or work on. When a Traditional Owner has provided a Welcome to Country ceremony, it is respectful to respond to the Welcome with an appropriate Acknowledgement.

Understanding

Acknowledgement of Country demonstrates the speaker or author's understanding of these principles, the importance of this gesture as a cultural protocol; and their knowledge of whose Country they are on. This understanding comes from education, awareness and knowledge sharing. At a deeper level it is an understanding of the history of this nation that has previously been suppressed, such as the lie that Australia was *terra nullius*; its people were not officially recognised; and faced terrible discrimination which still continues today in many forms.

Scope

- This policy applies to Surf Coast Shire Council representatives including Councillors, employees, contractors and volunteers who wish to give an appropriate and respectful Acknowledgement of Country.
- This policy does not apply to members or representatives of community groups or organisations not managed by Surf Coast Shire Council. However, community groups may wish to use the principles and information contained within this policy to develop their own Acknowledgement of Country processes.
- This policy applies to all civic functions, events, business activities and formal meetings hosted by Council representatives, both in-person and online.
- This policy applies to all official written documentation and publications, including but not limited to Council plans, reports, guidelines, websites and emails.

Policy

Council is committed to walking with Traditional Owners and all First Nations people in our community toward Reconciliation. Council will do this by recognising the First People of this land as the Traditional Owners and Custodians and paying them the appropriate respect.

One way that Council will do this is by ensuring its representatives give an appropriate Acknowledgment of Country in the following ways:

- When hosting, or as the first speaker at a function, event, formal gathering or meeting (either in-person or online) the Council representative will deliver an Acknowledgement of Country at its commencement
- When a Traditional Owner has provided a Welcome to Country ceremony at a function, event, formal gathering or meeting (either in-person or online) the Council representative will respond with an Acknowledgement of Country at the first opportunity immediately following the Welcome to Country
- Ensure the inclusion of an appropriate and respectful written Acknowledgement of Country on all official documents, reports, plans and policies.

Local Government Act 2020 Principles

Principles	Applicable to policy	If yes, provide details
<p><i>Governance Principles</i> (Consideration of the Governance Principles under s.9 of LGA 2020)</p>	Yes	<p><i>s.9b – Priority has been given to achieving the best outcome for the municipal to the community by contributing to the realisation of Theme One of the Council Plan 2020-2025.</i></p> <p><i>s.9h – This policy is in line with the national strategic direction in relation to Reconciliation with First Nations people.</i></p>
<p><i>Community Engagement</i> (Consideration of Community Engagement Principles under s.56 LGA 2020)</p>	No	
<p><i>Public Transparency</i> (Consideration of Public Transparency Principles under s.58 of LGA 2020)</p>	Yes	<p><i>s.58c&d – This policy does not apply to community groups and organisations, however community members or groups may choose to refer to this policy and guiding principles when developing their own Acknowledgement of Country processes</i></p>
<p><i>Strategies and Plans</i> (Consideration of Strategic Planning Principles under s.89 of LGA 2020)</p>	Yes	<p><i>s.89b – Consideration has been given in the development of this policy to describe an integrated approach across Council for the delivery of Acknowledgement of Country where appropriate</i></p>
<p><i>Financial Management</i></p>	No	

(Consideration of Financial Management Principles under s.101 of LGA 2020)		
<p>Service Performance</p> <p>(Consideration of Service Performance Principles under s.106 of LGA 2020)</p>	Yes	<p><i>s.106. 2a – This policy seeks to ensure that the diversity of our municipal community is recognised and respected. It recognises that we do have First Nations people living in our community, and that giving an Acknowledgement of Country is one way of recognising their Custodianship and continuing connection to their land.</i></p>

Definitions

Council: Surf Coast Shire Council

Representative: Surf Coast Shire Councillors, employees, contractors or volunteers

First Nations: Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples

Traditional Owner: An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who is a descendant of the original inhabitants of an area, and has rights and responsibilities for that area.

Country: A place or area that Traditional Owners both belong to and care for. A physical, spiritual and cultural home that nurtures and provides, and in turn must be nurtured and protected.

Elder: An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who has gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge and lore and who has permission to disclose knowledge and beliefs.

Terra Nullius: Latin term meaning “land belonging to no one” this was a legal principle implemented in Australian law as the basis for British settlement.

Reconciliation: Reconciliation requires the Australian community to recognise and respect the First Peoples of this land, to acknowledge the past injustices, and the ongoing inequalities, experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples since colonisation, and to commit to working towards a more equal and respectful future.

Welcome to Country: A ceremony performed only by a Traditional Owner to welcome visitors to their land and to grant them safe passage. A Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of formal events and may include a speech, singing, dancing and smoking ceremony.

Related Procedure

Guidelines

Council will provide as a written resource, the ***Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country: Guidelines for Surf Coast Shire Councillors, staff and volunteers.*** These guidelines will assist Council representatives in the delivery of respectful Acknowledgement of Country. These guidelines will be

updated regularly to reflect any changes made in consultation with Traditional Owners, political or societal changes, and the developing national status of First Nations peoples.

References

The policy is underpinned by the following Surf Coast Shire Council policy documents and external documents:

[Surf Coast Shire Council Plan \(2021-2025\)](#)

Surf Coast Shire Council [Statement of Commitment](#)

Surf Coast Shire Council Reconciliation Action Plan – Reflect (Draft)

[Maggolee](#) - Here in This Place

[Reconciliation Australia](#)

[Common Ground](#)

[Bringing Them Home](#)

Document History

Version	Document History	Approved by – Date
1	<i>New Policy</i>	<i>Council Resolution 27 September 2022</i>