

Version 3 | Jan 2026

First Peoples Engagement Guidelines

OUR COMMUNITY • OUR CFA



CFA would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and pay our deep respect to Elders past and present.

We also acknowledge that Aboriginal self-determination is a human right enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. CFA recognises the hard work of many generations of Aboriginal people who have fought for this right to be upheld.

Firesticks Workshop Bundanon Trust Reserve, NSW, July 2018.
Photo credit Owen Gooding.



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About these guidelines

Successful partnerships rely on trust and respectful relationships. The information in these guidelines is intended to help CFA members establish and sustain these relationships.

This is the second version of CFA's First Peoples Engagement Guidelines. The first was produced in 2018. Now in 2026, it is worth noting the significant changes in Aboriginal rights and reform at a Victorian Government level. These guidelines aims to reflect these changes and to align to the Self-Determination Reform Framework and the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework. CFA's commitment to improve Aboriginal inclusion is articulated in CFA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2023 -2025) and continues through the development of the First Peoples Bridging Plan (2025-2027).

The right to self determination has particular application to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's first peoples.

The aim of these guidelines is:

- to support CFA members better engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- to improve knowledge and understanding
- to understand Cultural Protocols.

Using the right name for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people shows respect and it shows that you care. It is the first step to building rapport.

When collectively talking about Indigenous Australians, it is preferable to use First Peoples or Australians, or to use the full term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For practical reasons you can state at the beginning of a document such as this that you will use the term First Peoples throughout, and in some instances the term Aboriginal will be used.

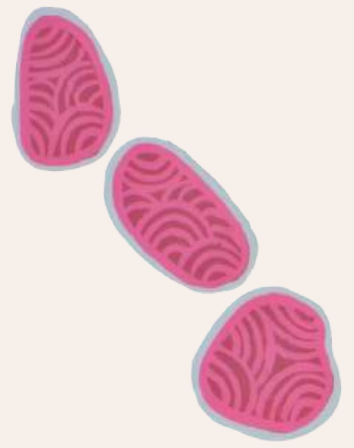
Self-determination means that people freely decide and determine what is important to them, economically, culturally and politically. First Peoples have made it clear that self-determination matters.

Principles of Engagement

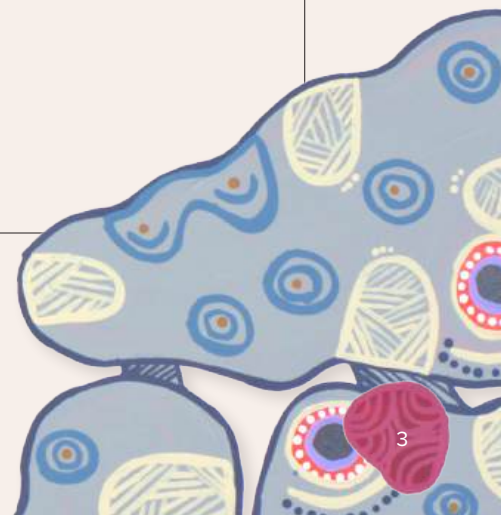
The following eight principles have been developed in partnership with Traditional Owners and the First Peoples Community to provide guidance on how to best engage with Traditional Owners and the First Peoples Community.

PRINCIPLE 1	Free, Prior and Informed Consent (Early Informed Engagement)
<p>Informed Consent (FPIC) is recognised in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and aligns with the principles of self-determination.</p> <p>The FPIC principles are noted below and must be embedded into all portfolio projects and initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free: consent must be given voluntarily without an expectation or timeline that is externally imposed. For example, Traditional Owners and the First Peoples Community may not want to engage in the project. It is their choice to self-determine their involvement.• Prior: consent is sought at the earliest possible stage of that project or initiative. You should aim ideally within the scope planning stage.• Informed: engagement is ongoing and may require multiple consultations.• Consent: a collective decision must be reached through the group's own customary decision-making processes.	
PRINCIPLE 2	Traditional Owners are rights holders and our partners
<p>Traditional Owners are rights holders over Country. They need to be treated as partners in planning and delivery projects that are of interest to them.</p> <p>This is a key step in establishing authentic and meaningful partnerships. Even without formal agreements. Traditional Owners have a right to partner in project works that are of interest to them.</p> <p>Attending First Peoples community events is a great way to build connections and shows that you are committed to building meaningful and genuine relationships.</p>	
PRINCIPLE 3	First Peoples cultural safety and competency
<p>Staff are expected to maintain a culturally safe environment for Traditional Owners and First Peoples Community.</p> <p>This is a vital step to building trusting and meaningful relationships. For this reason, it is an expectation that staff complete First Peoples Cultural Safety Training.</p> <p>Cultural safety training builds cultural competency and capability, and an understanding of power dynamics that can affect relationships and trust.</p> <p>Tips for culturally safe engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seek permission before taking photos and/or using their quotes• Use plain language• Avoid using technical language, jargon and acronyms• Listen	
PRINCIPLE 4	Meet on Country and in person
<p>Meeting on Country is a cultural custom that has been practiced for many years. The practice portrays respect and signals to Traditional Owners that you respect them as partners.</p>	





PRINCIPLE 5	Create realistic timelines that respect decision making processes
<p>Traditional Owners have their own governance structures and ways of making decisions and these need to be respected. Timelines for projects need to be decided in partnership, unless the government have determined an end date for major projects. Typically, this would occur in your first engagement meeting with Traditional Owners.</p> <p>Tips and considerations for timeline planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask how the group prefers to make decisions i.e. committee of Elders, Board of Directors, a specific project group etc.• Find out about their governance structures.• Build dates of significance into timelines i.e. National Reconciliation week, NAIDOC week. <p>Note that Sorry Business (bereavement and funerals) needs to be respected and may alter timelines.</p>	
PRINCIPLE 6	Be purposeful and prepared
<p>Be purposeful in your engagement by linking project objectives and outcomes with Traditional Owner and First Peoples Community aspirations.</p> <p>Strategic documents are a great starting point in sourcing aspirations and priorities.</p> <p>These can be found in documents such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whole-of-Country Plans• Joint Management Agreements	
PRINCIPLE 7	Resource appropriately and build in an engagement budget
<p>Like any request for service, First Peoples need to be compensated appropriately for their time.</p> <p>Your engagement budget needs to be flexible and will be informed when engaging with Traditional Owners and or First Peoples Community.</p>	
PRINCIPLE 8	Build trust by being transparent and open
<p>Building trust is key to supporting positive project outcomes.</p> <p>Be transparent and open about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project timelines• Scope• Negotiables• Non-negotiables• Issues or concerns	



The importance to CFA of engaging First Peoples

Many First Peoples, families and communities experience exclusion because of the complex and enduring legacy of previous government approaches and policies. This has left many First Peoples and their families disadvantaged in terms of education, health, life expectancy, employment and prosperity.

This is why self-determination matters. It means that First Peoples have the right to make decisions about issues that affect their lives.

Specifically, for a service delivery organisation like CFA, it is important to build trusted and respectful relationships with First Peoples and uphold their rights to make decisions that affect their lives.

When people feel included and connected, they are more likely to access CFA services and programs, implement safety measures and collaborate in fire risk reduction and other activities.

By building partnerships, trust and mutual respect, CFA can work together with First Peoples to improve fire safety and the use of fire in the landscape.

Quambatook grassland burn, smoking ceremony.
Photo credit CFA.



In 2014 CFA commissioned “Working Together” artwork by Emma Bamblett. The original artwork is displayed at CFA State Headquarters in East Burwood. Copies of the painting are in every District office across the State. The artwork tells a story about how CFA works together with the community to improve fire safety. You can hear the artist describe the story in this film.

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhHP9L8AUzo>





Charmaine Sellings and Rhonda Moore at the official opening of Bunjil brigade.

BUNJIL FIRE BRIGADE

The Bunjil Fire Brigade is unique to CFA and to Victoria. It is situated in the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust in East Gippsland. The brigade was all-Aboriginal and all-women until they were recently joined by a new recruit. The crew formed in the late 1990s as a satellite of Toorloo Arm Brigade. The small fire station continues to take pride of place on the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust.

Charmaine Sellings, influential local resident and brigade member explains that “the Trust went from having 20 or 30 fires per year to having almost no fires as soon as the brigade started. And this shows we’re doing a really important job of looking after our people and cultural assets here on the Trust.”

The brigade’s formation was the brainchild of the late CFA District 11 Operations Manager Mark Reid. In the 1990s there were fires getting out of hand at the Trust, often deliberately lit by locals to keep warm. However, response times from surrounding brigades were long because of the long distances. So a plan was hatched to add a satellite CFA station on site. When CFA held an information night to plan the local crew and station it was the local women that came along.

With only one access road in and out of the isolated peninsula of Lake Tyers, the residents are hemmed in by thick bush on one side and a vast lake system on the other. The Trust’s 200 residents rely on these women to keep them safe from fire.

Charmaine Sellings, Rhonda Thorpe and Marjorie Mobourne (dec.) were the three local women who were determined to make it work. They originally walked the streets of the Trust knocking on doors signing up volunteers. Eight women made up the inaugural brigade.

Charmaine remembers that “when we first set up the brigade the men called us the Banana Women because of our bright yellow outfits. We had a giggle about it because they were jealous of us, but the name stuck and that’s what we still call ourselves.”

Affirming the important role of CFA on the Trust, former Lake Tyers Trust CEO Steven Tregonning said the brigade has been a constant source of inspiration, unity and security to the community. ‘Having CFA here on the Trust has also been one of the few things that we’ve held certain over the years’, Steve said. “As a firefighter myself for over 30 years, I’ve also seen how women taking the lead in our community has really brought about a lot of positive change,” he said.

CFA’s commitment to the Bunjil crew ensures these very special Aboriginal firefighters continue their work protecting lives and property on the Trust.

In July 2023 CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan approved the establishment of an official brigade on the Trust in line with the principle of self-determination.

In accordance with the wishes of the local community, an indigenous name for the new brigade will be determined following engagement with Elders.



Use of fire – a common bond

CULTURAL BURNING

Cultural burning, sometimes referred to as Traditional burning, is performed by First Peoples as part of their cultural responsibilities and obligations to care for Country.

Cultural burning is the traditional ecological knowledge of Australia's first people. CFA acknowledges all Victorian First Peoples as a cultural continuum.

At CFA we acknowledge that fire is within the heart of all First Peoples and is what brings communities together.

In South Eastern Australia the practice of cultural burning has been interrupted for more than 100 years. However, land and fire management agencies including CFA are doing what they can to support the restoration of the practice.

CFA recognises that cultural burning can assist Victorians with the uncertainties of a changing climate.

For CFA this means working with three key principles:

1. Cultural burning is a practice performed by First Peoples for cultural purposes.
2. Cultural burning knowledge belongs to the Traditional knowledge holders.
3. Cultural burning partnerships with CFA must be led by First Peoples.

We cannot return Victoria's vegetation to its original state, due to modern land use and ownership. But we can manage it better through cultural burning, led by First Peoples.

Even though cultural burning practices have been interrupted in most parts of Victoria, Traditional Owners and the Aboriginal community retain their connection to Country. They have a deep responsibility to care for Country and know that burning is a vital part of caring for Country. Victoria now has The Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy, which documents an approach to cultural burning practices in Victoria, with a view to growing our practice and knowledge across the state.

Link: <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/6817/fireplusstrategyplusfinal.pdf>



"CULTURAL BURNING KNOWLEDGE BELONGS TO THE TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS AND ANY CULTURAL BURNING PARTNERSHIPS WITH CFA MUST BE LED BY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE!"

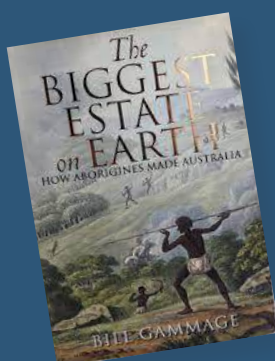
CFA Cultural Heritage Officer Michael Sherwan

Lessons learned by CFA

First Peoples fire management practices are different to those used by fire agencies.

It may mean burning at different times of the year and in different conditions. Some lessons include:

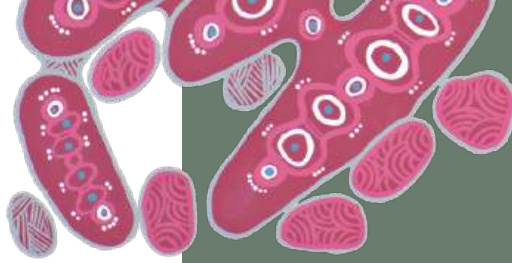
- Where circumstances permit, single point ignition is preferred to allow slow build-up of fire, enabling animals in the vegetation to move away from the burn.
- The colour of smoke indicates the intensity of the burn. White smoke is preferred.



Bill Gammage in his book *The Biggest Estate on Earth* produces a compelling argument that the way First Peoples managed the land prior to 1788 was well planned, well thought through, systematic and adaptive to the environment.

“Management was not passive, alert to season and circumstance, committed to a balance of life. The chief ally was fire. Today almost everyone accepts that in 1788 people burnt random patches to hunt or to lure game. In fact this was no haphazard mosaic making, but a planned, precise fine grained local caring.”

(Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, page 2)



- The tree canopy is sacred and fire should not be allowed to climb into the canopy. This is a fundamental rule to ensure Country is cared for. This requires that a fire is kept low in intensity.
- Natural barriers such as tracks, wet gullies and waterways are used as control lines instead of using mineral earth breaks which can harm plants and soils.
- Fire frequency can be increased when using cooler burns.
- A single species should not dictate the terms of fire being introduced into the landscape. Fire benefits all.

WORKING TOGETHER

The capacity of Traditional Owners to practice cultural burning on Country is a significant factor in cultural wellbeing and identity for Aboriginal people. Fire is healing. In Victoria, very little land is owned by Traditional Owners, so there are very limited opportunities for them to practice cultural burning. A partnership approach between Traditional Owner groups, landowners and CFA and other fire agencies is the way forward.

It is critically important that cultural burning partnerships and initiatives are led by First People.

Cultural burning is the traditional culture of First Peoples and fire knowledge is their intellectual property. CFA must respect and understand this when working together with First Peoples on cultural burns.



WESTERN VICTORIAN WOODLANDS

The Western Victorian Woodlands three-year project is a partnership between Barengi Gadjin Land Council, CFA, Forest Fire Management Victoria, Trust for Nature, Greening Australia, Bank Australia and Wimmera Catchment Management Authority.

The project culminated in a traditional burn led by the Wotjobaluk Nation at Minimay in West Wimmera in July 2020.

CFA Acting Chief Officer Garry Cook said the project was a perfect symbol for how we can work together to learn from one another.

“By better looking after the landscape together, we can also improve bushfire safety,” Acting Chief Officer Cook said.

While fire agencies conduct planned burns for fuel reduction purposes, traditional burning uses “cool burning” with minimal flame clears excess fuel, eradicates introduced species and allows native flora and fauna to return.

CFA West Region Vegetation Management Officer Ian Morrison said “It’s so important for the Indigenous culture to continue on, and a good opportunity for us all to work together to learn about their history and how we can re-introduce traditional burning. This is only the start of the journey.”

Traditional Owner and Parks Victoria Ranger Damien Skurrie, who led the Minimay burn along with fellow Traditional Owner Peter Haridene, said:

“We deem ourselves as fire practitioners. We’re very much in the learning journey to understand the implementation of fire management in landscape and I feel the time’s right for us as Traditional Owners to start influencing our use of fires in landscape.

“We’re starting to build a platform now that we can go out as a group and manage Country, in fact it’s customary lore and we see it as our responsibility to care for Country.

“Trying to change people’s perception of fire – when you use it correctly at the right time of year, it’s not scary, it’s something we use to help manage the landscape.”

Who to engage with

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN VICTORIA

In Victoria 66,000 people identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in the 2021 Census of Population and Housing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represented 1.0% of Victoria's population. This was up from 0.8% in 2016, and 0.7% in 2011.

In 2021, the Victorian Local Government Area with the most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was Greater Geelong, followed by Greater Bendigo and Greater Shepparton. It is recognised that not all Aboriginal communities are enabled to access census to contribute.

DIVERSITY ACROSS THE STATE

Acknowledgement of regional diversity is of utmost importance when engaging with Traditional Owners and First Peoples community groups in Victoria. It is crucial to recognise and respect the distinct cultural protocols, beliefs and practices of each group, as they vary across different regions.

Each Traditional Owner group possesses its own unique cultural heritage, languages, and connection to Country. By embracing this diversity and demonstrating a genuine commitment to understanding and appreciating the specific traditions and protocols of each group, we can foster meaningful and respectful relationships.

IDENTITY

Importantly, not all people who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander will identify as such. There is a long and complex history of persecution and exclusion and this can result in people choosing not to identify.

One of the biggest myths about Aboriginality is that if you have fair skin you cannot be Aboriginal – that you have to be black to be a 'real' Aboriginal. Another is that Aboriginality is attributed to the degree of ancestry, such as one-eighth or part Aboriginal.

These perceptions are highly offensive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Someone who has blonde hair and blue eyes may identify as Aboriginal. So, remember, be very careful of stereotypical judgement of who is Aboriginal.

The Commonwealth's definition is that an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person who:

- is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- is accepted as such by the community in which they live.

WHO DOES CFA CONTACT?

CFA needs to engage primarily with the Traditional Owner groups in Victoria, as they have the understanding about their traditional lands and the responsibility to manage their cultural heritage and cultural assets. Each CFA region and district can establish a relationship with the Traditional Owner groups within their boundaries.

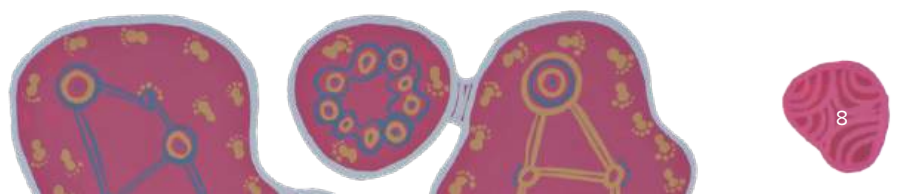
A Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) is a Traditional Owner group, legally recognised under the Aboriginal Heritage Act, with responsibilities for managing and protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage on Country.

CFA district and regional boundaries overlaid with RAP boundaries can be found on the CFA intranet (members online) in the Commonly Requested Maps section.

The map opposite highlights the most current RAP boundaries in relation to CFA boundaries across the state. If there is no RAP appointed in an area, it's important to know there will still be a Traditional Owner group or groups that cover that location.

Contact First Peoples State Relations (1800 762 003) to determine the Traditional Owner contact if there is no RAP.

In some locations be aware that sensitivities exist and not all Traditional Owner groups agree with the current RAP system in Victoria. CFA needs to manage these relationships carefully.



To learn about the part of the Country you are working on utilise the Maggolee website map Welcome Map (achris.vic.gov.au). You can click on the map and obtain information about the Traditional Owners for the area and where to make contact.

CONSULTATION FEES

Most RAPs or Traditional Owner groups will charge a consultation fee if they provide a service or information to CFA. It is best to clarify fees upfront. RAPs and Traditional Owner groups need revenue to support operating and program requirements.

CFA should treat RAPs and Traditional Owner groups as it would any other external consultant and pay a fair rate for their service.

The only time it would not apply is when CFA is doing work for the Traditional Owner group and we are the ones providing the service or information to assist.

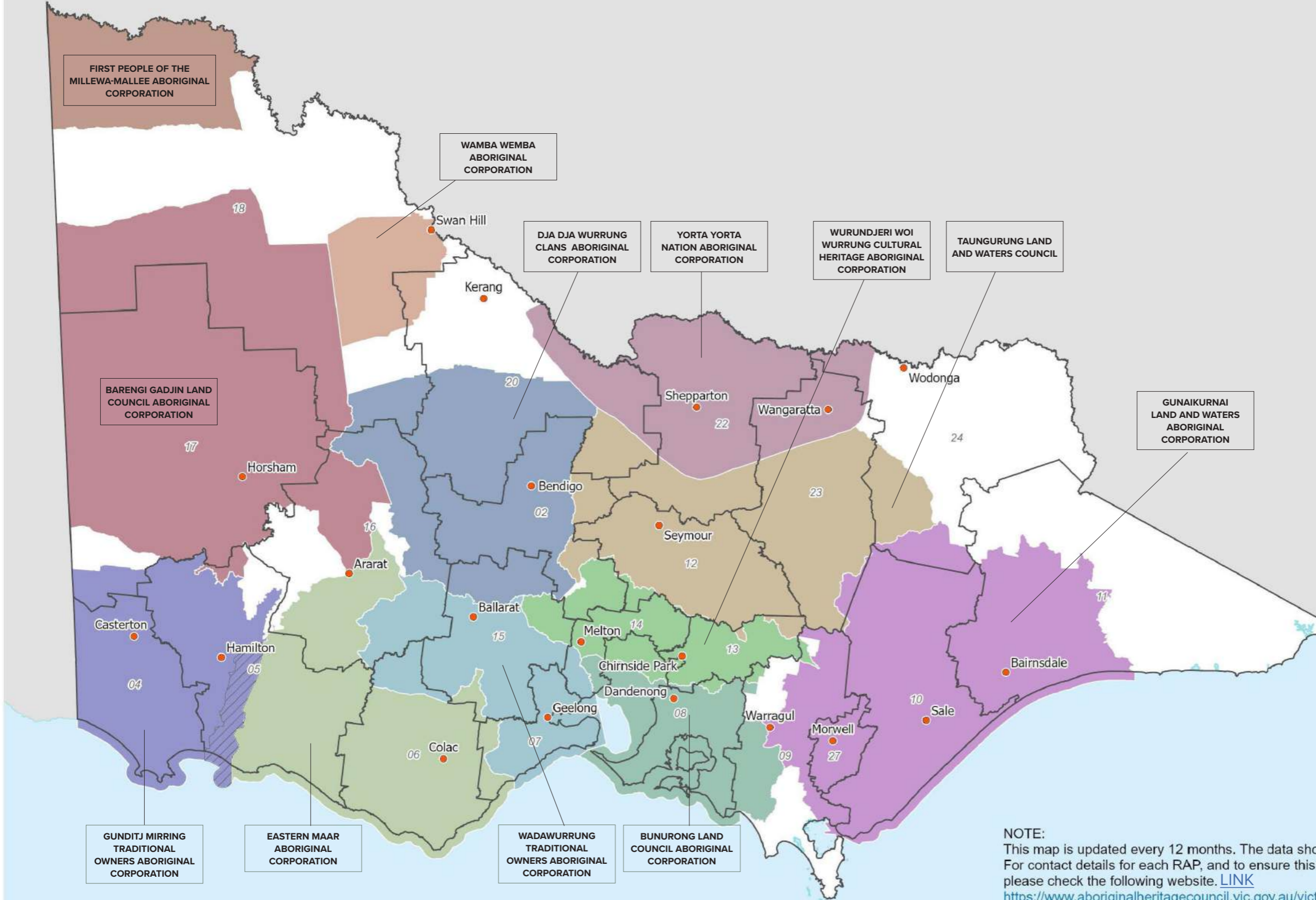
CONSIDERATIONS

CFA needs to be careful not to overload Traditional Owner groups with queries and requests. CFA is only one of many organisations with whom they engage at any given time. Please have a discussion in your district as to who will be the best point of contact for the RAP. Find out from the RAP or Traditional Owner group how many CFA contacts they would like and determine the best contact arrangement between the RAP and CFA district. Remember, you will likely have several RAPs to engage with across the district.

Both DEECA (Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action) and CMA (Catchment Management Authority) have regional staff who can assist CFA's First Peoples engagement.

Registered Aboriginal Party <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic)</i>	Native Title Determination <i>Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)</i>	Recognition & Settlement Agreement <i>Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (Vic)</i>
<p>Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) are responsible for managing Aboriginal cultural heritage within their appointed areas.</p> <p>RAPs are appointed by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, a statutory body made up of Victorian Traditional Owners, established under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006.</p> <p>Traditional Owners apply to become a RAP by submitting an application form and supporting materials to the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council.</p>	<p>Native Title is a property right held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples under traditional laws and customs, which pre-dates colonisation and is recognised by Australian law.</p> <p>Native title is determined by the Federal Court of Australia, or on appeal, by the High Court.</p> <p>Traditional Owners seek recognition of native title rights by making a native title application to the Federal Court.</p>	<p>The Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 provides an alternative framework for the recognition of Traditional Owners rights, financial and land management packages and settlement of native title claims in Victoria.</p> <p>A Recognition and Settlement Agreement is negotiated by Traditional Owners with the Victorian Government/</p>

Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP) and CFA District Boundaries



Legend

- CFA District Boundaries (Legislated)

NAME

- Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
- Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation
- First People of the Millewa-Mallee
- Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
- Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
- Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
- Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation
- Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
- Wamba Wemba Aboriginal Corporation
- Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation

- CFA District Headquarters
- Indicates an area where more than one RAP exists

** Contact the Office of Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council at VAHC@dpc.vic.gov.au to find out the contact in your area.

NOTE:
 This map is updated every 12 months. The data shown is current to 21st April, 2026. For contact details for each RAP, and to ensure this is the most current information, please check the following website. [LINK](https://www.aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/victoria-registered-aboriginal-parties)
<https://www.aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/victoria-registered-aboriginal-parties>

Privacy:
 This map is provided to CFA Members for the sole purpose of display of Registered Aboriginal Parties and CFA Districts and must ONLY be used for this purpose. It must not be kept or used for other purposes and must not be provided to anyone not responsible for providing the work associated with this described use. Any use of this map contrary to the above stated use will be considered an intentional breach of duties and responsibilities associated with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014. Use, transferral and disposal of this product must be handled with care.

Disclaimer:
 This map is a snapshot generated from Victorian Government data as well as data from various other sources. This does not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for error, loss or damage which may arise from reliance upon it. All persons accessing this information should make appropriate enquiries to assess the currency of the data.

Explanation:

Commonly Requested Maps
 Date Prepared: 21/04/2026
 Prepared by: Business Intelligence
 Contact: bi-request@cfa.vic.gov.au

Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country

WHY PERFORM AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY?

First Peoples have a unique relationship with the land. They consider their Country to be more like a friend or relative, to be cared for and respected. The land sustains and provides for them. They do not see land as a commodity in the way that non-Aboriginal people do.

They are the First Peoples, and it is important that this unique position is recognised and incorporated into our protocols. This would enable everyone to share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and facilitate better relationships together. As a member of CFA, 'Acknowledging Country' demonstrates that you respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their culture, and acknowledge their role as the Traditional Owners of the land you are on.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY AND A WELCOME TO COUNTRY?

An Acknowledgment of Country can be said by anyone who wishes to demonstrate their respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their culture. An Acknowledgement of Country is appropriate at all CFA official meetings, events, forums or conferences and can be said by anyone.

A Welcome to Country ceremony can only be performed by an Aboriginal Traditional Owner of the land on which an event is being held. A Welcome to Country is like a personal introduction, and an invitation to share and respect the land. These ceremonies vary from speeches of welcome, to traditional dance and smoking ceremonies.

For CFA, a Welcome to Country is appropriate at:

- official large and/or significant meetings
- statewide conferences and forums
- large district and regional events
- events or meetings held in communities with important First Nation connections
- new station openings or other CFA building openings.

WHAT WORDING CAN I USE TO INCLUDE AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY IN MY SPEECH?

"I would like to acknowledge the (local Traditional Owners tribe name) people, who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are gathered and pay my respects to their Elders both past and present."

OR, if you are unsure who the Traditional Owners of the area are:

"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."

As a sign of respect, find out which Country you're on before your speech, so that you can name it during your Acknowledgement. It is important that the acknowledgment is genuine and not a tick in a box exercise. A great idea is to use a story or interesting fact to include in your acknowledgment. This can help build a narrative that connects your acknowledgment to the work of CFA.

WHEN AND HOW WOULD I SAY AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY?

While not compulsory, CFA members are encouraged to recognise the Traditional Owners of Victoria and incorporate an Acknowledgment of Country (or a Welcome to Country) as part of all official protocol, including speeches, forewords in documents, and during meetings and event proceedings.

An Acknowledgment of Country is said at the very beginning of a meeting or event. If there is an MC, they may say the Acknowledgement of Country, or the first speaker might choose to say it. The meeting or event can commence once the Acknowledgement of Country (or Welcome to Country) is finished.



HOW CAN I FIND OUT WHO THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND ARE?

There are many clan groups which exist in Victoria and the correct one should be acknowledged, depending on where you are at the time.

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council has appointed Traditional Owners as Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) for the purposes of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006. The name of the RAP may not represent the name of the Traditional Owners in all circumstances.

If you need to confirm who the Traditional Owners are in your area, please contact your local RAP or the Local Aboriginal Network (LAN). You could also ask the local council if your area is not covered by RAP.

For further details, visit

www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/welcome-Country-and-acknowledgement-traditional-owners

WHEN AND HOW WOULD I REQUEST A WELCOME TO COUNTRY?

For major CFA meetings, conferences and events, a Welcome to Country, performed by an Elder or Respected Person, is preferred.

For help in arranging a Welcome to Country at CFA Headquarters, contact inclusionandfairness@cfa.vic.gov.au

There is a cost associated with a Welcome to Country, depending on the ceremony conducted. It is important to factor this in your event budgeting.

Where can I find out more information?

- www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/welcome-Country-and-acknowledgement-traditional-owners
- Resources for Engaging First Peoples | CFA Members Online <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/community-engagement/engaging-your-community/resources-for-engaging-your-community/resources-for-first-peoples>



ROCHESTER FIRE BRIGADE

Rochester Fire Brigade members are proud to fly the Aboriginal flag on culturally significant days, and leave it flying when they can as a sign of respect and inclusion. In November 2016, they hosted an Aboriginal smoking ceremony with the local Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owners to herald the start of the fire season. This was the first time CFA had done this anywhere in the state. It was led by the late District 20 Operations Manager Peter Taylor who believed that Aboriginal inclusion is all about building partnerships based on cultural exchange and knowledge sharing. This will be a lasting legacy of Peter's in District 20.

Captain Luke Warren is keen for the brigade to learn as much as it can about First Peoples Australian culture, traditions and land management practices and to be actively involved in First Peoples Australian inclusion at CFA.

At this unique event, a smoking ceremony was held, where CFA members walked through smoke as a way to be cleansed. Smoking ceremonies have been conducted for thousands of years, and have great meaning for First Peoples. As Aboriginal elder Kerri Douglas lit the leaves of local cherry ballarat, wattle and Eucalyptus trees, she spoke about how the rich aromatic smoke cleanses the air and wards off bad spirits. She then invited guests to enter the smoke as a sign of good intentions and respect.

"FLYING THE ABORIGINAL FLAG WAS IMPORTANT FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO SEE AT THE STATION AS IT SHOWS THEY ARE WELCOME HERE."

Luke Warren

In 2018 a local Aboriginal person noticed the flag flying at the CFA station. He stopped by the station and gifted the brigade a Coolamon. The act of flying the flag is a powerful symbol of inclusion and respect.

Recognise the impact of the past.

Past government policies and practices have had a significant impact on First Nation and led to many inequalities.

These include

- shorter life expectancy
- higher rates of infant mortality
- poorer health
- lower levels of education and employment
- higher rates of imprisonment.

Learn as much as you can about the impact of the past.

Learn who your local Traditional groups are and their history.

At the time of European settlement there were likely close to 38 different Indigenous languages spoken across what is now Victoria. Different Aboriginal clan groups have different languages, customs and laws so what is relevant to one group may not be the same in another part of the state.

Be genuine and authentic.

There can be unease due to past government policies and practices that have led to mistrust and suspicion of non-Indigenous Australians. Be genuine and authentic with your engagement and interactions.

Be clear and upfront with what CFA can and cannot do.

Learn about the Cultural Protocols for the area of Country you will be working on, before you start conversations. It is important to have a process of working with Aboriginal people and to be upfront on why you want to engage.

Follow through with promises.

If you state you will do something or promise something, you must follow through.

First Peoples have been let down by government and agencies many times and to build a relationship of trust you need to follow through on what you say you will do.

Consider wearing plain clothes.

Past government practices and policies mean that some First Peoples mistrust or are suspicious of those in government and law enforcement agencies. Some First Peoples can feel threatened and intimidated by people in uniform, so consider wearing corporate uniform or plain clothes, especially for the first few meetings.

Understand and respect Aboriginal Elders.

- Be aware that some times the person you are meeting or conversing with is not a Senior Elder, and may not be able to make decisions or agreements without consulting others.
- If you are speaking with an Elder ask permission if you can call them "Aunty" or "Uncle" as this is a way to show respect of their status in the community. If they introduce themselves with the title of Aunty or Uncle then it is fine for you to use this title.

Attend cultural awareness training or education.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are generally more receptive and willing to talk openly when they know you have some knowledge of their culture. Complete the Indigenous Inclusion training on CFA's Learning Hub. Attend a cultural immersion tour or cultural awareness program through the local Traditional Owner group.

Tips for engagement

RESPECT
TEAMWORK
INTEGRITY

Be welcoming and show respect.

Consider whether your brigade or CFA office can either fly the Aboriginal flag or Torres Strait Islander flag or place an Acknowledgement to Country plaque on the building entrance.

Attend the local NAIDOC Week or National Reconciliation Week event/s in your area.

Think about how CFA can get involved. It can be as simple as just taking the truck down for a few hours or offering a few people to support the event.

Do not make assumptions.

When you are engaging with First Peoples it is important not to assume:

- that Victorian First Peoples people have lost their culture or connection to Country.
- that any First Peoples person has strong understanding and knowledge of traditional culture and Country.

Be patient and take your time.

Building trusting relationships with First Peoples takes time.

- Styles of communication and approaches to engagement can differ between First Peoples and CFA. CFA's approach to meetings – the use of structure and time constraints – may be very different to a meeting with First Peoples. A meeting may cover a range of topics, and the conversation may seem unstructured. It's important to respect this and let the conversation unfold naturally.

- Meetings may take longer than you anticipate, so give yourself plenty of time. It will be seen as rude to leave for another meeting.
- Be prepared that deliberations may take some time, e.g. weeks or months, to reach a conclusion. Avoid rushing them; allow these processes to take their time.
- Your priority project or request may not be a priority for Traditional Owners. They have considerable demands on their time and energy from their own communities, as well as a wide range of other organisations besides CFA.

Cultural Safety

BUILDING CULTURAL SAFETY FOR YOUNG MEMBERS

Cultural safety is a fundamental human right and includes the inherent right to kin, community, cultural practices and identity. Child Safe Standard 1 in Victoria directs CFA to establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

Cultural safety for First Peoples children and young people is about providing them with a safe, nurturing and positive environment where they are comfortable with being themselves and expressing their culture and their spiritual and belief systems. It is also about ensuring they are supported by adults and peers who respect and encourage their sense of self and identity.

Under the Victorian Child Safe Standards, CFA is required to establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of First Peoples children and young people are respected and valued.

WHY IS CULTURAL SAFETY IMPORTANT?

Being able to express their cultural identity makes First Peoples young people stronger and safer. When they do not feel safe to be themselves and express their culture, they are at greater risk of harm and abuse and are less willing to report their concerns.

Being connected to culture is a source of resilience and is associated with better emotional, social and physical health.

There are many ways CFA brigades and teams can support children to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights. These can include:

- having children share their histories, stories and traditions
- involving their families in Brigade activities
- participating in cultural practices, including arts, songs, dance, and ceremonies
- supporting the use of their indigenous language
- creating an environment where speaking up about racism and discrimination is encouraged and ensuring brigade members know how to address such issues (CFA's Behavioural Standards and Issues Resolution).

Please note: Provide children with choice about cultural rights. Some children may not want to engage with culture or may prefer to express their culture only in specific settings.

CULTURAL SAFETY FOR ALL CFA FIRST PEOPLES AUSTRALIAN MEMBERS

Cultural safety is important for all members of CFA. Brigades can support both children and adults to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights.

Talk to your First Peoples members about how your brigade can make it a culturally safe place for all.

It may involve:

- participating in cultural awareness training programs and activities, such as a cultural immersion tour
- flying the Aboriginal flag and Torres Strait Islander Flag
- engaging in events such as NAIDOC Week
- collaborating with local Traditional Owner groups to hold a smoking ceremony or do a cultural heritage tour
- understanding Cultural Protocols before you commence engagement.

IMPORTANT CALENDAR DATES

These annual dates will help support engagement. Put these in your calendar.

13 FEBRUARY	Anniversary of the Apology (2008)
16 MARCH	National Close the Gap Day
26 MAY	National Sorry Day
27 MAY	Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum
27 MAY – 3 JUNE	National Reconciliation Week
3 JUNE	Mabo Day
1 JULY	Coming of the Light
FIRST WEEK IN JULY	NAIDOC Week

CFA can offer to support local events over NAIDOC Week, or host an event in support of National Reconciliation Week. There are many ideas available online at the National Reconciliation Week and the NAIDOC Week websites.



ECHUCA FIRE BRIGADE JUNIORS

Colin Atkinson is a local Traditional Owner in Echuca, a Wolithiga man and CFA firefighter. He has been a CFA member for over 14 years and joined Echuca Fire Brigade in 2018 at a time when the brigade was shifting mindsets to be more inclusive of First People. It was good timing.

Colin could see that encouraging young people to join the brigade would be pivotal, not only for future generations but for the present. Echuca's Juniors program is now one that other brigades look for inspiration. The Juniors program runs every Monday night, under the leadership of 4th Lieutenant Jordan Simpson. Its members include at least four young First People Australians, of which three are local Traditional Owners.

The Echuca Juniors won a host of placings at the Junior Championships in 2023, both in the under 14s and under 17s. One of the under 14s recently broke six records for a number of events including the hydrant and ladder race. They are indeed a competitive and dedicated team.

The entire Echuca Fire Brigade is proud of the Juniors Brigade and the young, happy firefighters they have become explains Colin, who is of course, proud of their commitment to Junior team competitions.

The Juniors are also lucky to be mentored by Uncle Henry Atkinson, who is Colin's grandfather. Uncle Henry was a champion runner when he competed in the CFA Championships in the 1950s through to the 1980s. He comes down to the Echuca Junior training nights to give his tips and the Juniors love it. It is under his guidance, alongside the Junior leaders that the team has flourished.

Over the past five years, the Echuca Brigade have made a measurable improvement to First Peoples inclusion. This is evidenced by the Junior Brigade's First Peoples membership, the flying of the Aboriginal flag at the front of the station and the Acknowledgement to Country the Captain says at every brigade meeting.

SUCCESSFUL CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT IN BUDJ BIM FIREFIGHTING

The Budj Bim cultural landscape in South West Victoria experienced a fire in December 2019. Recognising its cultural significance, the CFA and partner agencies engaged in consultations with Traditional Owners and the community to develop effective firefighting strategies.

The fire was successfully managed by employing low-impact tactics, taking into account the site's rocky terrain and cultural heritage. The collaboration between the CFA, Traditional landowners, and local communities strengthened relationships and ensured the protection of the Budj Bim landscape. Ongoing reviews aim to achieve improved outcomes for this culturally valuable area.



Aboriginal cultural heritage

Aboriginal heritage places are landscapes, sites and areas that are particularly important to Aboriginal people as part of their customary law and traditions. It includes tangible and intangible expressions of culture.

Aboriginal places may include:

- archaeological sites – sites of significance pre-dating European occupation
- historic sites – sites identified from records of the contact and post-contact periods
- places that are important because of their traditional or contemporary social significance.

Aboriginal places may also include an area of land, an expanse of water, a natural feature, formation or landscape.

Aboriginal Heritage places and objects are irreplaceable and non-renewable.

Some examples of sites are scarred trees, burial sites, middens, rock art and stone artefacts.

First Peoples' State Relations has compiled a series of site identification posters that illustrate the different types of cultural heritage sites you may come across. These can be found online at <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-places-and-objects>. Familiarise yourself with these posters to help identify sites when you are responding to an incident, mopping up, training, or planning a burn.



WHAT ARE CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT TREES?

<https://youtu.be/qf53GN7bjKQ>

AREAS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SENSITIVITY

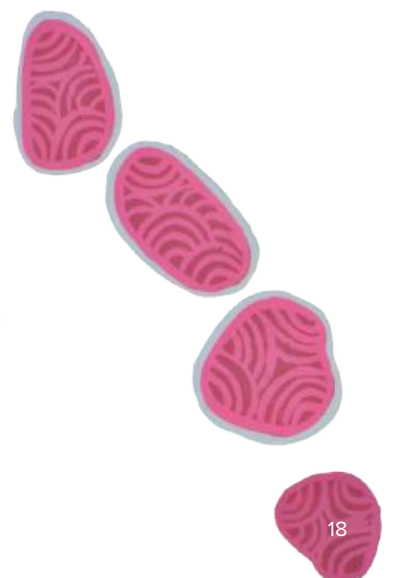
Areas of cultural heritage sensitivity are registered Aboriginal cultural heritage places, as well as landforms and land categories that are generally regarded as more likely to contain Aboriginal cultural heritage.

There are maps and spatial data sets of these areas available to the public at

https://achris.vic.gov.au/#/online_map

Areas which are considered sensitive include:

- land within 50m of registered cultural heritage places
- land 200m on either side of a waterway
- land 200m on either side of a prior waterway
- land within 200m of ancient lakes
- land within 200m of a declared Ramsar Wetland
- coastal crown land
- land within 200m of the high water mark of the coastal waters of Victoria
- Parks Victoria managed land, National and State Parks
- high plains
- Koo Wee Rup plain
- Greenstone outcrops
- stony rises associated with Budj Bim World Heritage Landscape (formerly Mt Eccles), Mt Napier and Mt Rouse lava flows
- volcanic cones of western Victoria
- caves, cave entrances and rock shelters
- lunettes
- dunes
- sand sheets.



ABORIGINAL HERITAGE ACT 2006 AND 2016 AMENDMENT

The Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 provides protection for all Aboriginal places, objects and human remains in Victoria, regardless of their inclusion in the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register or land tenure.

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 recognises Aboriginal people “as primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage”.

Registered Aboriginal Parties are responsible for the management of cultural heritage on Country. Where no RAP is established, it is the responsibility of First Peoples State Relations in partnership with the Traditional Owner Group.

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HERITAGE REGISTER

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register (VAHR) was established by the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006. The VAHR contains information about all known Aboriginal cultural heritage places and objects within Victoria – including their location and detailed descriptions.

There are over 30,000 Aboriginal objects and places recorded on the VAHR to date, many of these are located on public land. New places and objects are registered every day as more of the state is investigated for cultural heritage. To date less than 5% of the state has been surveyed, which means that there are many more places yet to be identified.

The information stored within the VAHR can be viewed by authorised people on the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register Information System only.

CFA OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE ACT

Section 29 of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act exempts harm being done to Aboriginal cultural heritage if the harm is the result of doing an act that “is necessary because of an emergency”. This should be considered also in the context of the provisions of the CFA Act providing immunity to CFA members when exercising a power/duty in good faith – section 18A of the 92 CFA Act.

Therefore, during an emergency CFA members are exempt from being charged for damaging Aboriginal cultural heritage sites. However, this does not remove our moral obligation to protect and preserve cultural heritage sites where possible during an incident.

During other non-emergency related activities such as operational training or planned burning, CFA will not be exempt and plans need to be put in place to ensure we do not damage cultural heritage sites.

The avoidance or minimisation of harm to Aboriginal and historical heritage resulting from planned vegetation management activities is outlined in links below.

Vegetation Management Guidance Manual | CFA Members Online

- VMGM Practice Note 004 (PN004). Under the Doc Development Index, called Cultural Heritage Values Checks.
- VMGM-PN004 Appx2 Contingency Plan for discovery of Aboriginal Heritage.

Cultural Heritage Values Checks

<https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/3297/PN004-cultural-heritage-values-checks.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>

This Practice Note outlines the process that CFA uses to identify and protect Aboriginal cultural heritage and historical heritage when planning fuel treatments, including planned burns and non-burn fuel treatments.

Contingency Plan for discovery of Aboriginal Heritage.

<https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/3297/contingency-plan-for-discovery-aboriginal-heritage.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>

CFA Contingency Plan for Discovery of Aboriginal Heritage 2025 details a contingency plan process to be followed if cultural heritage values are discovered during works. This document also contains process and reporting diagrams.



DEECA has compiled the following level of impact for each cultural heritage place. This is a useful guide for CFA.

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Place	Threat	Potential Impact Level	Risk Event (The threat may damage or destroy the value)
Art Site	Earthworks/Machinery	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by vehicle traffic and plant.
Art Site	Fire	High	Can be damaged by flame contact, smoke or heat scorch.
Art Site	Water/Foam/Retardant	High	Can be damaged by foam, water or retardant coming into direct contact with art.
Artefact scatter	Earthworks/Machinery	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by vehicle traffic, plant, slashing or hand tools.
Artefact scatter	Fire	Low	Little impact from low intensity fire/cool burns.
Burial/Human remains	Earthworks/Machinery	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by vehicle traffic, plant or hand tools.
Burial/Human remains	Fire	Moderate	May be damaged by fire, impact increases the closer remains are to the surface. Aboriginal burial places are highly sensitive and consultation with Traditional Owners should take place prior to any work commencing in the area.
Earth feature	Earthworks/Machinery	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by vehicle traffic, plant or hand tools.
Earth feature	Fire	Low	Little impact from fire.
Historical Place #	Earthworks/Machinery	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by vehicle traffic, plant or hand tools.
Historical Place #	Fire	High	Historical structures may be harmed by fire.
Non-Archaeological Place	Earthworks/Machinery	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by vehicle traffic, plant or hand tools.
Non-Archaeological Place	Fire	Low	Little impact from fire.
Object Collections	Earthworks/Machinery	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by vehicle traffic, plant or hand tools.
Object Collections	Fire	Low	Little impact from fire.
Quarry	Earthworks/Machinery	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by vehicle traffic, plant or hand tools.
Quarry	Fire	Moderate	Dependant on type and significance.
Scarred Tree	Earthworks/Machinery	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by works such as dozer lines, hazardous tree removal.
Scarred Tree	Fire	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by fire.
Shell Deposit	Earthworks/Machinery	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by vehicle traffic, plant or hand tools.
Shell Deposit	Fire	Moderate	Moderate impact from fire low intensity fire/cool burns.
Stone feature	Earthworks/Machinery	High	Can be destroyed or damaged by vehicle traffic, plant or hand tools.
Stone feature	Fire	Low	Little impact from low intensity fire/cool burns.

CFA PLANNED BURNING – SOME ADVICE

It is not practical or necessary to refer all CFA planned burns to Traditional Owner groups for operational advice on cultural matters. There are simply not enough CFA or Traditional Owner resources to go around.

Relationships, however, are critical. A trusted relationship between CFA and Traditional Owner group leaders provides a place where issues of common interest such as planned burns are discussed.

Get to know the Traditional Owners in your patch. Share what you do. Ask them about what's important. It's a conversation, sharing knowledge – not a referral. Be guided by the Traditional Owner group as to what information they may want to know about CFA planned burns. They may be happy to share details of cultural heritage site locations or let you know where some sensitive areas may be.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE FOUND A CULTURAL ARTEFACT OR SITE

- The private land owner is responsible to protect cultural sites or artefacts. CFA must advise the private land owner to contact the local RAP or – if one is not established – First Peoples Victoria on 1800 762 003 if they have not previously informed us about the status of the site. If Cultural sensitivity is identified, proceed as directed in Section 4 of the CFA Contingency Plan, specifically, if the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage is discovered on a site that is privately owned, the private landowner has the responsibility with respect to the management and reporting of the discovery. Where appropriate, the CFA may provide the private landowner assistance with this process. This means that the landowner first must give permission to enter land. Secondly, that permission is given to help assist the landowner to register cultural heritage. The responsibility is on the landowners to notify any unrecorded cultural heritage on their properties.
- It may not always be possible for CFA Members or Contractors to easily categorise newly discovered Aboriginal Cultural Heritage. Upon discovery of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, CFA Members and Contractors should take steps to report and protect the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage from further harm or interference until qualified experts can make detailed assessments and recommendations.
- Most importantly, if there is knowledge of a cultural heritage site on private property, CFA must ensure that no damage is caused to the site during planned burning operations or other non-emergency operations.
- If planning a burn where a cultural heritage site is known, exclude the site where possible, or adjust the burn boundary. Alternatively, construct an appropriate fuel break within the burn.
- When CFA is aware of a cultural artefact or site, care must be taken to avoid harm to its cultural significance from a burn, burn preparation activities or other non-emergency activity. Certain cultural heritage sites such as scarred trees are particularly vulnerable to fire. CFA's Cultural Heritage Advisors and DEECA's Cultural Heritage officers can assist in this instance.
- If you are conducting a burn 200m either side of a creek line, there may be midden sites along the creek. Even though fire is unlikely to damage a midden site, firefighting or control line construction machinery could compact the ground and damage the sites. Consider placement of control lines and control line construction methods when working in riparian zones to minimise risk of soil disturbance.

CONNECTING TO COUNTRY THROUGH CULTURAL IMMERSION

During Reconciliation Week 2023 CFA members visited Budj Bim in south-west Victoria for a cultural immersion tour.

A World Heritage listed area, the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape contains extensive physical evidence of the Gunditjmara people altering the landscape to modify and manage the water flow and ecosystems to manage food resources.

The Budj Bim ranger shared the Gunditjmara story of the volcanic eruption of Budj Bim (also known as Mt Eccles) from around 30,000 years ago, when an ancestral creation-being revealed himself in the

landscape. Modern science dates this back at least 6,600 years, which modified the water system for kooyang (eel) trapping into artificially-constructed holding ponds to enhance kooyang containment and availability.

CFA members remarked that the tour of Budj Bim is a great way to challenge the myth (from our childhood education and general white/western beliefs) that First Peoples were always nomadic hunter/gatherer, who never constructed homes or established communities in permanent locations. During the tour we saw the remnants of these homes and a reconstruction.

Walking through the Budj Bim sites CFA members saw evidence and heard stories of Gunditjmara's use of fire to heat rocks and water to crack them in pond construction, and fire to clear the vegetation for water flow from pond to pond. The smoke from fire was used to preserve eels. Together they spoke of cultural fire and bushfires in the area.

District 5 volunteer Adrian Straw and District 7 volunteer Jan Weate thought it was an excellent tour on an awe-inspiring site.

"THIS WAS A FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE.
I HAVEN'T STOPPED TALKING ABOUT IT"

Paul McCallum a volunteer in District 5



Terminology

Respectful language use depends on what different communities find appropriate.

If possible, it is best to consult with Traditional Owners, local Elders, or community to determine which language and terminology they prefer. However, it's also important to be mindful of the history of dispossession and colonisation. Some First Peoples who have been displaced may not know their language or cultural group.

'First Peoples Australians' is an inclusive term for Australia's First Peoples. 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' may also be used, however should always be written in its entirety, capitalised, and never abbreviated (e.g 'ATSI').

Here are some general guidelines to follow

- Use the terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander' when referring to the specific Indigenous peoples of Australia.
- Use 'First Peoples' or 'First Peoples Australians' as alternative terms to acknowledge their status as the original inhabitants of the land.

What to avoid:

- Avoid using outdated and derogatory terms such as 'Aborigine', 'half-caste', 'full-blooded', or any racial slurs. These terms are offensive and perpetuate stereotypes.
- Avoid using generic terms like 'native' or 'tribal'.
- Avoid generalisations or assumptions that all Indigenous people have the same beliefs or practices.

Be mindful of the impact of your words and avoid perpetuating stereotypes. Treat Indigenous cultures with the same respect and dignity as any other culture.

By using appropriate and respectful language, we can create an inclusive environment that values the diversity and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Other terminology to be aware of:

Koori

The term 'Koori' originated in NSW as a collective name for Aboriginal people from the area and has been extended to Victoria in some places. Some Aboriginal people from Victoria refer to themselves as Koori and identify as Koori. The term is used in some Victorian organisations such as the Koorie Heritage Trust and the Koori Justice Unit and through the Department of Justice and Regulation, for example the Koori Justice Youth Program.

CFA's first Aboriginal inclusion plan was titled the Koori Inclusion Action Plan (KIAP). Although CFA chose this title for the first plan, the use of the term Koori can be offensive to some Victorian Aboriginal people. It is best to use the term Aboriginal or First Peoples person if you are unsure or ask what they prefer.

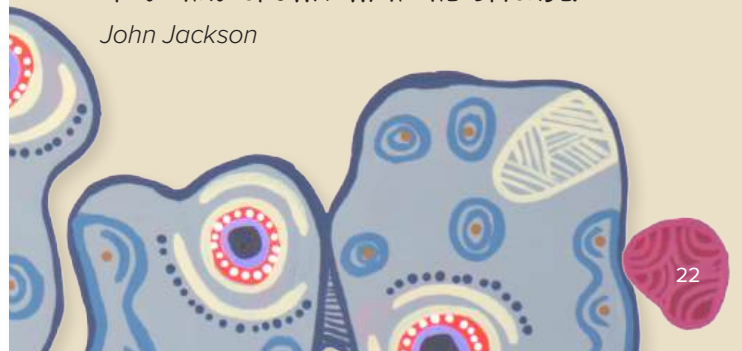
Traditional Owner

Traditional Owner is the term used to refer to Victorian First Peoples who are the descendants of First Peoples groups or clans who occupied a particular area of Victoria prior to European colonisation.

There are many Traditional Owner groups in Victoria. It is important for CFA members to consider the diversity of Traditional Owner groups across the state and understand that each group has its own customs, beliefs and practices. Traditional Owner groups are not always defined by post-colonial concepts of geography such as states or territories, so consider this when working with Traditional Owner groups close to the NSW and SA borders.

"WE LET THE KIDS CLIMB ALL OVER THE TRUCK AND WE HAVE A YARN TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY. WE CAN REALLY SEE THAT RELATIONSHIPS HAVE BEEN FORMED AND TRUST HAS GROWN WITH THE BRIGADE!"

John Jackson





Landowner or custodian

First Peoples do not consider their land as property in the sense that many non-First Peoples do. For Aboriginal people, land is where they come from and something they belong to. Aboriginal people will talk about 'their Country' or 'caring for Country'.

Note that some First Peoples do not use the word 'Owner' and prefer the word 'Custodian' as they feel it better represents their relationship to the land. Others prefer the word 'Owner'.

"TO ME, CUSTODIAN, MEANS LOOKING AFTER SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO SOMEONE ELSE. IN OUR BELIEFS WE COME FROM THE EARTH AND LOOK AFTER THE EARTH AND THEREFORE IN TODAY'S TERMINOLOGY WE OWN THE LAND AND THE LAND IS PART OF US".

Professor Henry Atkinson, Wolithiga Elder

Listen for how a person refers to the land. If in doubt, ask if that person prefers Owner or Custodian.

Country

A First Peoples person will use the term 'Country' to refer to their traditional lands and where their 'mob' or 'clan' originated. For example "I am from Wurundjeri Country".

Identity by clan group

First Peoples identify with their traditional clan, or clan groups, and so you will hear someone say "I am a Wurundjeri woman" or "I am a Wadawurrung man". Some Traditional Owner groups are made up of a number of clan groups.

First Peoples prefer to use the term group, clan or mob as in the expression "which mob do you belong to?" rather than using the word tribe.

Caring for Country

Caring for Country is more than the physical management of a geographical area or parcel of land. It encompasses caring for the values, places, resources, stories, and cultural obligations associated with that area, as well as the processes of spiritual renewal, connecting with ancestors, food provision and maintaining kin relations. Land and waters are pivotal, 'sentient' participants in this engagement.

For non-First Peoples the use of the expression caring for Country is a good way to show understanding and respect for the relationship between First Peoples and Country.

However, it is important that if we are working with Traditional Owner groups on Country we do not take on the lead role to discuss details about Country. This is not our role, and it is rude and disrespectful. We can advise about fire suppression and fire behaviour but we need to speak from a CFA perspective.



BARMAH FIRE BRIGADE

Barmah has a large Aboriginal population and Barmah Fire Brigade members recognised they needed to do more to be welcoming and inclusive of the local community after learning about the KIAP. Brigade members took part in some Aboriginal cultural awareness training in 2014, and realised they needed to be more actively involved with Aboriginal-run events and with the local Aboriginal cultural centre.

Since then, every year, the brigade has taken the truck to the local Aboriginal Dharnya Cultural Centre for the annual NAIDOC Week event. Brigade Captain Murray Blair and brigade member John Jackson can see that having the truck at these events has made a real difference to help break down barriers.

Where to learn more

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is as rich as it is diverse. With over 60,000 years of history to cover, there's a lot more to learn!

A good place to start is CFA's KIAP (2014-2019) and First Peoples Bridging Plan (2025 -2027) Diversity and Inclusion Resources | CFA Members Online

CFA has a First Peoples Inclusion e-learning course in the Learning Hub for all CFA members to access.

Below is some further reading covering key topics:

CFA Learning Hub – First Peoples Inclusion

<https://learninghub.cfa.vic.gov.au/pages/course.jsf?courseId=18688411&pollingMode=on#!/courseroom/course>

Language

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies – Indigenous Australian Languages

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/indigenous-australian-languages>

Identity

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies – Indigenous Australians: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/indigenous-australians-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>

Population

Australian Bureau of Statistics – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, 2016

<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/australia-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-population-summary>

Busting commonly held Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander myths

There are many myths about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that have been mistaken for fact. Discover the truth here:

<https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/busting-myths-about-aboriginal-culture-in-australia>
Creative Spirits - 24 myths you might believe about Aboriginal Australia

Understanding Sorry Business

Supporting Carers, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care – Connecting to Culture: Sorry Business

<https://www.snaicc.org.au/>

Getting to know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture

Here's an in-depth history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture from 60,000 years ago to today:

Working With Indigenous Australians – History: 60,000+ years ago to 1788

http://www.workingwithindigenoustralian.info/content/History_2_60,000_years.html

The importance of family and kinship in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture

Family is the common denominator in most cultures. The love and support we all rely on from family is no different for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. When viewing it through a Western lens however, there are some significant contrasts to be aware of. One of the more important social structures to comprehend is kinship. Read more about kinship:

Common ground – Kinship Systems

<https://www.commonground.org.au/article/family>

The impacts of colonisation – understanding the past to make sense of today

As the oldest surviving culture in the world, much has changed in a relatively short period of time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Read more about Indigenous history post-colonisation and the challenges they faced:

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies – First encounters and frontier conflict

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/first-encounters-and-frontier-conflict>

Australians Together – What about history?

<https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/australian-history/get-over-it/>

Understanding the impact: The Stolen Generation and intergenerational trauma

The trauma felt by the Stolen Generations continues today in the form of intergenerational trauma. Read more about the cycle of trauma and how and why it affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Australians Together – Intergenerational trauma

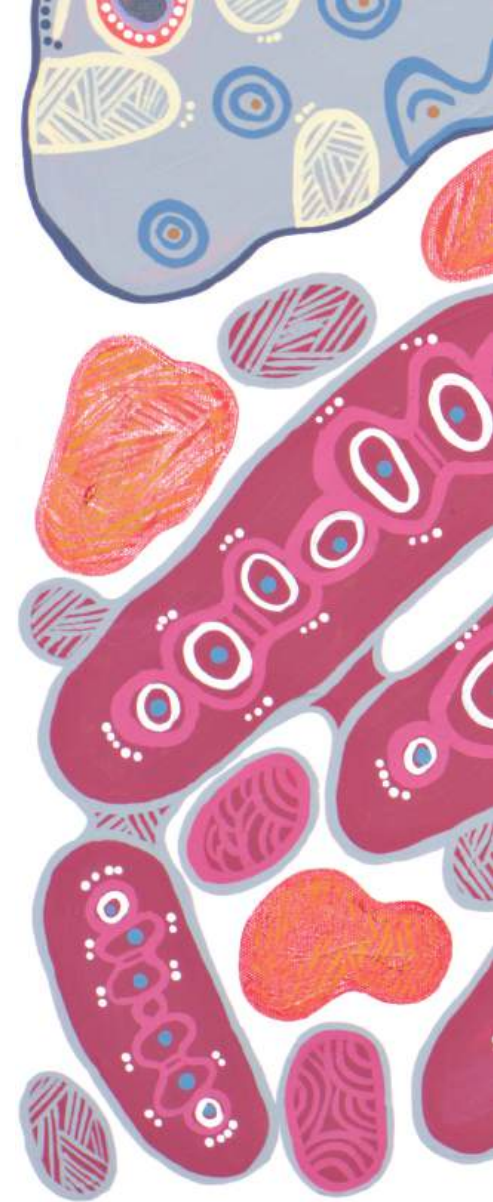
<https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/the-wound/intergenerational-trauma/>

Registered Aboriginal Parties contacts

REGISTERED ABORIGINAL PARTY	CONTACT	CFA DISTRICTS
Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation Frankston	E admin@bunuronglc.org.au W bunuronglc.org T (03) 9770 1273	D8 and parts of D9
Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation Horsham	E admin@bgclc.com.au W www.bgclc.com.au T (03) 5381 0977	D17 and D18 and parts of D16 and D5
Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation Bendigo	E info@djadjawurrung.com.au W www.djadjawurrung.com.au T (03) 5444 2888	D2, D20, and parts of D15, D16 and D18
Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation Ballarat	E admin@easternmaar.com.a W www.easternmaar.com.au M 0427 271 937	D5
Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation	E chm@glawac.com W www.gunaikurnai.org T (03) 5152 5100	D9, D27, D10, D11, and part of D24, D23
Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation Heywood	E reception@gunditjmirring.com W www.gunditjmirring.com T (03) 5527 1427	D4, D5, and small part of D17
First People of the Millewa -Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (FPMMAC)	E www.fpmmac.com.au T (03) 4014 9780	D18
Taungurung Clans Aboriginal Corporation Broadford	E culturalheritage@taungurung.com.au W www.taungurung.com.au T (03) 5784 1433	D12, D22, D23, and small part of D24 and D23
Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation Ballarat	E admin@wadawurrung.org.au W www.wadawurrung.org.au T (03) 4318 6333	D15
Wamba Wemba Aboriginal Corporation	E admin@wambawemba.com W www.wambawemba.com T n/a	D18
Wurundjeri Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Aboriginal Corporation Abbotsford	E reception@wurundjeri.com.au W www.wurundjeri.com.au T (03) 94162905	D13, D14, D2 and parts of D15, D8 and D9
Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation Shepparton	E reception@yynac.com.au W www.yynac.com.au T (03) 5832 0222	D22, D23, D20 and small part of D24

Victoria has committed to action all elements of the 2017 Uluru Statement from the heart. To understand more about Victoria's Treaty go here www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/treaty





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