



**ROTTNEST
ISLAND
AUTHORITY**

ABORIGINAL REFERENCE GUIDE

A practical guide for all Rottnest Island Authority staff, volunteers and commercial businesses.



NIDJA WADJEMUP, WHADJUK NOONGAR BOODJA

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people are advised that this publication contains images of deceased persons.

The information contained in this guide that describes Aboriginal cultural heritage, customs and spirituality should not be shared without first seeking permission as this is regarded as intellectual property. See page 24 for more information on Aboriginal Intellectual Property.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Rottneest Island Authority kaadatj Wadjak Noongar moort. Baalap Wadjemup kaaradjiny, RIA acknowledge Whadjuk Noongar families. They Wadjemup caring, baalabang malayin nakolak-ngat wer wirn kalyakoorl noyinand koort boodja-k wer kep-ak. their culture and spirits always connected Island-to and water-to.

Ngalak kaadatj nedingar, birdiya wer boordakan Noongar moort. Ngalak karnadjil kaadatj We acknowledge ancestors, Elders and future Noongar families. We truly acknowledge men maaman wer noba wirn ali kalka nginow noyiyang Wadjemap ngardak boodja-k. and boys' spirits who still remain connected Wadjemup under ground-in.

Baalabang moort maambart-boort, ngooni-boort, kongk-boort wer Birdiya-boort. Their family's father-without, brother-without, uncle-without and Elder-without.

Translation courtesy
of Sharon Gregory







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An aerial photograph of a coastal landscape. A paved road curves through the scene, separating a body of water on the left from a larger, reddish-brown water body on the right. The land is covered with green vegetation and some dead, bleached trees. The water on the left is a pale, milky color, while the water on the right is a deep, rusty red. The overall scene is a mix of natural and man-made elements.

INTRODUCTION

This guide aims to assist Rottnest Island Authority staff and volunteers, and commercial businesses operating on the island to confidently understand stories and information relating to Wadjemup's Aboriginal history and culture.

Users of the guide can learn about Wadjemup's Aboriginal history and culture, gain greater understanding of appropriate terminology, and be better informed on protocols and communications.

This guide is not intended to be a definitive source of information, but it does provide pointers to further reading and information, in particular, where to learn more about Rottnest Island's Aboriginal history and culture.

Wadjemup holds a complex significance to Aboriginal communities across Western Australia, due to its use as an Aboriginal prison and the Aboriginal prisoners that are buried there. In 1994 the WA Government recognised the island as the largest site of Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in Australia.

The Wadjemup Project

The Wadjemup Project was established in 2020 and will be an important large-scale act of recognition related to the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal people. Its focus is to determine the most appropriate and authentic way of commemorating the Aboriginal men and boys who are buried on the island, as well as the use of the old prison building in the Settlement known as the Quod.

As Wadjemup is part of Whadjuk Noongar traditional country, the Whadjuk Noongar people are putting in place cultural authority protocols to lead engagement with other Noongar and Aboriginal people across WA.

Wadjemup Whadjuk Cultural Authority (WWCA) – creation of a cultural authority framework

In 2020, through a Noongar led process, a Wadjemup Whadjuk Cultural Authority Reference Group (WWCARG) was established in 2021 to lead State-wide consultation regarding the future of the Burial Ground and the Quod.

Membership included Whadjuk Noongar Traditional Owners Neville Collard, Herbert Bropho, Farley Garlett, the late Margaret Colbung, Elizabeth Hayden, Karen Jacobs, Vivienne Hansen and Sandra Harben.

Showing respect

Visitors to Wadjemup are encouraged to acknowledge and pay respects to the Whadjuk people's ancestors and their Elders past, present and future.

The Wadjemup Aboriginal Reference Group

The Wadjemup Aboriginal Reference Group is a Cabinet-appointed advisory group to the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA). It was established in 2017 and their role is to advise RIA on all Aboriginal cultural matters in relation to the day-to-day functioning of the island. The current members are:

- Pamela Thorley – a Wargyl Keip Noongar woman
- Brendan Moore – a Whadjuk Noongar man and descendant of a Wadjemup Aboriginal prisoner
- Lindsay Dean – a Wargyl Keip Noongar, Bardi and Karajarri man
- Walter McGuire – a Whadjuk Noongar man
- Casey Kickett – a Noongar woman from Whadjuk, Yued and Ballardong and Wardandi countries
- Kathleen Musulin – a Malgana/Yawuru woman

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WADJEMUP



Geological history

Before the last ice age, the area of land that currently exists as the island was connected to the mainland and part of a larger region known as Biidjiigordup. During this time, the Whadjuk people would gather there for hunting, trade, ceremony and important meetings.

When the last ice age ended, sea levels rose, and this caused part of the landmass of Biidjiigordup to disappear underwater. As a result, the islands of Wadjemup / Rottnest Island, Ngooloomayup / Carnac Island and Meeandip / Garden Island formed off the coast of Walyalup / Fremantle.

Recent discovery of artefacts found on Wadjemup predating 6,500 years ago provides archaeological evidence of this event, but this period of geological change was also captured by the Whadjuk people through the Dreamtime (Nyitting) stories that they passed down through many generations.

This is one story about the changes that affected Biidjiigordup that was told by Whadjuk people over thousands of years.

Care should be taken when explaining the cultural history of Wadjemup to third parties. It is not appropriate for non-Aboriginal people to talk in detail about Noongar spirituality or customs. Noongar protocols are very different to those in mainstream non-Aboriginal cultures regarding the sharing of knowledge and history.

Spiritual connection

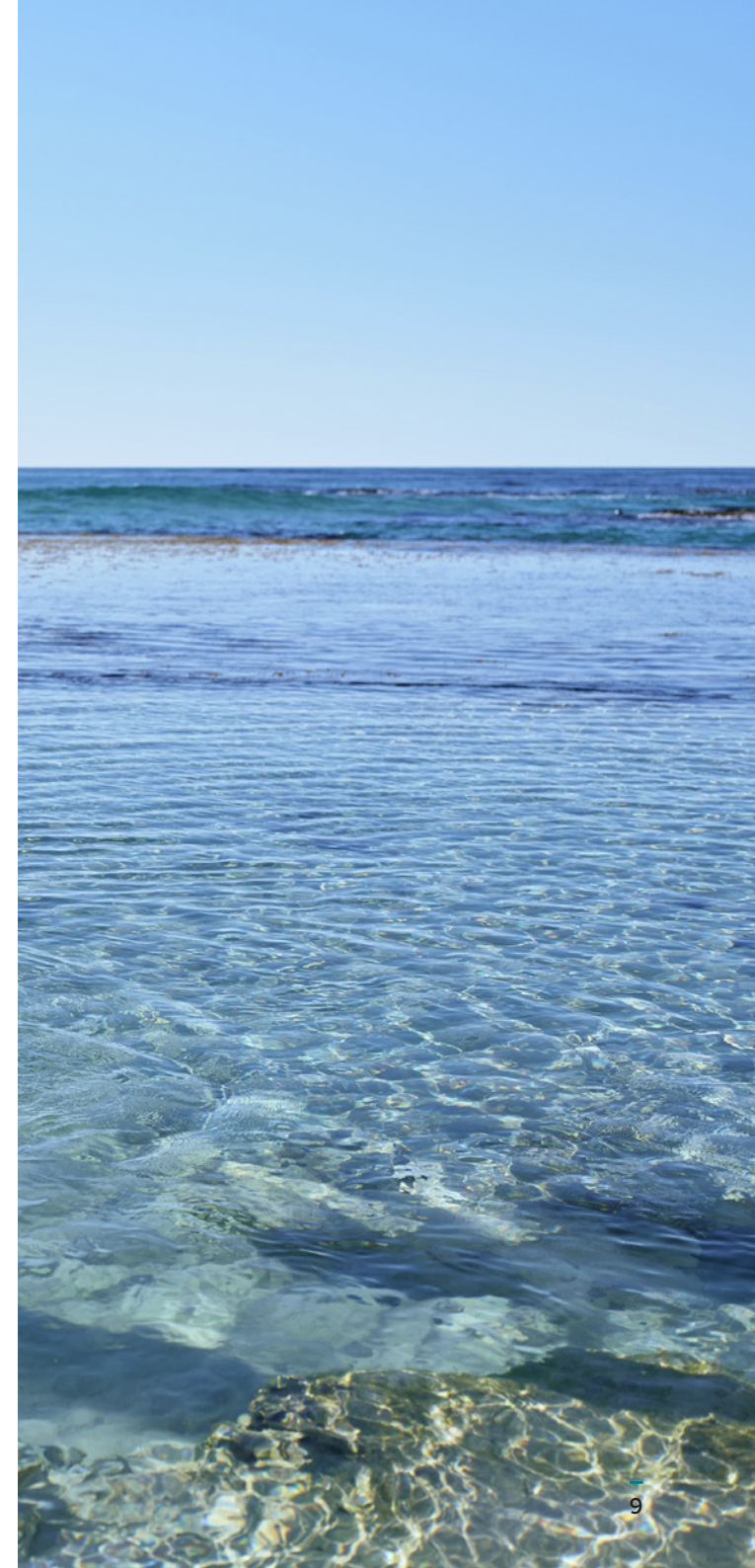
After Wadjemup was cut off from the mainland there is no cultural or archaeological evidence indicating that the Whadjuk people continued to travel to or inhabit the island. However, Wadjemup still remains significant to Whadjuk cultural beliefs related to 'life after death' and became known as the resting place of the spirits – a place of transition between the physical and spiritual world.

Some Whadjuk people believe that the spirit of the deceased travels to Wadjemup during its journey towards to the afterlife.

The island's name

The name of Wadjemup that the Traditional Owners, the Whadjuk people, gave to the island refers to 'place across the water where the spirits go to rest'.

After becoming known as Rottnest Island following first contact by European seafarers in the 17th century, the Aboriginal name of Wadjemup / Rottnest Island is now being adopted and used as the more appropriate term for the island.



Prison history

From 1838 to 1931 Rottnest Island was established as a prison for Aboriginal people. If prisoners survived their incarceration on the island, they were unable to return to their families and communities as they were often hundreds to thousands of kilometres away and had no means of transportation. This created long-lasting fractures within familial, cultural and social structures throughout WA's Aboriginal community.

Almost a century of Aboriginal incarceration on Rottnest Island began when the first six Aboriginal prisoners were brought to the island in 1838. The island was used as an Aboriginal prison until 1904 (except for a short period of closure from 1849 to 1855), and subsequent forced labour camp for prisoners until 1931.

Around 4,000 Aboriginal men and boys from all over the WA were incarcerated on the island, many of them having been transported in chains for thousands of miles.

The map on page 18 shows where prisoners were moved from and the many language groups they belonged to.

Aboriginal prisoners were forced to construct a large number of buildings and other structures on the island including the Quod, seawall, cottages in the main settlement, the old mill and haystore, churches, lighthouses and other infrastructure.

373 Aboriginal prisoners died during the time the prison was operating. While most deaths were caused by sicknesses due to overcrowding, poor nutrition and introduced diseases, it is recorded that five prisoners were hanged. The graves of the prisoners are in the Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground which is located within the Settlement, adjacent to the Quod.

When the Aboriginal prison officially closed in 1904, a forced labour camp was established and Aboriginal prisoners were used to build roads and other works on the island until 1931.



Development as a tourist destination

Closure of the prison brought Rottnest Island's possibilities as a recreational destination to the forefront, and in 1917 the Rottnest Island Board of Control was appointed to manage the island. The island was also declared a Class A Reserve and became a destination for public recreation and tourism. The former prison buildings, including the Quod were converted into holiday accommodation and over time these developments largely obscured their former brutal use.

Heritage sites

There are registered Aboriginal heritage sites on the island which include Dreaming sites, archaeological sites and the Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground. These areas are protected under provisions of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 making it an offence to alter or interfere with them.

The survivors

Ancestors of the men and boys who survived their incarceration have a challenging experience with the island. While they are thankful that their relatives did not perish, they are still affected by knowing that so many others did. Sharing and passing down the stories of their ancestors' experiences before, during and after their imprisonment is an important process of not only personal, but also community, healing and understanding. It also ensures that the prisoners histories are not forgotten and the individual experiences of those who were taken from their lands are remembered and acknowledged.

A formal apology

The State Government issued a formal apology to the Aboriginal people of WA when RIA released its fourth Reconciliation Action Plan in 2021. The apology acknowledged the pain and sadness that Wadjemup holds for Aboriginal peoples in WA through its use as a prison. The apology also acknowledged how the past management of RIA played a historically significant role in the obfuscation of the prison history and showed a lack of respect for the cultural significance of the island to the Aboriginal community.



Apology


Wadjemup is a place of pain and sadness for many Western Australian Aboriginal peoples.

Between 1838 and 1931 the Island was used as an Aboriginal prison. State records indicate that approximately 4000 Aboriginal men and boys from Western Australia were imprisoned on the Island. At least 373 of these prisoners died in custody and were buried in an area currently referred to as the Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground.

In 1907, the Colonial Secretary's department drafted a scheme to transform the Island from an Aboriginal penal settlement to a recreation and holiday destination. As part of this transformation, the area where the burial ground is located was repurposed as a camping ground known as Tentland and the Quod (main prison building) was converted into a hostel. Over time the history of the Island as a place of incarceration was concealed.

The Rottnest Island Authority (RIA), as the statutory authority established in 1987, and vested with the management of recreational and holiday facilities on the Island, has played a historically significant role in the obfuscation of the Aboriginal prison history. It is acknowledged that many past practices of those entrusted with management of the Island were not respectful of Aboriginal peoples or the cultural significance of the Island. We recognise that this has caused great pain and anguish within Aboriginal communities. For this we apologise.

The closure of Tentland in 2007 and the return of the Quod to RIA management in 2018 marked important steps forward in the RIA journey towards reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples. We will continue to work in collaboration with the Whadjuk Noongar people and the wider Aboriginal communities of Western Australia to promote reconciliation and acknowledge the past.

An aerial photograph of a vibrant coral reef. The water is a mix of deep blue and bright turquoise, revealing the intricate patterns of the coral below. Several divers in yellow and blue gear are scattered across the reef, some appearing to be in a line. The overall scene is dynamic and colorful.

DEFINITIONS AND TERMS

Aboriginal (with capital A): Indigenous inhabitants of the mainland of Australia, including Tasmania. The term “aboriginal” without capitalisation is a generic term referring to native peoples of a particular area.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples/ Cultures: This is the most correct reference for Australian Indigenous cultures and peoples. This term recognises the distinct cultural differences between the two broader groups while also recognising their unity as Australia’s First Peoples. The term illustrates that there are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups within Australia i.e. they are not one homogenous group but a diverse group of hundreds of nations (or cultural groups) and clans within those nations.

Aboriginality: A person of Australian Aboriginal descent, identifying as Aboriginal and being accepted as such by the Aboriginal community.

Acknowledgement of Country (with capitals): An opportunity for anyone (regardless of ethnicity) to show respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal peoples to Country. It can be given by both non-Indigenous people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are no set protocols or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, though often a statement may take the following form: “I’d like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the (people) of the (nation) and pay my respects to Elders past and present.” Similar to a Welcome to Country, an Acknowledgement of Country is conducted at the beginning of a meeting, speech or formal occasion.

Artefact: An object made by a human being, typically one of cultural or historical interest.

Assimilation: A 19th century theory that Aboriginal people should be ‘civilised’, by becoming Christians and living as Europeans did.

Aunty and Uncle: Terms used as a mark of respect and affection between Aboriginal people. As these terms imply close relationships, non-Aboriginal people should not use them unless invited to do so or until permission is sought.

Chert: A hard, opaque rock varying colour from light to dark, composed of silica with a fine-grained texture. It occurs as nodules (flint) or, less often, in massive beds. Chert is one of the hardest and sharpest rocks which Whadjuk people used for ceremony and making knives. It was not used for spears. Several chert artefacts have been found on Wadjemup.

Colonialism: The period of history from the late 15th to the 20th century, when European nation states established colonies on other continents. It meant the forcible takeover and exploitation of Indigenous peoples and their land, ignoring their laws and customs, and their rights.

Contemporary and Traditional: While the majority of Aboriginal people reside in urban areas, traditional practices, customs and values continue in contemporary environments. It is generally accepted that Aboriginal people identify strongly with their traditional group and employ a diversity of cultural practices, even when living away from their community. Care should be taken with the use of the terms “contemporary” and “traditional” when referring to Aboriginal groups and practices.

Corroboree: The term was first used by Europeans to describe Aboriginal ceremonies which include song and dance. The Aboriginal word is caribberie and the ceremonies pass on stories of the Dreaming or Dreamtime. The Noongar word for dance is ke-ning and there are different dances by different people from different places. The use of ochre and designs indicate the type of ceremony and which language group is performing.

Country (with capital C): The term used by Aboriginal people to refer to the land to which they and their extended family belong, but also covers all their values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with a particular area and so both a spiritual and physical connection. Every part of Australia is considered Aboriginal land and Aboriginal people are bound to a particular territory of land through spiritual links and obligations of care and custodianship to family, community, lore and country. The Noongar word is boodja.

Culture: The customary and traditional ways of living, with a set of common understandings, shared by members of a group or community. For Noongar people this includes attachment to land and the usage of it; language, identity, relationships, and ways of living and working.

(The) Dreaming / Dreamtime (with a capital D): The Dreaming, or Nyitting in Noongar, has different names for different Aboriginal groups across Australia. The Dreaming refers to Aboriginal creation stories, which give meaning to everything past, present and future.

Elders (with capital E): The custodians of Aboriginal knowledge. Elders are individuals who have gained respect and recognition as a custodian of knowledge and lore and beliefs.

First Australians and First Nations Peoples (with capitals): First Australians recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia. First Nations Peoples recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the sovereign people of this land. It goes further than 'First Australians' as it recognises various language groups as separate and unique sovereign nations.

Gaol: A place for the confinement of people accused or convicted of a crime – old spelling. More often spelt as jail in modern writing.

Governor: An official appointed to govern a town or region, the representative of the British Crown in a colony or in a Commonwealth state that regards the monarch as head of state.

Language Group: There are over 400 (and up to 700) different Aboriginal language groups across Australia, all linked to particular geographical areas. The term 'language group' or 'dialectal' group is used in preference to the outdated term 'tribe'. In Noongar country the 14 language groups are Amangu, Ballardong, Yued, Whadjuk, Wardandi, Kaniyang, Pinjarup, Goreng, Bibbulmun, Wilman, Minang, Njaki Njaki, Wudjari and Njunja. See page 18 for the map of WA Aboriginal Language Groups.

Lore: A body of traditions and knowledge on a subject or held by a particular group, typically passed from person to person by word of mouth. The difference between 'law' and 'lore' is: law means a rule or a collection of rules (as in western understanding); lore is knowledge or tradition passed from generation to generation. Sometimes the two words do become a little confused but the key difference is that western law can be changed (at will) and Aboriginal lore remains intact and unchanged but within it carries rules, obligations, cultural understandings, etc.

Men's Business: Aboriginal practices exclusive to men and boys.

Mob: An extended family group, living and functioning as a small society.

NAIDOC/NAIDOC Week: NAIDOC originally stood for 'National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee'. This committee was once responsible for organising national activities during NAIDOC Week and its acronym has since become the name of the week itself. NAIDOC week is celebrated by all Australians every year in July to highlight the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For more information, visit naidoc.org.au.

Native Title: Native title is the recognition by Australian law of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's traditional rights and interests in land and waters held under traditional law and custom. The Native Title Act (NTA) became law when it was passed by the Australian Parliament in 1993, but was first recognised in Australian law in 1982 when a claim was lodged in the High Court of Australia and 10 years later was upheld in the Mabo decision and overturned the ruling that Australia was Terra Nullius. It established a process for claiming and recognising native title lands and waters in Australia. The NTA aims to balance Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' rights to land, and sets out how native title rights and interests fit within Australian law. More info. at nativetitle.org.au

Noongar: The name for the Aboriginal people of the south-west of Western Australia. Also spelt as Nyungar, Nyoongar, Nyoongah, Nyungah, Nyugah and Yunga. RIA's preferred spelling is Noongar. The Traditional Country of the Noongar people covers the entire south-west area of WA from Leeman in the north-west to beyond Cape Arid in the south-east. Archaeological evidence has established that Noongar people have lived in this area for at least 45,000 years. They are one of the largest cultural blocks of Aboriginal people in Australia. There are 14 language groups within the Noongar community and approximately 30,000 Noongar people living in the south-west.

Quod: Colonial English slang for prison or jail.

Reconciliation: Reconciliation is about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples, for the benefit of all Australians. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Australia's colonial history is characterised by devastating land dispossession, violence, and racism. Over the last half-century, however, many significant steps towards reconciliation have been taken. It is an ongoing journey and generations of Australians have fought hard for meaningful change. In a just, equitable and reconciled Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will have the same life chances and choices as non-Indigenous children, and the length and quality of a person's life will not be determined by their racial background. Visit reconciliation.org.au for more information.

Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP): Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement. The RAP program's emphasis on relationships, respect, and opportunities is rooted in mutual collaboration and trust. It gives organisations a framework from which to foster connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There are four RAP types — Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate. These types allow RAP partners to continuously strengthen reconciliation commitments and constantly strive to apply learnings in new ways. Rottneest Island Authority released its fourth RAP, their second Innovate RAP, in November 2021.

Reconciliation Day / Reconciliation Week: Reconciliation Day marks the start of National Reconciliation Week which is held on the first Monday after or on May 27 every year. It is the anniversary of the 1967 referendum when Australians voted to amend two parts of the Constitution that excluded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Following this, the next significant step towards formal reconciliation was The Mabo Decision in 1992 which rejected terra nullius (land belonging to no-one) and recognised First Nations people as traditional custodians of Australia for the first time. National Reconciliation Week (NRW) started in 1996 and since then hundreds of NRW events are held across Australia every year to help all Australians learn about our shared histories, cultures and achievements, and to explore how everyone can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia. More information at reconciliation.org.au

Songlines (with a capital S): A traditional song or story recording a journey made during the Dreamtime. Song cycles are an integral part of how information about Dreaming Tracks is transmitted. These songs often describe different places in the journey of the Ancestor and thus they are a map. It is the last concept that has led to the term 'Songline'. Most of the information about specific details of Songlines and Dreaming Tracks are not for public dissemination and are part of the secret sacred lore of Aboriginal cultures.

Sorry Business: A term used by Aboriginal Australians to refer to the death of a family or community member and the mourning process. It is an important grieving process when someone passes and involves not only immediate family, but an entire community.

Sorry Day: National Sorry Day is observed every year in Australia on 26 May to remember and acknowledge the mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly removed from their families and communities — the Stolen Generations. The first National Sorry Day was in 1998, one year after the "Bringing Them Home" report was tabled in Federal Parliament. The report was a result of a government enquiry into the past policies that caused children to be removed from their families and communities during the 20th century. Sorry Day is an opportunity to acknowledge the strength of the Stolen Generations and their surviving families, and to reflect on how all Australians can play a part in the healing process.

South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council

(SWALSC): The native title representative body of the Noongar people who are the Traditional Owners of the south west of Australia. SWALSC works with members to progress resolution of Noongar native title claims. The body also focusses on advancing and strengthening Noongar culture, language, heritage and society.

The South West Native Title Settlement: is the largest native title settlement in Australian history and commenced in February 2021. The Settlement affects an estimated 30,000 Noongar People and encompasses approximately 200,000 sq km in the south-west of WA. In June 2016 the WA Parliament recognised the Noongar people as the Traditional Owners of this land area. The Settlement resolves the Noongar native title claims in exchange for a package of benefits including the 2016 Act of Parliament, a perpetual trust (established in March 2021), the establishment of six Noongar Regional Corporations and a Central Corporation, as well as Government support to ensure Noongar self-determination and long-term social, cultural and economic opportunities. Additional commitments under the Settlement will start as the seven Noongar corporations are established. More information at noongar.org.au

Traditional Owners (with capitals): the English umbrella term for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners of a territory. The definition of Traditional Owners can vary quite significantly depending on the legislative context but was first recorded in the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth) as meaning: “a local Aboriginal descent group who have common spiritual affiliations to a site on the land, being affiliations that place the group under a primary spiritual responsibility for that site and for the land; and are entitled by Aboriginal tradition to forage as of right over that land”.

Welcome to Country (with capitals):

A traditional cultural protocol where an Elder or representative from a particular nation group welcomes visitors onto their Country, usually through speech, song, dance, smoking ceremony or a combination of all. A Welcome to Country can only be performed by Traditional Owners who have been given permission to welcome visitors onto their traditional land. Providing a Welcome to Country is a paid service.

Whadjuk: The name of the dialectal group from Perth. Whadjuk is situated beneath Yued and above the Pinjarup dialectal groups.

Women’s Business: Aboriginal practices exclusive to women and girls.



KEY ABORIGINAL EVENTS CALENDAR

15 to 21 March: Harmony Week

26 May: National Sorry Day

27 May to 3 June: National Reconciliation Week

First full week in July: NAIDOC Week

August 9: International Day of the World's
Indigenous Peoples

Other significant dates:

19 Sept 2006: Single Noongar Claim.
The day Federal Court Judge, Justice Wilcox,
found that Noongar people have maintained
connection to their land, an area of 193,957sqm
that spans throughout Western Australia.

These events are celebrated each year
and dates may vary.



NAMING PROTOCOLS



People

When referring to or formally introducing Aboriginal people, check their preferences on how you should do this. For example, some people may want to have their cultural heritage included (i.e. Walter McGuire, a Whadjuk Noongar man), others may not.

When referring to Aboriginal people, culture and history always use the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'.

Indigenous, First Australians, Australia's First Peoples are also appropriate terms and can be used to avoid repetition, but the first preference is to use Aboriginal.

Please note that the term 'Aboriginal' is an adjective not a noun, i.e. Aboriginal person, so it should not be used to describe 'an Aboriginal' or 'Aboriginals'. In addition, the term 'Aborigine' will cause offence so should not be used in any context.

Geographical names

Geographical features and places in WA were named by Aboriginal peoples long before the arrival of colonists. The names are not arbitrary, they are intrinsically attached to an Aboriginal group's understanding of its history, culture, rights, and responsibilities to the lands.

Over the past 200 plus years, the European term of Rottnest Island has become the more well-known name for the tourist destination off the coast of Perth. However, given the Wadjemup Project, State Empowerment Strategy and Landgate's Dual Naming Guidelines, dual naming of the island is being implemented so that Wadjemup becomes as well-recognised as Rottnest.

When referring to the island, always write 'Wadjemup / Rottnest Island' when written for the first time, then you can choose to use 'Wadjemup' or 'Rottnest Island' moving forward. They can also be used interchangeably. If you are writing a longer piece, revert back to the full naming convention for each new section.

Please note: the Aboriginal name appears first with the non-Aboriginal name occurring second, separated with a solidus (/) with a space on either side.

When displayed on signage, both 'Wadjemup' and 'Rottnest Island' need to be in the same font type, size, style, and colour.

Never refer to Wadjemup / Rottnest Island as:

- Rottnest Island, Wadjemup
- Wadjemup, Rottnest Island
- The Island
- The Rottnest Island
- The Wadjemup

EVENTS & MEETINGS

(BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE)



Communication protocols

Understanding the purpose and requirements of both a Welcome to Country and an Acknowledgement of Country as well as other cultural protocols. This section details how and why these practices are important, how and when they should be conducted, and by whom.

Both protocols act to pay respect to the traditional custodians, ancestors and continuing cultural, spiritual and religious practices of Noongar people. They also help to increase awareness and recognition of Aboriginal peoples and cultures, and restore and maintain cultural practices. Aboriginal history and culture were once denied existence and if an Aboriginal person is attending an event, function or meeting where there is no Acknowledgement or Welcome to Country, they may not feel comfortable being in that place.

Welcome to Country

The Welcome to Country ceremony is an acknowledgment and recognition of the rights of Noongar people. It is an acknowledgement of respect for traditional owners, respect for people, respect for rights and a respect for country. The land, waterways and culturally significant sites are still very important to Noongar people. The ceremony is an acknowledgement of the past, provides a safe passage for visitors and is a mark of respect.

In the past, the Welcome would usually involve an elaborate ceremony of song, dance and feasting. The visitor would be shown which areas were safe to travel through and be in, and which areas were not. They would also be taught about local customs, safe foods to eat and where to find water.

The meaning behind this was not only to make visitors feel safe but to instil in them an understanding for the land that would give them a connection to that country. The hope was that they would therefore treat it respectfully, as if it were their own land. The symbolism is important as it offers the visitor permission to be on that land and provides protection to the visitor. In traditional times, you did not travel to another area without being officially welcomed to that area.

Only Traditional Owners/Custodians of the land on which the event takes place can deliver a Welcome to Country.

Some Welcome to Country may include specific ceremonial acts such as smoking, singing so that the Elder can cleanse the spirits of the land that are there, let them know the reason for the gathering and ensure that it is safe for the people attending.

There is no exact wording when conducting a Welcome to Country. The content of the ceremony should be negotiated between event representative and the Traditional Owner to allow the ceremony to reference the nature of the event and include community practices.

A Welcome to Country is a fee for service. The South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council indicates a range of \$500-\$1000 depending on the requirements.





Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is usually delivered as part of housekeeping and a welcome at meetings and events to guests.

It should be delivered at significant/large internal meetings or meetings with external participants e.g. Executive meetings, inter-departmental meetings, tours runs by volunteers etc. Any individual can deliver the acknowledgement.

The preferred Acknowledgement of Country for RIA is:

"I begin today by acknowledging the Whadjuk people, Traditional Custodians of Wadjemup on which we <gather/meet> today. I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this island. and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and future. I also pay special respect to the men and boys whose bodies still rest beneath the sands of Wadjemup, and to the families and descendants who lost them. I also pay respects to all Aboriginal peoples affected by the historical use of Wadjemup as a place of incarceration."

Guidelines around filming and photography

If you are photographing or filming an Aboriginal person, make sure that you receive their recorded permission to do so. Also ensure that you understand any restrictions around information they share regarding Aboriginal culture or history.

There are strict cultural protocols around the exchange of information. Do not assume that you can pass on or reproduce cultural stories either in verbal, audio-visual or written form.

Commercial photography or filming of an Aboriginal Site or Aboriginal Heritage Place on Wadjemup requires consent under the authority of the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 1974 (AHR). Please contact the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage for further information.



Deceased persons

There are strict customs and protocols surrounding deceased Aboriginal persons. In some Aboriginal cultures, to hear the voice, record the name or see an image of someone who has passed away is distressing and can cause grief. It may also contravene kinship laws to hear or view this material.

Sorry Business (as defined in the Definitions & Terms section pp 15) often prohibits people from hearing or viewing this material to ensure that the spirit of family members who have passed away can safely go on to the afterlife.

Content warnings

Images, videos or documents referring to Aboriginal persons should always be checked with Aboriginal people before they are shared. The family of the deceased should be contacted to seek written permission. If it is granted, this permission must be recorded and kept on file with the relevant asset. Once the asset has been cleared, it must be preceded by a warning.

Aboriginal Intellectual Property

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are the custodians of their cultural heritage. This includes a tradition of oral storytelling that communicates and preserves cultural heritage and traditional knowledge by communication from one generation to the next.

As western notions of copyright protection are based on a concept of recorded or material form, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities are often vulnerable to the appropriation and misuse of their oral stories because of the lack of written records.

Generally, stories are not protected by copyright unless they are written down or recorded in another form. However, once a story is recorded then it falls into being considered as a copyrighted piece of intellectual property.

ArtsLaw Australia have developed an Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) policy to help protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are members of Art Centres from having their oral stories and traditions recorded and used without their permission. However, the principles of this policy should also apply to any RIA staff or volunteers who are engaged in using or sharing information about Noongar history and culture.

As indicated earlier in this guide, it is not appropriate for non-Aboriginal people to share or talk in detail about Aboriginal spirituality or customs. This can also include songs, music, dances, stories, ceremonies, symbols, languages and designs. Non-Aboriginal people should not use Aboriginal names in their business-branding, nor should they use designs that evoke the style of Aboriginal art.

Aboriginal IP is a communal rather than an individual interest. And while Aboriginal IP is currently not recognised under Australian law, best practice requires that it is acknowledged and respected. This is based on acknowledging the principle of self-determination that Aboriginal people should be recognised as the primary guardians and interpreters of their cultures, should be allowed to maintain secrecy around certain knowledge and customs, and must be given proper attribution if they chose to share cultural heritage.

If you are wishing to use or share such information then you should consult with and obtain permission from the relevant Traditional Owners so they can advise on how the material should be attributed (if allowed) and given the opportunity to approve the way in which it is used.

For more information visit artslaw.com.au and search ICIP.

Terri Janke's Pathways and Protocols also provides advice about ethical and legal issues involved in the application of Aboriginal cultural material to screen-based content at terrijanke.com.au/pathways-protocols

Where to find more information

Other resources are available such as:

- Rottneest Island Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2021-2023
www.ria.wa.gov.au/policy-and-reports/sustainability/Social-sustainability/Reconciliation-Action-Plan
- Australian Government First Nations Style Manual: www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples
- Noongar Protocols brochure produced by the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council.
www.noongar.org.au/noongar-protocols





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The information in this publication has been provided as a guide only. Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the content, Rottnest Island Authority do not take responsibility if any information is incorrect or has changed since publication.

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