



AUSTRALIAN FRESHWATER SCIENCES SOCIETY

*Research for management and understanding of
Australia's inland waters*

Indigenous Engagement and Partnership Policy

(Final Version: Approved by AFSS Executive 03/09/2020)

i. Preamble

The Australian Freshwater Sciences Society (AFSS) recognises and acknowledges the unique relationship and deep connection to Country that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have, as the Traditional Owners and first peoples of Australia.

The AFSS is committed to the objective of supporting close involvement and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in aquatic research and management.

AFSS looks to the future to drive discovery and innovation in the aquatic sciences. This progress informs our experiences, our personal journeys and our shared history as a society. That history extends back far beyond the foundations of the Australian Freshwater Sciences Society to the Traditional custodians of this land, whose descendants are part of our community today.

Aboriginal people attach enormous cultural and spiritual significance to landscapes. In the Aboriginal world view, people and Country (including lands, waterways and seas) are interdependent entities that are intrinsically linked in the landscape. This means that there is no separation of nature and culture. The health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people is directly influenced by both the health of the environment and the degree to which Aboriginal people can be actively involved in caring for it.

As First People of Australia, Aboriginal people have inherent rights that were never traded or given away. These inherent rights are recognised in a wide range of International, Federal, State and Territory Government instruments that afford Aboriginal people ownership and custodial interests in Country and recognises including their unique responsibility to care for their communities, cultural landscapes, biodiversity and places of particular cultural significance.

Ongoing access to Country and its resources is essential so Aboriginal people can continue cultural practices, maintain links with the land and care for Country. Aboriginal communities can retain and obtain valuable knowledge and skills through being proactively involved in environmental management and conservation.

Australian Freshwater Sciences Society's Executive, Members and students can benefit from Aboriginal people's knowledge, relationships and cultural and environmental practices and protocols that are alive and vibrant in the Aboriginal communities. This engagement will provide the AFSS with the fundamental foundation to establish meaningful and sustainable relationships and sound working partnerships.



The unique position of Aboriginal people in Australia's culture and history is acknowledged and recognised by the AFSS. AFSS recognises the disadvantage that many Aboriginal people continue to face, and the need to engage Aboriginal communities in economic, environmental and conservation projects.

ii. Objective

AFSS will engage the Traditional Custodians meaningfully through our transformative learning and life experiences, and influence the wider world through our own discovery by disseminating knowledge, ideas and innovation. AFSS recognises and celebrates the role of indigenous peoples in water management. The Society will embrace Aboriginal perspectives in AFSS business and events, and support activities which build genuine partnerships with Aboriginal peoples.

iii. Means of Attaining Objective

The Society has a strong commitment to build its Cultural capacity to attain this objective and will achieve this through:

1. Appointment of a formal indigenous representative position on the Executive to facilitate the objective. This may need to be considered in more detail in future, given complexities with having one representative across Australia.
2. Creation of an Indigenous Working Group (IWG). As the Society builds its Aboriginal membership, there will be opportunities for active membership and participation on the IWG.
3. Recognition of Traditional Custodians at AFSS events

a. Welcome to Country

- The Welcome to Country is a modern-day interpretation of an ancient practice by which people seek and receive permission to enter or travel across the country of the local clan or nation.
- A *Welcome to Country* ceremony is to be undertaken ONLY by a local Indigenous Custodian, locally recognised Indigenous Community spokesperson or locally recognised cultural service provider. The *Welcome to Country* occurs at the beginning of an event and is usually the first item on the agenda. The local Indigenous Custodian will choose what words they use and the Welcome can be conducted through speech, song, ceremony or a combination of these.
- AFSS events that should include a Welcome to Country:
 1. Awards and presentation nights;
 2. Conferences;
 3. Events that include attendance by Ministers, Executive, or special guests;



b. Acknowledgment of Country

- An *Acknowledgement of Country* is a way for the wider community to demonstrate respect for the local Indigenous Community and land. It can be performed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. An *Acknowledgement of Country* should be performed as the first item on the program agenda.
 - An *Acknowledgment of Country* is used when a local Indigenous custodian is not available to attend and conduct a *Welcome to Country*. It can also be used if the ceremony or event is a less formal proceeding. The wording of an *Acknowledgement of Country* is quite different to a *Welcome to the Country*. It is a statement of respect made by visitors to an Indigenous community or Indigenous people from other nations and recognises the Indigenous community as the traditional custodians of the land where the meeting is being held.
 - AFSS events or ceremonies that should include an *Acknowledgment of Country*:
 1. Internal meetings;
 2. Committee meetings;
 3. The Annual General Meeting
 4. AFSS supported state or territory events
 5. Local forums or presentations
 - Example of the wording that can be used is: *"I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are gathered and pay my respects to their Elders both past and present. I would like to extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today."*
4. Following best practise to identify when and how to consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (see Appendix One).
5. Development of linkages – including:
- a. AFSS State Representatives establish and maintain open channels of communication with key Indigenous Organisations (e.g. NSWALC, NAILSMA, MLDRIN, NBAN, NLC, CfC etc.) so that researchers can get in touch with State Representatives and seek information on how to get in touch with Traditional Owners in their research areas.
 - b. To communicate with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities early when in organising the annual conference, and discuss options to include and involve as



appropriate (e.g. Welcome to Country, Acknowledgement of Country, field excursions, plenary speakers).

- c. Relevant links on the society's website for interested members to pursue. Contact Indigenous Organisations and seek approval to include links to their websites to facilitate researchers looking to connect with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people through the AFSS website
 - d. In addition, if any events are being organised by the state reps that local Indigenous organisations and traditional owners are invited as a way of building links with the Society
 - e. Other activities as decided upon by the Executive in consultation with the IWG.
6. Supporting members' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders through:
- a. Supporting sessions at conferences which promote engagement.
 - b. Providing information to members on how to approach engagement activities (see Appendix One).
 - c. Sharing networks where appropriate with members of the Society.
 - d. Other activities as decided upon by the Executive in consultation with the IWG.
7. Commitment to plan further opportunities in fostering these linkages in future conferences through:
- a. Consideration of creation of special classes of membership of the Society or scholarships.
 - b. Reporting on Indigenous Participation facilitated by the AFSS in the Annual Report.
 - c. Promoting the Indigenous Travel Scholarship.
 - d. Other activities as decided upon by the Executive in consultation with the IWG.

iv. Summary

The Society recognizes that to build the type of Society we wish to become, we must create a pathway that provides a more equitable and inclusive future between the Society and Aboriginal Australia. By dedicating ourselves to increasing the recruitment of Indigenous students and Society membership, we will create a better more inclusive and successful Society for future generations.

The Society has endorsed and supported this process / strategy and we acknowledge the road ahead is long and there is much work to be done. By respecting our shared past and recognizing our equality in the present, we will build a brighter future together.



APPENDIX ONE: Effective Consultation

Follow best practise to identify when and how to consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Meaningful consultation with Aboriginal people relies upon demonstrating a shared understanding of Aboriginal culture and the wants needs and aspirations of Aboriginal communities. Effective engagement of Aboriginal communities and individuals affords the opportunity for Aboriginal communities to exercise their inherent rights to advance matters of cultural significance where there has been an ongoing connection since time immemorial.

Culturally appropriate consultation is an approach that conveys an understanding and respect for Aboriginal peoples and communities. Aboriginal people require that consultation should be a process that provides for real influence in decision making.

Those consulting should ensure that appropriate mechanisms and good meeting procedures are adhered to.

A “culturally” appropriate consultation with Aboriginal communities and individuals can be recognised in a set of guiding principles to ensure effective recognition and implementation of Aboriginal initiatives.

Consultation needs to be undertaken with a positive approach, to promote:

Respect: A philosophic and practical recognition of the traditional and cultural heritage of Aboriginal people and communities, including their access to and use resources.

Engagement: Involvement of the wider Aboriginal communities with management and custodianship of resources in keeping with their traditional cultural roles and emerging contemporary interests.

Foundations for effective community engagement

The core values that will drive effective Aboriginal community engagement are:

1. **INNOVATION** – We believe learning, enquiry and discovery improve lives. Working together WITH Aboriginal communities to assist people and community to become productive communities in the freshwater science and management arena;
2. **INTEGRITY** – We conduct ourselves ethically, equitably, and for mutual benefit, inspiring openness, courage and trust; and
1. **EMPOWERMENT** – We encourage and support Aboriginal stakeholders to participate in freshwater science and exchange knowledge for mutual learning and to benefit understanding of best practice in freshwater management and conservation.

The fundamental foundations for effective Aboriginal community consultation are listed to assist in a process that demonstrates respect, establishes sound working relationships based on



transparency, honesty and the improvement of working relationships with Aboriginal people and communities.

1. Recognition that Aboriginal cultures are fluid, dynamic and unique, and acknowledgement that consultation needs to occur across all issues that may affect Aboriginal peoples and places.
2. All people have the right to be consulted with, if the issues affect the place that person or community lives in.
3. The right to choose the appropriate people and place to conduct consultation.
4. The full purpose and process for the consultation will be clearly articulated to participants prior to actual consultations being undertaken.
5. Participants will be treated with respect and dignity and the rights of participants to be heard and to speak will be valued.
6. All views expressed in the consultation process will be considered.
7. Agreements sought during consultations will be reached by consensus.
8. The Aboriginal community will receive feedback from the consultations in a timely manner.
9. That effective consultation is conducted with Aboriginal communities and individuals.
10. The context for undertaking consultation within communities must include the components of:
 - 10.1 **Inclusiveness** - the need to include the Aboriginal community in the process, as well as relevant community organisations.
 - 10.2 **Accessibility** – all documentation must be in plain English and have a clear explanation of technical details. Representatives conducting the consultations are to be accessible to Aboriginal individuals and communities throughout the process, as well as providing information that will assist decision-making.
 - 10.3 **Respect** – acknowledging the varying roles, responsibilities, obligations and rights of Aboriginal peoples and communities. To be respectful of culture and people is the first step in the process of developing working relationships.
 - 10.4 **Accountability** – acknowledging the responsibility to adequately consider the rights and needs of Aboriginal individuals and community groups. Those parties to the consultation will be accountable for the decisions made in the consultation process.