

“You Can’t Ask That” Aboriginal Awareness & Protocols

Question	Craig’s Response	Kaleana’s Response
IDENTITY & CULTURE		
Do Aboriginal people consider themselves more Australian than everyone else?	The response would vary greatly across the 500,000 Aboriginal people who have, as we all do, varying opinions on a range of things. In my opinion, I am not 'more Australian' than anyone - there is no definition of what is Australian - that name has only existed since Federation. What I do possess is a sense of history and stewardship as a descendent of the original inhabitants of this continent.	Yes I agree.
Can anyone call themselves Aboriginal?	No, the issue of Aboriginal identity remains contentious for some, but the official definition used by government is based on three (3) criteria: "An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he (she) lives." See https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/CIB/cib0203/03Cib10	No, of course. Agree with Craig’s statement.
How important is identifying yourself as Aboriginal to your sense of belonging?	Everyone needs to feel a sense of belonging in their life - Aboriginal people, whatever the challenges faced, will always hold a strong sense of belonging to country, their mob and their culture.	It’s very important, its who we are, it’s where we have come from and it’s our future. I’m very proud of who I am. I have strong and continuous connection to my Country.
Is it appropriate or necessary to acknowledge moiety? Men's business vs women's business?	No, it is generally not appropriate to discuss these things, especially for non-Aboriginal people. There may be some exceptions in certain circumstances – always be guided by the Aboriginal people present as to what is appropriate to discuss.	Yes, always be guided by the Aboriginal people.
With the current growth in people getting DNA testing I am aware that people are discovering their Aboriginality in their family history. How can people in this situation link with their Aboriginal descendants and community?	This is a very common situation for many people. If you have researched your ancestry and found Aboriginal heritage, there is no clear answer that will guarantee that you will connect with your descendant’s community, or any Aboriginal community for that matter. It is a very human thing that relies on so many factors. It is possible there are no people left in the community left to vouch for	My grandmother used to tell me that this family I went to school with were Aboriginal and she would explain their cultural links to me. I would say to my friend at school “ <i>you know you’re Aboriginal ay? Why don’t you admit it?</i> ” And she would always deny it and

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	<p>your connection, depending on the length of time surpassed. There are, however, organisations that seek to assist in linking people to their mob and Link-Up is the one I know the most who do great work in helping people on their journey to finding themselves and their mob. https://www.linkupnsw.org.au/</p>	<p>so did her other siblings. Years have passed and they have children of their own and now, all of a sudden, decided that it's time to acknowledge their Aboriginality. I never understood why and maybe I never will, but I was always taught to be proud of my Aboriginality, be proud of where you have come from. There are always people in community that may know your connection.</p>
<p>I've heard that our idea of a single Aboriginal culture is wrong because of the many and varied nations – is this true?</p>	<p>True, there is no single Aboriginal culture in Australia due to the over 500 nations (countries) that traditionally made up this land. There may be commonalities across all of these, but each has its own culture, language, way of living etc. Consider Europe - all of the countries that make up Europe have their own language, culture, identity and values – they are not lumped into one single "European culture" - This is no different in that respect.</p>	<p>This is a great comparison Craig - would you call a French person European? Would they get offended? They wouldn't like to be put into a box that gives them no identity on where they are from, their language etc. When we meet other Aboriginal people one of the first things we ask is “Who’s your Mob?”</p>
<p>Apart from Uluru, are there any other sites or landmarks which are sacred to the Aboriginal people?</p>	<p>There are millions! Physical cultural heritage exists everywhere in the landscape, even underground and under the sea as we currently know it. Special places include natural features, archaeological places and ceremonial places just to name a few - every aspect of traditional life has left a record on the landscape. To give you an idea, from memory (which could be struggling as I age!) the area around Wollombi in the Hunter has been assessed as averaging over 14 Aboriginal sites per hectare. Having said that, there are also special or ‘sacred’ places that have developed in a post-settlement context, such as certain buildings or places that have special meaning to the Aboriginal community.</p>	<p>Not to mention Lake Mungo and the Willandra world heritage area where the oldest human remains were brought to the surface dating back to 46,000 years old. This in itself is sacred for all humanity! It's right in our own back yard! All Country is sacred – and it's all connected.</p>
<p>What challenges have you dealt with in your career due to your Aboriginal identity?</p>	<p>There have been many challenges to face and difficult for me to provide specific examples, but a key one that occurs a lot is people assuming that everything 'Aboriginal' is your responsibility, whereas delivering initiatives, services or outcomes to Aboriginal people should be everyone's responsibility.</p>	<p>I agree Craig, and people assume that we know everything. Also, having your cultural safety and cultural values being challenged by others.</p>

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<p>Are "fair skinned" Aboriginal people as disadvantaged as darker Aboriginal people? Is it right for them to take up the scholarships, jobs etc. that are marked for Aboriginal people only?</p>	<p>Aboriginal people come in all shapes, sizes and colours. Don't be confused when fair skinned, blue eyed and blonde-haired people identify as Aboriginal – the explanation is a simple case of genetics i.e. dominant and recessive genes (just like blue eyes/brown eyes). Think of Aboriginal identity as being like a cup of tea or coffee – no matter how much milk you put in and change its colour, it's still tea or coffee! Being Aboriginal is not the colour of your skin or eyes or how broad your nose is. It is a spiritual feeling, an identity you know in your heart.</p>	<p>Yeah I agree. Fair skinned Aboriginal people can experience different kinds of racism in certain situations because people don't think they are Aboriginal.</p>
<p>Can we ever ask someone if they are Aboriginal or should we wait for the person to initiate and just never bring it up?</p>	<p>I think the key point here is how the question is approached, and for what reason, and what basis you are needing an answer. For example, to ask someone who is applying for an Aboriginal identified job or to access specialised Health Services – Yes. To ask someone because they have dark skin – No.</p>	<p>Yes, I agree.</p>
<p>When Aboriginal people raise an issue which often relates to the past, society often respond by saying 'get over it' and 'its in the past' – what are your thoughts?</p>	<p>I would use an analogy with some other groups of people who have experienced past trauma - are the ANZAC's or Holocaust survivors expected to 'get over it – it was in the past'?</p>	<p>The past was not that long ago! My grandparents didn't have the same opportunities as non-Aboriginal people. They weren't allowed to finish primary school. My grandmother had to teach herself to read and write. My mother wasn't born an Australian citizen and my mother is not that old. Aboriginal people were not counted as citizens until the 1967 referendum. How can we also get over the continue loss of our native vegetation, massive fish fills, threatened and endangered cultural keystone species and poor quality of our country?</p>
<p>PROTOCOLS</p>		
<p>Why is an Acknowledgement of Country important to the Aboriginal people? What is the difference between an Acknowledgement of Country? When should we consider arranging a Welcome</p>	<p>Please refer to the Aboriginal Protocol Guidelines on the NSW Landcare Program's Gateway page at: https://landcare.nsw.gov.au/landcare-program/aboriginal-communities-engagement-program/</p>	



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to Country rather than an Acknowledgement of Country for meetings/events?	and the Landcare NSW page at: https://landcarensw.org.au/projects/aboriginal-communities-engagement-program/	
Where do we find, and how do we make contact with, an Aboriginal Elder to carry out a Welcome to Country? Is there a directory?	There is no directory, you have to do some research yourself depending on where you are located. This is also why we have Aboriginal staff employed in our agencies - they can connect you to the right place. In Sydney, the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council has its Welcome to Country rates on their website, but you don't get to choose which Elder: https://metrolalc.org.au/services-resources/welcome-to-country/	Agree - through your Aboriginal staff, or through other agencies such as LLS. There may also be Aboriginal corporations, organisations, etc
How much should you expect to pay for a Welcome to Country?	It can be expected that a Welcome to Country could cost anywhere from \$150 - \$400. However, these prices are provided only as a general guide. In providing cultural services such as Welcome to Country, artistic performances and ceremonies, Aboriginal people are using their intellectual property. In Sydney, the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council has its rates on their website: https://metrolalc.org.au/services-resources/welcome-to-country/	
Why do some Aboriginal people get offended when an Acknowledgement of Country is accidentally missed when 99% of the time it is done?	The premise of 99% is exaggerated and inaccurate. If they did occur 99% of the time, then there would be no need to educate people on why it is important. But this question actually answers itself - if you were the recipient of an experience, a welcoming feeling, a service, a ritual, or even a product 99% of the time, and then it didn't occur, wouldn't you feel something wasn't right or missing?	I sometimes get offended being asked all the time to do a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country because I might be the only Aboriginal person there. Acknowledgement of Country should be everyone's responsibility.
Why is the term "Aunty" and "Uncle" used so widely in the Aboriginal Community?	Put simply - RESPECT! It also relates to recognition of Aboriginal Elders, kinship and extended families.	Agree!
Is the better terminology 'Aboriginal' or 'Indigenous'? or does it not matter?	Whilst these two terms appear interchangeable in various forums, in NSW my advice is to use the term "Aboriginal". The term "Indigenous" appeared in the 80s and 90s at the Federal Government level. I heard a (tall?) tale once that a 'bean-counter' (no offense intended for our very important bean counters - they do a great job!) in a Federal Government department realised that the	Other terms that are also widely used nowadays is “First Nations” and “Traditional Owners”.

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	<p>number of characters used for "Indigenous" was only 10 characters, yet the term "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders" uses 38 characters, including spaces. To extrapolate this out over thousands of times the terms would be used in written form over the years, the shorter version equates to a substantial saving of printing ink, time taken to type it out, space on the paper, etc. - you get the picture.</p>	
<p>I've read that the word 'Aboriginal' is an acceptable term for our first people, but I've also read that the word 'Aborigine' is offensive. Why are two such similar words received differently?</p>	<p>Context and social change – it is generally perceived as insensitive. In the past, the term “Aborigine” was used to denigrate or used in a racist or derogatory way. Many words that were once acceptable to society can later become unacceptable. Without a capital "a", "aboriginal" can refer to an Indigenous person from anywhere in the world. The word means “original inhabitant” in Latin.</p>	<p>Agree!</p>
<p>Do you have some examples of “no-nos” or negative behaviour that non-Aboriginal people may not be aware they’re doing in the workplace?</p>	<p>Please refer to the Aboriginal Protocol Guidelines on the NSW Landcare Program’s Gateway page at: https://landcare.nsw.gov.au/landcare-program/aboriginal-communities-engagement-program/ and the Landcare NSW page at: https://landcare.nsw.gov.au/projects/aboriginal-communities-engagement-program/</p>	<p>Asking an Aboriginal person if they know a certain other Aboriginal person? There are over 500,000 Aboriginal people in Australia - we don't know everyone! Another example of a 'no-no' is the very common comment “Oh, I used to have black fellas working for me” or “I had/have a friend who is Aboriginal”.</p>
<p>How do I find out about the Aboriginal tribal country I am on?</p>	<p>There have been several representations of a map of Aboriginal Australia, but for many Aboriginal people they are also held with a level of inaccuracy and contention/disagreement, mainly due to the loss of cultural knowledge being passed on by Elders for several generations for various reasons, including direct policies by the authorities at the time that forbade the passing on of cultural knowledge and would result in punishment. This then leads to multiple sources of truth. But here's some old and new map references that can be used as a guide: https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-230054338/view</p>	

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	https://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/tribalmap/ http://nationalunitygovernment.org/pdf/aboriginal-australia-map.pdf	
What’s the story behind a smoking ceremony?	An Aboriginal smoking ceremony is a traditional custom that involves combining hot embers and the wet leaves of various native plants in a traditional wooden dish to produce smoke. This smoke has cleansing properties and the ability to ward off bad spirits from the people and the land and make a pathway for a brighter future. Certain traditional smoking ceremonies are also used for wellbeing and positive therapeutic outcomes dependant on what plants are available from region to region. The smoking ceremony can be conducted in conjunction with a Welcome to Country, and may involve those present gathering around a dedicated smoking site, or be invited to walk through the smoke for an individual cleansing.	Aboriginal people also use smoking during times of sensitive cultural business such as repatriations, recover burials, etc. to cleanse the spirits and not take any bad spirits with you.
How does someone become an Aboriginal Elder?	An Aboriginal Elder is someone who has gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge and lore, and who has permission to disclose knowledge and beliefs. In some instances Aboriginal people above a certain age will refer to themselves as Elders. It is important to understand that, in traditional Aboriginal culture, age alone doesn't necessarily mean that one is recognised as an Elder and they are not 'self-appointed'. Aboriginal people traditionally refer to an Elder as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle', however, it is recommended that non-Aboriginal people check the appropriateness of their use of these terms beforehand.	Agree!
OTHERS		
What is one little thing, that could make a big difference to make Aboriginal people feel welcomed and included in our Landcare activities? How can we assist Aboriginal people in a day to day way?	Interestingly, there is no special answer - from my point of view just treat them as you would respectfully treat anyone else, with no pre-conceived assumptions or expectations. It's interesting how many times people open up private conversations about something they saw or heard relating to Aboriginal people or issues, and want to share it with me with empathy. That's OK most of the time, but sometimes it feels a bit like I've got a sign on me that says "I'm Aboriginal – please discuss!" It’s becoming known as a form of mental fatigue in itself.	Agree!

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<p>What do you think about Australia day being on January 26?</p>	<p>This is subject to differences of opinion in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. My personal opinion on it adds no value to an already contentious and polarising national debate. Most people who have asked me this question either seek to express their strong agreement or disagreement on it, depending on my response, so I personally prefer not to engage in the debate.</p>	<p>I agree Craig, it’s not something that I choose to participate in either. It’s not a day I celebrate.</p>
<p>Is there such a thing as an Indigenous restaurant? Any recommendations?</p>	<p>Yes, I’m sure there is! I can’t name any specifically, but there are many restaurants and caterers using such flavours as lemon myrtle and other native ingredients and spices featuring in the food, especially in highly populated areas! I recommend using your favourite internet search engine to find them. Try and choose those that are majority Aboriginal owned and operated if possible.</p>	
<p>Why is Western Sydney’s Aboriginal population so large?</p>	<p>This relates to demographics as a whole. I’m sure many of those Aboriginal people (and other disadvantaged people) in Western Sydney would love to afford to live in Bondi or the Northern Beaches. <u>Fact:</u> Aboriginal people are the most disadvantaged in Australia in nearly all indicators (Google the Statistics if needed), therefore have the least wealth, highest unemployment etc. <u>Fact:</u> People generally try and live where they can afford, have a chance of getting a job and providing for their families. <u>Fact:</u> Sydney has lots of jobs, with many for people with lower education, unskilled labour that is low paid work. <u>Fact:</u> Eastern Sydney is unaffordable for these people. <u>Fact:</u> Western Sydney is more affordable to live, and still have access to job opportunities.</p>	<p>Yes, I agree and these are the areas that have a lot of Aboriginal housing.</p>
<p>Do you think the government at the state and federal level have done enough to recognise Aboriginal peoples place with the land and the displacement that occurred throughout European settlement?</p>	<p>When asked this question I tend to reflect longingly on the status of the Maori people of New Zealand and their experience with European settlement which resulted in the Treaty of Waitangi. I do carry some envy that Australian Aboriginal people are not afforded the same status as New Zealand Maori people in our respective societies.</p>	<p>No, there is a lot more truth to be told.</p>
<p>Do you think Australia should have a Treaty similar to the Treaty of Waitangi</p>	<p>It would be very welcome, but unlikely in my opinion. The vast geography of Australia dwarfs New Zealand, who were able to mobilise the Maori leaders of each tribe to Waitangi to sign the</p>	<p>Yes I agree. For example, Victoria is committed to working towards a treaty, with</p>

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between the New Zealand Government and the Maori people?	document. That would have been impossible in Australia at the time of European contact.	some of the mob asking for a truth commission before progressing to a treaty. But is this for all the mobs in Victoria? No, not all nations want to participate in the process as they have never, and will never, cede their sovereignty in the first place.
I know there are many, but what is the biggest thing we could learn from Aboriginal culture to incorporate into our ways of living these days?	Aboriginal people are 'people people', who generally consider interpersonal relationships to be of paramount importance - this 'people first' or now called 'customer-first' principle is now being mirrored in government and corporate establishments across the world. Having said that, I believe the biggest thing that Australia could learn from Aboriginal people is sustainability - how to manage scarce resources provided by the natural environment for future generations to experience the same, or better, lives than we have enjoyed.	Look after our land and waters and they will look after us. It's simple. Our resources need to be managed holistically and not in isolation.
Do you think Reconciliation is working?	As a principle I think it is a positive thing. For me, the real issue is how it ebbs and flows in the general consciousness of people, the media, etc. It would be a shame if it was just something we thought about for only one week a year, or two weeks if you include NAIDOC, or only when public protests occur, after which it is forgotten.	Yes I agree!
How do Aboriginal people feel when Australians complain about immigrants coming to Australia?	A sense of irony!	Ha ha - so true!
Last Christmas I had an argument with my cousin - she insisted that Aboriginal people all get pensions from the government just for being Aboriginal. Is this true?	No, this has never been true, but is a well-worn myth that has lasted over 40 years and continues to circle around by those who believe it. The fact is, there are Aboriginal programs that are equivalent to mainstream programs, but are branded and delivered differently so that Aboriginal people know it is for them. In relation to other 'special' benefits, all governments deliver support programs to areas based on need and backed by data. There are support programs for farmers, small businesses, people with a disability, etc – why are they not subject to the same myth?	Yes I agree. I got a free education - I went to public school! Was that a 'special benefit'?

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	Austudy and Abstudy are identical in nature, just branded differently.	
How can it be proven that Aboriginal history dates back 65,000 years?	Science & Technology.	Oral history that has been passed on through generations. Aboriginal people have always known we have always been here. We don't need to prove it - but yes, science and technology supports that for us.



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