

**Memorandum of Understanding**  
**between the**  
**National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander**  
**Ecumenical Commission**  
**and the**  
**National Council of Churches in Australia**

**Originally Signed 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2005**

**By**

**President of the NCCA, Revd Professor James Haire**

**General Secretary of the NCCA, Revd John Henderson**

**Chairperson of the NATSIEC, Bishop James Leftwich**

**Executive Secretary of the NATSIEC, Graeme Mundine**

**And endorsed by the Executive of the NCCA and**

**All members of the NATSIEC**

**Amended 13 July 2010**

## Table of Contents

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>PREAMBLE</b> _____                                   | <b>3</b> |
| <b>INTENT</b> _____                                     | <b>3</b> |
| <b>OBJECTIVES</b> _____                                 | <b>4</b> |
| <b>PRINCIPLES</b> _____                                 | <b>4</b> |
| <b>IMPLEMENTATION: HOW TO CONSULT WITH NATSIEC</b> ____ | <b>4</b> |
| <b>REVIEW AND AMENDMENT</b> _____                       | <b>5</b> |
| <b>APPENDIX 1: WELCOME TO COUNTRY</b> _____             | <b>6</b> |

## Preamble

1. The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) and its member Churches are aware of the importance of the First Peoples of this land: the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been custodians of this country for many thousands of years.
2. The NCCA notes the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and affirms particularly its principles of equality, non-discrimination, consultation and cooperation when pursuing harmonious and respectful relationships with the First Peoples of this land.
3. The NCCA and the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) acknowledge the importance of mutual respect and understanding by modelling reconciliation to its member Churches and to the wider Australian community; and the benefits of a close and informed relationship.
4. The NCCA is committed to furthering reconciliation and ensuring that the First Peoples of this nation are shown respect and are valued for their contribution to Australian church life.
5. The National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission is mandated to:

**“Provide a basis for further political action by church-related Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and the member churches of the National Council of Churches in Australia.”**

6. The National Council of Churches in Australia is mandated to:

**“Encourage and enable the member churches in the light of the Gospel to give prophetic leadership to each other and the community by**

**iv] acting in solidarity with Aboriginal and [Torres Strait] Islander people”**

## Intent

The intent of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to have in place an agreed procedure for the NCCA to act respectfully, appropriately, and in solidarity, with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples, through NATSIEC.

## Objectives

The objective of the MOU is to:

1. Put on record the key requirements of the consultation process for the National Council of Churches when making comment on Indigenous issues to the member Churches, the wider non-Indigenous community, and the Indigenous community.
2. Ensure that members of NATSIEC and through them, Indigenous communities around Australia, are consulted before statements are made to them and on their behalf by the National Council of Churches in Australia.

## Principles

The following principles underpin the implementation of this MOU:

1. the NCCA is expected to consult with the NATSIEC in all matters relating to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia as a matter of respect;
2. as the Indigenous Ecumenical peak body in Australia, the NATSIEC has an important role to play in addressing the NCCA's involvement in Indigenous issues;
3. particular Member Churches have Indigenous members and/or Indigenous Church bodies<sup>1</sup> with whom they can consult about matters relating to them and NATSIEC encourages Member Churches to use those resources when involving themselves in Indigenous Issues.

## Implementation: How to consult with the NATSIEC

### 1. Media Statements

In the event of a media statement made by the National Council of Churches in Australia (including its various Commissions and Networks) relating to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander issues, the Council is expected to bring a draft copy of the statement to the NATSIEC<sup>2</sup> for endorsement.

### 2. Public Events

The NCCA, its Networks, Commissions and staff<sup>3</sup> are requested to include a 'Welcome to Country' or an 'Acknowledgement of Country' at the start of any events in which they are involved, regardless of Indigenous content or involvement, as a sign of respect.

In the event that the President, General Secretary, an Executive member, a member of a Commission / Network or a staff member of the NCCA is to speak at a public

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<sup>1</sup> Such as NATSIAC (Anglican), NATSICC (Catholic), UAICC (Uniting), ACCIM (Churches of Christ), Salvation Army Aboriginal Ministries (Southern Territory).

<sup>2</sup> The NATSIEC Executive and where possible the total membership of the NATSIEC will be involved in endorsing any press releases, speeches or articles produced by the NCCA relating to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander issues. Please see Appendix I for an appropriate formulation.

event involving Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander issues, they are to involve the NATSIEC by including them in the preparation of speeches.

3. Articles for print

If the President, General Secretary, an Executive member, a member of a Commission / Network or a staff member of the NCCA is preparing an article for publication (for either a resource produced in-house or for an external body), involving Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander issues, they are requested to involve the NATSIEC in the preparation of such articles by informing the NATSIEC<sup>4</sup> of their intent and by producing a draft for endorsement by the NATSIEC **before** the article goes to print.

4. Projects

If a Commission or Network of the NCCA is planning a project that has any impact on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples, they are to invite the NATSIEC into the planning phase of the project. They are also required to consult directly with the stakeholders of the project.<sup>5</sup>

**Review and Amendment**

The MOU will commence on the date it is signed by all parties, and, unless otherwise agreed between the Parties, continue until the next meeting of the NCCA National Forum.

The Parties will undertake a joint review of the consultation process outlined above before each meeting of the NCCA National Forum.

This MOU may be amended at any time by an agreement in writing between the Parties.

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<sup>4</sup> See footnote no. 2

<sup>5</sup> Where the project is targeting, or taking place within, a particular Indigenous community, consultation with NATSIEC **only** is **not** sufficient.

**Signed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December by:**

President of the NCCA, Revd Professor James Haire

General Secretary of the NCCA, Revd John Henderson

Chairperson of the NATSIEC, Bishop James Leftwich

Executive Secretary of the NATSIEC, Graeme Mundine

**And endorsed by:**

**The Executive of the NCCA and all members of the NATSIEC**

Amended at the 7<sup>th</sup> National Forum of the NCCA 13th July 2010

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President of the NCCA, Bishop Michael Putney

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General Secretary of the NCCA, Revd Tara Curlewis

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NATSIEC Commissioner, Ms Elsie Heiss

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Executive Secretary of the NATSIEC, Graeme Mundine

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## Appendix to the MOU

### Welcome to Country

#### What is a 'Welcome to Country'?

A 'Welcome to Country' is where the traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custodians (usually the Elders) welcome people to their land. It always occurs in the opening ceremony of the event, preferably as the first item.

Adopting such practices enables the wider community to share in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ceremony and has been found to lead to better community relationships and therefore assists the reconciliation process.

Welcome to Country, also known as the Traditional Welcome, allows the Traditional Custodians of the region to give their blessing for the event to take place on their land. It must be done by a representative of the Traditional Custodians of the location at which the event is taking place. If it is not possible to arrange a Traditional Welcome by a local representative, a simple acknowledgment of Traditional Custodians by other speakers is appropriate (see Acknowledgement of Country).

Welcome to Country may consist of a single speech, or it may include some kind of ceremony (a song, dance, didgeridu solo, etc), or it may be a combination of these. It is important to remember that the Indigenous representative/s must feel comfortable with the arrangements. Rather than a gesture of tokenism and political correctness, Welcome to Country is a right of the local Indigenous Custodians and not a privilege.

Contact with the Traditional Custodians should be made as early as possible in the planning of the event. It is protocol that a gift be given to individuals or to an organisation for providing such a service. What form the gift takes should be negotiated between the Indigenous Custodians and the event organisers.

### Acknowledgement of Country

As a sign of respect, it is appropriate for speakers at public events to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land at the beginning of their speeches.<sup>6</sup>

Acknowledgement of Country is a way that the wider community can show respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the ongoing relationship of the traditional Custodians of the area with that land, waters and seas. It is a significant and symbolic reconciliation gesture. Acknowledgement of Country may also occur when Traditional Custodians are not available to provide an official Welcome to Country.

**Example 1:** "I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which this event is taking place".

**Example 2:** "I acknowledge that we are standing on the land of the [Gadigal] people of the [Eora] nation who have been custodians of this area for thousands of years."

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<sup>6</sup> To find out the name of the traditional custodians of the area you are in, contact your local Aboriginal Land Council