

Reconciliation Seminar 1: FAQs

Transcript from the Reconciliation Series 1 2022

Question 1

What is the difference between a 'Welcome to Country' and an 'Acknowledgement of Country'?

Preston Johnston presents facts of 'Welcome to Country' and 'Acknowledgement of Country'

Fact: A 'Welcome to Country' is a ritual or cultural practice performed at any events held in Australia to recognise the cultural significance of the surrounding area and in particular Aboriginal's artwork

Fact: The Welcome must be performed by a recognised Elder or traditional custodian of the representative land

Fact: A 'Welcome to Country' is sometimes accompanied by other traditional practices such as smoking ceremonies, music and/or dances

Fact: A typical 'Acknowledgement of Country' can be, ' I Acknowledge the traditional Elders of this land on which we are meeting I pay my respects to the Elders past and present and the Elders from other communities on the land we are on and their kids'

Fact: A 'Welcome to Country' is recognising the significance of the land to the Traditional Owners and your place in it. An ' Acknowledgment of Country ' can be performed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal person.

Question 2

What do I say if I am doing an 'Acknowledgement of Country'?

Begin with this simple acknowledgement:

"I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land we are meeting on today and I pay respect to the Elders past, present and emerging"

Practise this acknowledgement so that you can learn to say it without reading it. Once you can say this without reading it you can become creative for example -

"I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land that we are currently meeting on, the people of the Wurundjeri, I pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. And I would like to extend that to the lands that you are currently on now and I pay respect to your Elders, past and present, and for those that have shaped you, who you have become today."

Start learning a simple version of 'Acknowledgement to Country', and be able to say the Acknowledgement without reading it before you become creative.

Question 3

How many Aboriginal nations are there?

"AIATSIS Map Of Indigenous Australia. The AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia is an attempt to represent all the language, tribal or nation groups of Indigenous Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups were included on the map based on the published resources available between 1988 and 1994 which determine the cultural, language and trade boundaries and relationships between groups."

<https://reconciliationsa.org.au/aiatsis-map-of-indigenous-australia/>

On this map there are about 260 distinct language groups and 500 dialects. The language groups are geographically bound. A good map for Aboriginal students those who were not born on Country and can find where their parents may have lived. AJ's people are Wiradjuri and Wotchabaluk. This map demonstrates how big and diverse Aboriginal communities are.

Question 4

What is the Kulin nation?

<https://www.coranderrk.com/our-history>

The Kulin nation are the five language groups around the Melbourne area:

Dja Dja Wurrung

Taungerong

Wathaurong

Woi Wurrung

Boon Wurrung

The word 'rong/rung' at the end means language. The Wurundjeri people spoke Woi Wurrung. The Boon Wurrung people around the bay often identified as the 'upside kangaroo' a head a hands pouch and legs. Wathaurong goes down to Geelong.

The five language groups make up the Kulin nation, sometimes known as the Kulin Alliance.

Question 5

How do you define Aboriginality?

Aunty Eva Jo Edwards is a Boon Wurrung, Yorta Yorta and a Mutti Mutti Elder.

"I define Aboriginality and me as an Aboriginal person, is what I feel inside and what my connections are. I have been living in Yarram since I was five and my connection to country here is probably my strongest even though I am from SE Australia. It is not about the colour of our skin, it is not about the colour of our eyes, and the colour of our hair. Aboriginality is something that we feel. We just know no matter how much we have been institutionalised and not told we are Aboriginal. I don't speak my language and I am shattered that I don't speak my language and fluently. I have children who have blue eyes, and green eyes and brown eyes and I have grandchildren with blond hair and blue eyes and that does not make my grandchildren or my children any less Aboriginality than I am Throughout society and throughout history of Victoria being the first to be colonised Aboriginality is not something about how you look"

AJ relates that Aunty Eva Jo talks about connection to community, connection to family, connection to country, a feeling that is inside and it is definitely not about skin colour. There is a legal definition. There has always been legislation about Aboriginal people and under the Aborigines' Protection Acts of the past, there were legal definitions such as Aborigines, full bloods, half caste, quarter caste, 1/16th. Those words ceased operation after the 1967 referendum.

In 1983, The Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs proposed a new 3-part definition of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of:

1. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
2. Identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
3. and is accepted as such in the community he (or she) lives

All three points of those definitions must be considered. There is debate about how this wording is not easy and this can be difficult if you are from the 'Stolen Generation' and you might be recognised in the community that he (or she) may lives.

If an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is not feeling culturally safe he (or she) may not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Question 6

What do the colours and symbols mean on the Aboriginal flag?

Maurice presents the following facts about the Aboriginal flag:

- It was designed in 1971 by an Aboriginal artist, Harold Thomas, a Luritja man from central Australia
- It was created as a symbol of unity and national identity for the Aboriginal people during the Land Rights Movement in the early 1970s
- The symbolic meaning of the flag colours are –
 - Black represents the Aboriginal skin colour
 - Yellow circle represents the sun
 - Red represents the sands and the lands of Australia
- The copyright of the Aboriginal flag was owned by Harold Thomas

AJ related that since Maurice spoke these words the copyright of the Aboriginal flag was bought from Harold Thomas by the Federal government in January 2022.

Question 6

What do the colours and symbols mean on the Torres Strait Islander flag?

AJ introduces Noah to speak the facts about what the symbols and colours mean on the Torres Strait Islander flag.

Noah presented the following facts of the Torres Strait Islander flag:

- The Torres Strait Islander flag was designed in 1992 by Bernard Namok
- The Torres Strait Islander flag was chosen from over 100 entries in an art competition organised in January, 1992 by the Islands Coordinating Council.
- The signs and symbols of the Torres Strait Islander flag are –
 - Green panels at the top and bottom of the flag symbolise the land
 - Blue panel in the centre represents the water of the Torres Strait
 - Thin black stripes between the green and blue panels signifies the Torres Strait Islanders themselves
 - White five point star in the centre of the flag represents the five major island groups; the Western, the Eastern, the Central, Port Kennedy and the Mainland
 - White Dhari is the dancers' headdress and around it the white also symbolises the Torres Strait Islander people
 - White symbolises peace and harmony and the star is a symbol for navigation
- In July 1995 the Torres Strait Islander flag is recognised by the Australian government as the official flag of Australia this was during the Flag Act in 1953
- You can fly the Torres Strait Islander flag without permission and you must have permission to reproduce the flag for commercial purposes.

Question 7

What makes a good Ally?

AJ draws on an article by Summer Finlay, 'How to be a good Ally', a link is in the resources section of this seminar.

There are 7 points -

- Always 'preface our voices', Aboriginal voices have not always been able to tell Aboriginal stories and it is often our stories (?) are retold on our behalf and sometimes they are whitenised and don't actually share the true history. It was only a couple of NAIDOC themes ago, the theme was 'Listen to our stories'
- Sometimes be okay about not being part of the conversation it is about giving Aboriginal people the platform to talk but not always talking on behalf or for Aboriginal people
- Be there for the good times and the bad
- Say something when you hear someone say inappropriate things about Aboriginal people, those terms that we often get called such as 'Abo' and 'Coon'. We still hear them on a daily basis or those percentages that you are only a half caste. It is really important you understand what those words are and do stand up and say something when someone uses those words
- Don't take it personally when we don't agree with you and if you want to hear Aboriginal voices and you will hear a diversity of voices and it is important to stop and listen
- Don't go it alone; it is about working with us, it is about supporting us and it is about empowering us to be able to have a say in all levels of the decision making process
- Understand that Aboriginal people are not all the same; as highlighted on the map there are over 500 different nations and many language groups that do exist that different Aboriginal people will share with you their different experiences. And sometimes give you different opinions on questions that you ask no one is right or wrong it is about incorporating them in your actual practice

Question 8

What is the dreamtime?

AJ introduces Jamarra who presents facts about the dreamtime and the dreaming -

The dreamtime is a term when life is created and it is called different names by different language groups. Generally speaking the dreamtime explains how the natural world was created such as animals, trees, plants, hills, rocks, spiritual themes and ancestors. These creation stories are the basis of Aboriginal lore and culture

The dreaming should not be seen as a state or linear; it is about past and present and our future. It is a timeless concept. This means that the dreaming starts before the life of the individual begins and continues to exist when the life of the individual ends

Each community have their own dreamtime stories, themes are often consistent with each other. Dreaming stories command the laws of we fit in society and the present it tells us how and why certain things happen it carries out certain practices and how it relates to the world around us. Dreamtime or creation stories are passed through generation by generation through the world of our symbols, dances, songs, stories and ceremonies

AJ thanked Jamarra and explained the dreamtime is a place that Aboriginal people hold dear, it is a place we can't see but we know it exists. It is where our stories originate from, it is where we originate from and it is where we go when we pass away. Dreamtime stories are not just stories and they are not Aboriginal fairy tales, they are stories that tell us how the world was created and stories that tell us how to live our lives today.

When you are reading dreamtime stories, it is important to -

- acknowledge that the stories are not fairy tales
- that the dreamtime stories often tell how the world was created from the perspective of that particular language group, and it is important to acknowledge the particular language group of whose story you are sharing
- There are always morals of the story. If you are sharing the stories, ask the children who you are working with ask them what they learned from the story and as a facilitator, trainer or educator look at what morals do you want the children to learn from these stories

Question 9

What is the population of Indigenous people in Australia?

AUSTRALIAN POPULATION DATA

The number of Indigenous Australians in 2021 was estimated to be 881,600, or people that ticked the box.

Among the Indigenous Australian population in 2021:

- 91.4% identified as being of Aboriginal origin (an estimated 727,500 people)
- 4.2% identified as being of Torres Strait Islander origin (an estimated 38,700 people)
- 4.4% were of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin (an estimated 32,200 people)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Census, 2021 Population: Census, 2021

The Indigenous Australian population is projected to reach about 1.1 million people by 2031

Every census from 1967 is about 40,000 people that identify for each new census

Question 10

What is the Indigenous population of Victoria?

VICTORIAN POPULATION DATA

In Victoria 66,000 people identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in 2021, which is equal to 1% of the state population. Among the Indigenous Australian population in Victoria in 2021:

- 94.2% identified as being of Aboriginal origin
- 3.2% identified as being of Torres Strait Islander origin
- 2.6% were of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin

<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/victoria-aboriginal-and-torres-straitislander-population-summary>

Question 11

What is the most appropriate terminology?

AJ noted that he has used different terms, such as Indigenous and Aboriginal and introduced a film clip of Dr Summer Finlay when she talks about using appropriate language.

“Hi I am a Yorta Yorta woman, PhD candidate and a public health practitioner. I want to have a yarn with you about how to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There are so many people who are getting it wrong and I am constantly having to explain to people what is appropriate and what is not and why. Please refer people to this video, link below. I am using a lot of my time to answer the same explanations of terminology and non-Aboriginal people can go to this website and find the answers.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples around the country like to be called different things and this is not going to suit everybody but what this video will do, will give you an understanding of what is clearly not appropriate, and when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples always ask them how they would like to be referred to.

To put it into perspective; for example if your name is Samantha and I decided I don't like the name Samantha, because it is too long, and I want to use the name Jane for now on. Keep this in mind as a way to understand why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples want to be referred to appropriately

Do not call us 'Abos', it is an offensive term and has negative connotations, do not use it as an excuse as an abbreviation it is unacceptable.

The word Indigenous, it must be capitalised, this is a proper noun; media outlets please capitalise the word Indigenous have some respect, for us as proper nouns. We are people

with distinct cultures and if you are going to capitalise Australia, as First Nations Peoples we want to be capitalised as well. Thank you in advance for changing your style.

I refer to myself as a Yorta Yorta woman, that is my mob, that is my country, that's where my family is from and where my ancestors are from. When you are referring to distinct groups of people and you know the country it is a good idea to use that term. If you do not know the term and you are referring to mainland First Nations People you can use the word Aboriginal and it does not include Torres Strait Islanders. Torres Strait Islander people are a distinct culture and they have their own title and this is the title they prefer. Use the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when referring to all First Nations People under what is now called Australia.

Do not use the acronym ATSI, it is not appropriate, as it is offensive to use ATSI. I don't use ATSI. Thank you for watching this video, I really appreciate you taking the time, I know that a lot of other Aboriginal people will as well, and if we are to move forward and genuinely respect both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as the rest of Australia, we need to be naming each other appropriately."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYUpms6lh6Q>

AJ spoke about words that are used -

BE CAREFUL OF THE WORDS USED

- Indigenous person
- Indigenous Australian
- First Nations
- First Australians
- Aborigines
- Half-caste
- Quarter-caste
- Part Aboriginal
- Abbo
- Boong
- Coon
- ATSI
- Blacks
- Blackfellas
- You people
- Them
- Koorie
- Mixed Blood

Some of these words can be used and there are those words that should not be used, such as 'Abo, boong, coon and ATSI. Indigenous is a word that is used as a collective, as our Indigenous population, we don't identify a person as being Indigenous. Some people like to be called First Nations people. I have a problem with the word First Australians, because in growing up in my narrative, those first Australians I was taught at school were the white people who arrived on the ships.

Aboriginal people may use the word "blackfellas" between themselves and it is always appropriate to use those terms back to them.

The word 'Koorie' means to the south-eastern Australian, do not presume that every Aboriginal in Victoria is Koorie, if you say are you Koorie, and they are not they may say the I am Murri from North Queens land or I am Palawa from South Australia.

AJ reiterated what Summer said in her video; understand what these words are and how words can impact on people and always clarify exactly how Aboriginal people would prefer to be called.

Question 12

What is an Elder?

AJ introduces Aunty Leanne Sumner, Gundijamara elder.

AJ asked How do you find an Elder in community?

"I think an Elder is elected by community, I think it is about the community saying to you, you know you've done the Aboriginal way of things, you supported the community and so they acknowledge that with you by calling you Aunty. I don't believe that suddenly you turn fifty and you are an Elder, I believe it is about the community deciding, that you have done what they feel is beneficial to the community and so they acknowledge that by calling you an Elder and calling you an Aunty, giving you that respect"

There are Elders in the families and they can speak on behalf of the family and there are Elders in the community, that speak on behalf of community.

Question 13

Have numbers increased of Indigenous children attending Early Childhood services?

One of the current Close the Gap strategies is by 2025 to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in prep, Year Before Full time Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95 per cent.

Nationally in 2021, 96.7 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Year Before Full time Schooling (YBFS) age cohort were enrolled in a preschool program.

That has been a huge increase in the number of years.

<https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/socioeconomic/outcome-area3>

Question 14

How can we start hearing true Aboriginal stories?

That is by asking people and talking to as many Aboriginal people as you possibly can. One thing I do for truth telling is I provide a platform for Aboriginal people to share their voices, and through this Reconciliation Series I have invited Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal people to share their experiences. I do this in my own life as well; the videos you have seen are all on the Girraway Ganyi consultancy YouTube. This is my YouTube channel.

With over 450 subscribers it has the Elders stories, it has the younger peoples' stories, where over a couple of years we have interviewed the kids periodically over a two year period and put together a clip about them sharing their own experiences about being an Aboriginal kid in 2020 - 2021 when the videos were made.

There is the fact vaults, the short vaults that the Aboriginal children wrote themselves, scripted and my son and I edited them and put them up on site. Those are the five and four fact vaults. There is also myth busting in the Elders' shorts and in some of the other kids stories.

Easiest way to navigate the story telling is to go to playlists -

playlist list 1 looks at Elder stories, 5 elder stories

Playlist 2 is the Elder shorts, which are the short clips where the Elders are sharing their concepts

Playlist 3 are the quick fact files and activities about 29 of them and some I have been doing some entering programs at schools. Recording of the Aboriginal kids with the families' permissions and all the Aboriginal people got paid as well for their stories.

Playlist 10 Scotch College

Playlist 12 is Camberwell Grammar

Series 4 and 5, there are 18 Aboriginal workers that share their experiences and share strategies and tips about working with Aboriginal people and there is fifteen workers, non-Indigenous sharing their experiences with working with Aboriginal people to give you more strategies with actually working with Aboriginal people

I am very lucky as in 2021 this YouTube channel was awarded the Heart Award's for Highly Commended award for the YouTube stories.

So please when you get a chance this is a great channel place to watch and listen to Aboriginal I am always updating I probably have another 40 - 50 videos to upload, it is always continually updating.

Thank you for tuning in and I thank Dr Summer Finlay, Aunty Leanne Sumner, Aunty EvaJo Edwards, Preston, Maurice and Noah for their stories that we actually heard.

In my language we say "Mandang Guwayu" which means 'I will see you guys later'

Bye!