



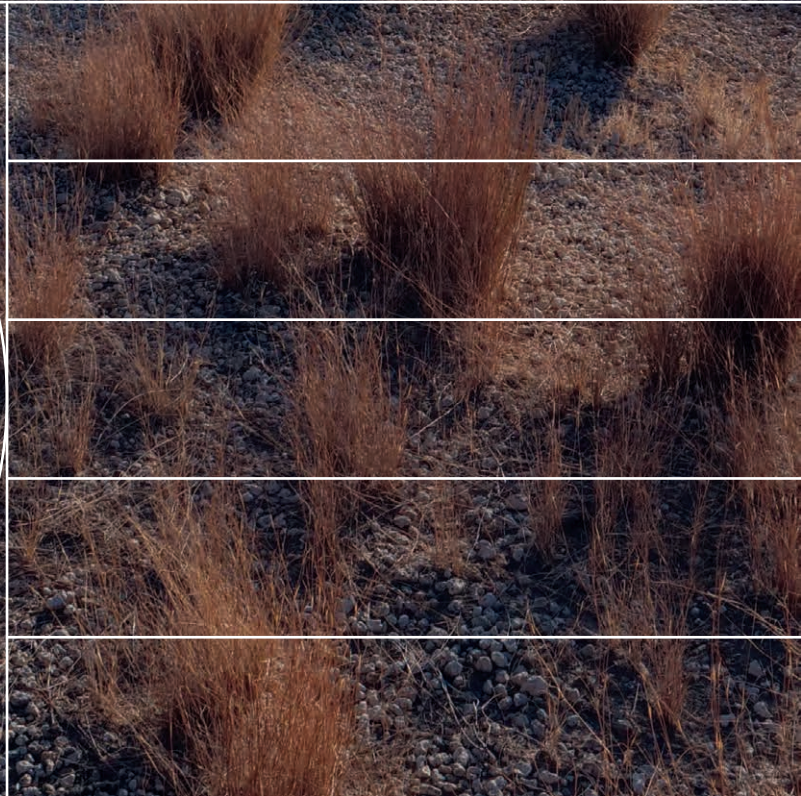
**Biodiversity
Council**



Biodiversity Council Cultural Protocol

Biodiversity Council
April 2025

Image: Jaana Dielenberg



Acknowledgement

The Biodiversity Council acknowledges the First Peoples of the lands and waters of Australia, and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and future and expresses gratitude for the long and ongoing custodianship of Country.

Further information

For more information

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Biodiversity Council – Cultural Protocol

This document has been created for the Biodiversity Council councillors and staff.

It will guide collaboration and outline protocols for working with and alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, ensuring that perspectives are respected and appropriately represented in research, policy, and communications.

The Biodiversity Council is an independent expert group dedicated to promoting evidence-based solutions to Australia's biodiversity crisis. From its founding, the Council has integrated the expertise and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as a core element of its work, supported by long standing relationships with Indigenous people, communities and organisations. Representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is included at every decision-making level within the Council.

This document is a living resource and will continue to evolve, reflecting the ongoing and open-ended nature of collaboration.

There are some essential and great resources publicly available that highlight ways to collaborate and work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations:

- **AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research**
- **Threatened Species Recovery Hub: Indigenous Engagement Protocols for Threatened Species Researchers**
- **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

- **Our Knowledge, Our Way: Indigenous-led approaches to strengthening and sharing our knowledge for land and sea management**

To support cultural competency, the Biodiversity Council advises all staff and council members to familiarise themselves with these key resources. These documents have contributed to the development of this protocol. It is crucial to independently deepen understanding, rather than relying solely on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and Indigenous Knowledge holders to educate non-Indigenous people. Engaging with these materials, community events and getting out into community is essential for fostering respectful, informed, and effective collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This cultural protocol should be reviewed every 1–2 years in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councillors and communities to ensure its ongoing relevance. Feedback from council members and staff should be incorporated to help the protocol evolve with emerging needs and remain effective in fostering meaningful collaboration.

Overview

In developing and implementing a Cultural Protocol for the Biodiversity Council, principles for engagement in research and conservation are crucial. First, Indigenous self-determination in research means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should have authority over how research involving their knowledge, lands, and cultures is conducted. Understanding that Indigenous cultures are incredibly diverse, with unique laws (Lore) and customs, is essential. This requires recognising that there isn't a single viewpoint among Indigenous groups—each community has its own perspectives and protocols. Respecting this diversity is a fundamental aspect of cultural competence.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems also vary widely, and it's important not to assume that everyone holds the same understanding of concepts, traditions, or information. Recognising these distinctions helps prevent the misappropriation or misinterpretation of Indigenous Knowledge, which can lead to significant stress and concern within communities. It is essential to engage Indigenous leadership throughout all stages of research, policy and media rather than approaching groups merely for ceremonies or as a service provider. True collaboration means involving Traditional Custodians, Elders and community members in the planning and execution phases.

Respect for Culture and Connection to Country

- Respect the cultural significance of Country and the deep connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with Country.
- Acknowledge Traditional Custodians and the cultural significance of the Country where work is being conducted. Ensure that all engagement respects local customs, laws (Lore), and practices.
- Respect men's and women's business.

Cultural Safety

- Foster an environment of trust, cultural safety, and mutual respect.
- Ensure all interactions promote cultural safety. Create spaces where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants feel respected, valued, and free to express their perspectives.

Collaboration and Participation

- Respect and promote Indigenous Knowledge as equal to Western Science.
- Encourage meaningful and reciprocal partnerships that value Traditional Knowledge alongside Western scientific approaches.
- Engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as equal partners from the outset of any project. Involve Traditional Custodians, Elders, and community members in the co-design of projects and decision-making processes. And ensure that remuneration is available for those who engage.
- Look for opportunities to prioritise the employment of Indigenous Australians in paid roles (postdoc/cultural advisor/consultant).

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent

- Ensure Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is obtained for any project involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge or participation. Acknowledge that this consent can be withdrawn at any point.
- Obtain explicit consent before using any Indigenous knowledge. Ensure that communities are informed about the scope and purpose of the work and that they have control over how their knowledge is used.

Challenges: Systems aren't designed to allow adequate relationship-building.

Intellectual Property and Knowledge

- Protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge and intellectual property from misuse or misrepresentation and agree upon principles of Knowledge Sharing at the first stage of project co-design..
- Ensure Traditional Knowledge is shared only with explicit permission. Avoid the unauthorised use of Indigenous knowledge and respect all Intellectual Property rights associated with it.
- Ensure that data management aligns with knowledge-sharing agreements.

Representation in Research, Policy, and Communications

Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are appropriately represented in all research, policy, and communications.

Research: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions to research must be acknowledged in publications, with appropriate co-authorship and co-presentation where relevant. Ensure Traditional Knowledge is clearly distinguished and acknowledged in all findings where it has been used with FPIC.

Policy: Policies should acknowledge the influence and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives, ensuring that these are highlighted in policy briefs and documents.

Communications: Acknowledge the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in all forms of communication, including media, presentations, and public statements. Use culturally respectful language and ensure correct naming conventions for people and places are followed. Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people contributors have every opportunity to contribute to the content of communications that relate to their Knowledge, Country and community.

Avoid using dissenting Indigenous voices against each other

Respecting the diversity of perspectives within communities is crucial when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Using dissenting voices to undermine or discredit others is harmful, divisive, and perpetuates colonial approaches. This protocol emphasises the importance of fostering respectful dialogue, understanding differing views, and not exploiting disagreements for external agendas.

The Importance of Language

The use of language must reflect cultural sensitivity, respect, and accuracy in all communications.

Naming Conventions: Always correctly refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their Country, and cultural terms, including in publications. Seek guidance on proper usage when necessary.

Respectful Terms: Avoid outdated or inappropriate terminology, and use respectful and endorsed terms by communities.

Dual Naming: Where applicable, use both Traditional place names and introduced names to reflect the significance of Indigenous cultural landscapes and species.

Translation: Where possible, provide translations of important communications in relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, ensuring that the translation is accurate and endorsed by community members.

Communication and Feedback

- Maintain open, transparent, and continuous communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners throughout the project. This includes reporting back once the project has concluded.
- Establish regular feedback mechanisms for ongoing dialogue with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collaborators. Provide opportunities for their review and amendment of project outputs.

List of definitions:

Indigenous – Refers to both Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Biodiversity Council – Refers to all staff and Councillors associated with the Biodiversity Council.

References

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Biodiversity Council

The Biodiversity Council brings together leading experts including Indigenous Knowledge holders to promote evidence-based solutions to Australia's biodiversity crisis. It was founded by 11 universities: The University of Melbourne, The University of Western Australia, The Australian National University, The University of Adelaide, The University of Sydney, The University of Queensland, Deakin University, The University of Canberra, Monash University, Macquarie University, and The University of New South Wales. It is host by The University of Melbourne. It receives support from The Ian Potter Foundation, The Ross Trust, Trawalla Foundation, The Rendere Trust, Isaacson Davis Foundation, Coniston Charitable Trust and Angela Whitbread.

Image: Jack Pascoe