COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
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FOREWORD

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – Australia (AFFA) embraces diversity and the unique insights and values that different cultures bring to the Australian way of life. Recognising this diversity, we seek to respond to the different needs of our clients to ensure we deliver the best possible outcomes. A key principle is to make engaging with Indigenous clients and taking account of their particular needs a normal part of delivering our programs and services.

Indigenous people are important in agriculture, fishing and forestry industries and AFFA needs to be more inclusive of this important client group. We recognise the importance of ensuring that all client groups, including Indigenous people, have ready access to our programs and services. We have worked with some success to improve accessibility in a number of areas, including the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy, the Agriculture – Advancing Australia FarmBis Program and the Indigenous Landcare Facilitators Network.

We also recognise that Indigenous people have many skills and abilities to contribute both as AFFA employees and as representatives on our boards and committees. I am therefore keen to ensure staff are aware of the most effective ways to engage and interact with this group. In working with Indigenous people towards this goal, AFFA is seeking to raise awareness of their cultures. It is hoped that this will help us tap into the wealth of knowledge and experience they can bring to the design of our programs and services as well as actively consulting them on issues of mutual interest. We also need to work together to ensure there are no barriers to their full participation.

AFFA’s approach to Indigenous clients aligns with the Framework to Advance Indigenous Reconciliation released by the Council of Australian Governments in 2000. This is being implemented by all government agencies and by way of specific action plans for the agricultural, fishing and forestry sectors by the Primary Industries Ministerial Council and the Natural Resources Management Ministerial Council.

Through this guide we are endeavouring to raise awareness and in turn give Indigenous people the opportunity to use their unique skills to create their own economic prosperity in agriculture, fishing and forestry. Please join us in working to achieve these outcomes.

Michael J Taylor
Secretary
INTRODUCTION

AFFA has developed this guide for staff, which highlights the cultural values of Indigenous people, particularly their focus on community and the importance of the land and the sea to their cultural identity.

We hope this guide will help ensure our programs and services are readily accessible to our Indigenous clients. While the guide focuses on Indigenous people as clients, some of the principles discussed apply equally to our Indigenous employees, and these are highlighted throughout the publication.

Australian Indigenous culture varies between each tribe or clan. Many Indigenous people feel strongly about the impact European settlement has had on their past and present, often disadvantaged, circumstances. These guidelines can give us only a small cultural insight, but we hope they will help us be more culturally aware and better understand the Indigenous people we work with, either as clients or as colleagues.

“When Indigenous people get a pastoral property, the community comes with it. Some people may just want to live on the land and others will want a commercial enterprise. The resultant dynamics are very interesting and take a long time to work out. A big issue is who owns what. It is necessary to separate the commercial from the traditional. They eventually work it out but it involves trade-offs so that traditional owners get some advantages. But funding bodies need to understand that it is very difficult to deal with the commercial without also dealing with the social.”

Research organisation employee, NT
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

WHO ARE THEY?

Who is an Indigenous person? Commonwealth legislation defines Aboriginal as
‘a person who is a member of the Aboriginal race of Australia’.

For many years a three-part administrative definition has also been used:
‘An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person 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 or she lives.’

Although this guide uses the word ‘Indigenous’ to describe both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, it is important to note that people from these backgrounds identify themselves as two distinct cultural entities.

‘Indigenous Australia’ is made up of about 40 different nations, with the majority of Indigenous people preferring to use their own terms to describe their identity (ie nation, country, tribe, skin, language, Aboriginal or Indigenous). Indigenous people will let you know what they prefer. The following are common terms for Indigenous people in the States and Territories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New South Wales</th>
<th>Koori</th>
<th>Queensland</th>
<th>Murri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Koori</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>Nunga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Koorie</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Nooyngah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Palawa</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Tribal or Traditional name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Spelling can vary (Reed-Gilbert 2002)

THE STATISTICS

In the 1996 Census, 386,049 people identified themselves as Indigenous Australians. Projections are that this number will increase significantly in coming years because of natural increases and because more people are identifying themselves as ‘Indigenous’ on census forms for the first time. On current rates, the Indigenous population will grow at an estimated rate of 5.3 per cent a year to reach 649,000 in 2006. The Indigenous population is also younger; 40 per cent of the population is aged under 15 years compared with 21 per cent of the total population.

Some 3,369 Indigenous people identified themselves in the Census as being engaged in agriculture, fishing and forestry. While this is not high, an
estimated 16 per cent of Australia’s land area is under Indigenous ownership or management, and this is expected to increase further. Much of this is pastoral land and presents continuing land and water management challenges.

“Ngaangyatjarra people have what many people don’t have and that is a continuous association with the land – this is a powerful resource – their ‘corporate knowledge’ can always value add to land management requirements for the wider society. But what to do to create employment is a very difficult issue.”

Regional Indigenous organisation employee, WA
ASPECTS OF INDIGENOUS CULTURE

CULTURAL AFFILIATION

Indigenous people have strong and complex ties to the land, sea and community. In 1994, around 60 per cent of Indigenous people identified with a clan, tribal or language group, over 84 per cent saw elders as important and 75 per cent recognised an area as their homeland.

LANGUAGE

Before European settlement there were between 600 and 700 different groups or ‘tribes’ of Indigenous people in Australia, and some 200 to 250 different languages and dialects. Today only about 30 of these languages are in regular use. In 1994, 14 per cent of Indigenous people spoke an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language as their main language – this may be more prevalent in remote areas and the Torres Strait and important to note when seeking to work with Indigenous people.

INDIGENOUS SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Indigenous people and communities have their own rites, beliefs, customs and laws, that are important to respect if you wish to successfully engage with them.

Some characteristics may be common across Indigenous society, including a focus on strong mutual obligations to an extended family, where individualism may often be secondary to social cohesion and cultural responsibility. Indigenous people may place great importance on sharing, for example, traditional cultural ties can dictate that someone’s wealth is shared among kin. Not maintaining relationships and obligations could lead to the loss of Indigenous identity and support of the community.

In brief, Indigenous characteristics might include:

• a clear distinction between the role of men and women in the community group. For example, this could mean that men have responsibility for animal business such as hunting, and women for plant business;
• the use of totems, because of their affinity with all aspects of the environment Indigenous people can have totems that link strongly to the Dreamtime;
• Indigenous communities may confer important roles on people, such as being an elder or law keeper. These roles bring great respect and responsibility;
• elders are a key focus of a community;
• it may be considered inappropriate for Indigenous people to make decisions without referring to the elders or Aboriginal law;
• being a part of a community has certain responsibilities. In Indigenous society family can come first, not work and this can be significant when considering workplace issues;
• children are raised not only by their parents but also by their parents’ siblings, who are also considered to be mothers and fathers;
• in some communities, an Indigenous person may not be considered an adult until they are 30 or older;
• being publicly singled out or ‘shown up’ can be humiliating or shameful for an Indigenous person. This can make face-to-face discussion or contact less effective, but sitting side by side and having a long yarn could have a positive impact;
• it can be disrespectful to speak of the deceased and on some occasions people with the same name as a person who has died will have to change their name;
• respect can be shown through body language, such as not looking more senior people in the eye; and
• not using ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ does not mean disrespect, it is just that they are not a part of traditional concepts.

Some communities still practise traditional rites. This can mean, for example, at particular times of the year there may be ceremonies requiring customs or protocols to be followed when traveling in certain areas or communities. You should also be aware that you may need a permit to travel on traditional land. Breaches can result in fines, not to mention the negative impact that this may have on future relationships. You can seek details on who to contact about permits through the regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission offices.

Another example may be the formal acknowledgment of traditional owners when visiting their land. This is a sign of respect, acknowledging those who have gone before and those that are carrying on the traditions today. Some people, as a matter of course, now start meetings by formally acknowledging the traditional owners of the land that they are on, even when they are not present. For example, if you worked in Barton, Canberra, you could acknowledge the Ngunawal people when opening a meeting.
WHEN AND WHY YOU SHOULD INCLUDE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Many Indigenous Australians today experience high poverty levels and often lack basic needs of food, clean water and shelter. Priorities for many Indigenous people include maintaining cultural values and language and having access to basic health and education services. Managing a complex economic enterprise is often, understandably, given a lower priority to basic services. This focus is shifting and there is a growing call from Indigenous communities wanting economic independence and self-management.

The main reason for consulting or seeking representation is to ensure a better policy, program or service ‘fit’ for all of our clients. The diversity of our client base means we need to be flexible and innovative when consulting or developing policies, programs and services. When the interests of Indigenous people are part of these, you should consult Indigenous stakeholders to ensure outcomes are appropriate for everybody.

Committees, reference groups or working parties maybe used to increase stakeholder involvement. Involving Indigenous stakeholders in these processes will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience and increased ownership of the initiative.
COMMUNICATING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Your approach when communicating with Indigenous people will be different depending on the community’s location. Each has to be recognised as culturally distinct, whether it is in a remote or rural location, or in a provincial town or major city.

Indigenous communities and organisations have strong and established networks with an outstanding level of skill and experience. These networks and corporate knowledge are not difficult to access. It is simply a matter of taking the time to make some strategic phone calls (ie the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Office), talking to people so you have an understanding of their communities issues, their needs and aspirations, and then develop your approach. Details of key indigenous organisations are listed at the end of this guide.

Person to person meetings are excellent if there is the time and budget to travel. The benefit of arranging a meeting is that there will be a commitment by both parties to attend and address the subject of the meeting. The next best thing is a phone call; email is okay, but remember you are just one more person on the list and not all rural and remote locations have adequate information technology.

Indigenous newspapers, magazines and radio services (see AFFA Public Relations for details) are also effective for getting information into these networks.

Best practice with any communication activity includes:

- establish a rapport – have a general discussion first and take the time to gain attention;
- speak clearly (no acronyms) and ensure written and verbal material is tailored to the audience – also remember, English may be the second language and an interpreter may be needed;
- take the time to explain what you are doing and why their involvement is important;
- don’t raise expectations – let them know what you expect from the process;
- don’t assume they know as much about the issue as you do;
- determine how much they know about government or government processes;
- encourage them to talk and listen to what they are saying and reflect it back to ensure you have the messages clear;
- be prepared to take longer than you might with other stakeholders – it’s important not to rush or push;
- silence doesn’t mean they don’t understand - they may be listening, remaining non-committal or waiting for community support;
- negotiate an outcome; and
• give feedback on how things went and what happened as a result of the contact - this may help both parties in future consultations.

In terms of the physical setting, think about sitting side by side instead of face to face. If in doubt about what is appropriate, discreetly seek guidance. It’s okay not to be all knowing – they will appreciate and welcome your desire to respect their values and customs.

You need to ask permission before taking photos or filming, and seek written permission to use the photos or film. Be clear upfront, or you may find you have to recall and reprint your publications or edit your film. This is particularly relevant if a person dies.
THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN SEEKING INDIGENOUS INVOLVEMENT

You should keep the following in mind when seeking Indigenous involvement:

• identify the sort of representation required in the first instance;
• work through local Indigenous agencies to find the right person or group to link to and to get information on the best way to approach them. It is important to get this right to ensure you don't create divisions in the community;
• because of the great variety in Indigenous land ownership and cultural background across Australia you may need to take a regional approach;
• some Indigenous communities can be alcohol and smoke free;
• dressing modestly when visiting a community provides an equal footing – remember some communities are economically disadvantaged;
• Indigenous people may be hesitant to say that they speak for anyone other than themselves and you will need to factor this into your approach;
• Indigenous people working for government agencies may sometimes need additional support in managing their professional obligations as well as their family and community obligations; and
• even in the one region there may be a number of key Indigenous organisations that have staff with valuable experience. You may need to do some preliminary research into who they are, what they do and the experience and corporate knowledge that can be called upon to assist both Indigenous people in the region and AFFA.

If you ask Indigenous people to serve on committees and other bodies you need to give them the resources to be fully involved. There can be great physical demands in sitting on a committee and this applies particularly to Indigenous people. They may have important knowledge but are not able to participate properly because of distance, poor transport and cultural barriers such as not being comfortable in a group that assumes high-level English literacy skills.

If you invite Indigenous representatives to join in an activity, consider whether or not assistance will be required so the person is not disadvantaged. This may include sitting fees, travel costs, company directors training and mentoring.

The need to be neutral is important. Don’t get involved in politics. Showing empathy is appropriate, but it is best to remain neutral.

“There needs to be an appreciation of what Aboriginal land use is. It may be a range of things and include managing naturally occurring populations of turtles or dugongs rather than operating a sheep or cattle station. Land management may include fire management and the end result is to find employment for people looking after country. This may involve funds from a variety of sources such as CDEP to manage land for a variety of reasons.”

Commonwealth Government employee, NT
KNOWING WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL

In seeking to ensure AFFA’s programs and services are accessible to Indigenous clients and that it becomes an employer of first choice for Indigenous people, AFFA aims to:

• improve awareness of Indigenous cultures and best practice communication and policy/program/service development approaches throughout AFFA;
• increase the number of Indigenous clients aware of, and accessing, AFFA programs and services;
• increase the number of Indigenous people represented on AFFA related advisory committees and boards;
• adopt workplace practices that support Indigenous employees; and
• increase the number of Indigenous people employed in AFFA.

You will know you have been successful when you develop policies, programs and services with Indigenous people and not for them.

You will have considered your target clients and taken steps to ensure that their views are represented in working groups and stakeholder consultations.

If you are developing performance indicators you should consider the above aims and ensure you collect data through the life of an activity to help evaluate its success or otherwise. A measure of success could be that the number of Indigenous people participating in programs is in proportion to those working in portfolio industries.
**WHO TO CONTACT**

If you are consulting Indigenous people, you should seek advice on possible contacts, local protocols and customs. Regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission offices are recommended as the first contact. The following details on key Indigenous organisations and State/Territory government contacts may also be helpful. Understanding and respecting local protocols and customs will help you make the most of any consultation process.

**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF KEY INDIGENOUS ORGANISATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction and legislation</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Potential for interaction</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)</td>
<td>Deliver a Business Development Program with an annual budget of $36 million but more demand than can be met. Usually considers assistance for enterprise development up to $300,000. Requests for more than this are passed on to the IBA.</td>
<td>The ATSIC commercial development unit is based in Brisbane and deals with rural enterprises. If AFFA develops specific programs for Indigenous people then it could do so in partnership with this unit or use it’s corporate knowledge and experience in program design.</td>
<td>Ph: (02) 6121 4000 Website: <a href="http://www.atsic.gov.au/">http://www.atsic.gov.au/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Business Australia (IBA)</td>
<td>IBA’s role is to assist and enhance Indigenous self-management and economic self-sufficiency. It is also required to advance the commercial and economic interests of Indigenous people by accumulating and using a substantial capital asset for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</td>
<td>The IBA is based in Canberra and could be consulted when developing programs.</td>
<td>Ph: (02) 6285 3031 Fax: (02) 6285 2348 Website: <a href="http://www.iba.gov.au/">http://www.iba.gov.au/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC)</td>
<td>Complement native title and address the disposessed Indigenous people who would be unable to have their land needs met through the native title process. Purchases properties</td>
<td>The ILC is now a major force in land acquisition and management throughout Australia.</td>
<td>Ph: 1800 818 490 Email address: <a href="mailto:ilcinfo@ilc.gov.au">ilcinfo@ilc.gov.au</a> Website: <a href="http://www.ilc.gov.au/">http://www.ilc.gov.au/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Brisbane and Western Division office is in Perth.

Land Fund and Indigenous Land Corporation (ATSIC Amendment Act 1995) and holds them before divesting them to Indigenous owners.

| Land Enterprise Australia (LEA) | National with the office in Canberra. | This is the property management subsidiary of the ILC. | LEA holds corporate knowledge and skill in Indigenous land management, particularly in the pastoral industry. | Ph: (02) 6269 2500 Fax: (02) 6285 4300 Email: leainfo@lea.ilc.gov.au Website: http://www.ilc.gov.au/le/a/home.asp |

Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) TSRA is a Commonwealth statutory authority established in 1994 under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989. TSRA aims to strengthen the economic, social and cultural development of the Torres Strait to improve the lifestyle and wellbeing of Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people living in the region. TSRA could be consulted when developing programs. Ph: (07) 4069 0700 Website: http://www.tsra.gov.au/ |

### STATE AND TERRITORY INDIGENOUS ORGANISATIONS

**Tasmania**
Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Department of Premier and Cabinet
6th floor, 144 Macquarie Street, HOBART TAS 7001
03 6233 3671  www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/oas

**Victoria**
Department of Natural Resource and Environment
8 Nicholson Street’ EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

**New South Wales**
Department of Aboriginal Affairs
Level 5/ 83 Clarence Street, SYDNEY NSW 2000
02 9290 8700  www.daa.nsw.gov.au

**Australian Capital Territory**
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Unit
Chief Minister’s Department
Cnr. Constitution Avenue & London Circuit, CANBERRA ACT 2600
02 6207 6836
www.act.gov.au
(Follow links to Chief Minister’s Department)
Queensland
Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy
46 Charlotte Street, BRISBANE QLD 4000
07 3224 2519    www.datsipd.qld.gov.au

Northern Territory
Office of Aboriginal Affairs
Level 1 / Darwin Central Office Suites, 21 Knuckey St
DARWIN NT 0800 08 8924 4225

Western Australia
Department of Aboriginal Affairs
Level 1/ 197 St Georges Terrace, PERTH WA 6000
08 9235 8000    www.aad.wa.gov.au

South Australia
Department of State Aboriginal Affairs
22 Pulteney Street, ADELAIDE SA 5000
08 8226 8900    www.dosaa.sa.gov.au
REFERENCES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Department of Primary Industries and Energy (1997) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rural Industry Strategy, Canberra.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (1999), Answering the Myths and Misconceptions about Indigenous Australians.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Aboriginal Australia. Series on different aspects of Indigenous people and their culture published and distributed between 1989 and 1997.


Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – Australia (2001), Client Service Charter 2001-02, Canberra.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – Australia (1999), Guidelines for reaching our clients – women, Canberra.


Queensland Government (1998), Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic development strategy, Brisbane.

Reed-Gilbert, K (2002), Aboriginal Culture, History & Heritage Training Program course notes.
“We need to develop a partnership approach. We would love to work with AFFA to help achieve this. The vast majority of requests from Cape York people fall into AFFA’s charter. We need to sit at the table and put all resources on the table and then allocate them to meet the broadest possible range of needs. Deliver results in partnerships. Recognise expertise of regional bodies. The regional body can interpret the program and then show how it can be delivered to meet AFFA objectives.”

Regional Indigenous organisation employee, Qld