

**Living Culture - Living Land**  
and its people

**Noongar Protocols**

**Welcome to Country**



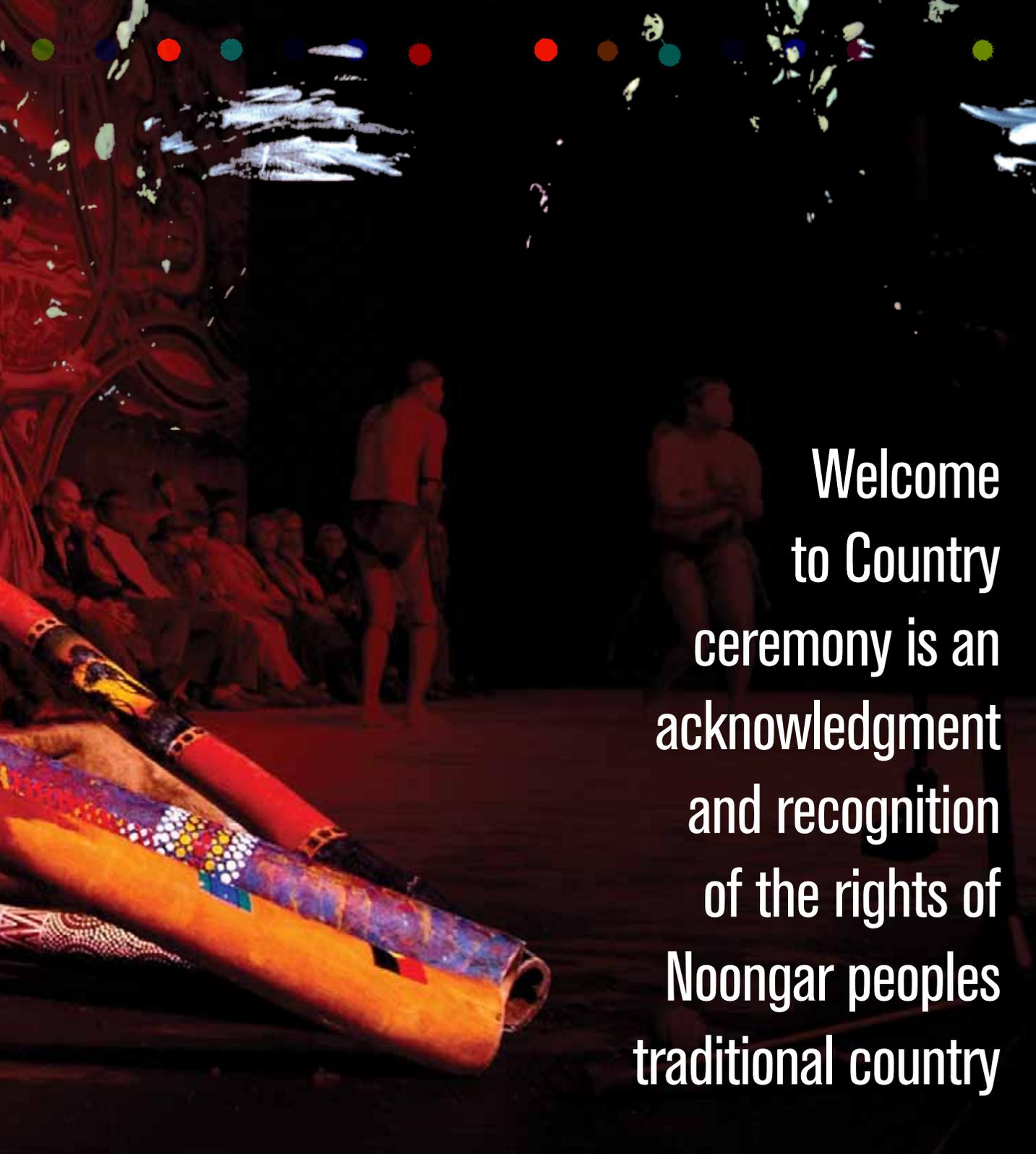
South West Aboriginal  
Land & Sea Council







*Shane Abdullah, Richard Walley and James Webb perform at National Native Title Conference Welcome to Country 2008*



# Welcome to Country ceremony is an acknowledgment and recognition of the rights of Noongar peoples traditional country

This acknowledgement pays respect to the traditional custodians, ancestors and continuing cultural, spiritual and religious practices of Noongar people. Further, it provides an increasing awareness and recognition of Australia's Aboriginal peoples and cultures.

The Welcome to Country ceremony is an acknowledgment and recognition of the rights of Noongar people. The act of getting a representative who has traditional local links to a particular place, area or region, is an acknowledgement of respect for traditional owners. It is respect for people, respect for rights and a respect for country. The land, waterways and cultural significant sites are still very important to Noongar people. It is an acknowledgement of the past and provide a safe passage for visitors and a mark of respect.

Protocols are the standards of behavior that people use to show respect to each other. Every culture has different ways of communicating, and in order to be able to work with someone from a different culture in a respectful way you need to understand how people from that culture communicate.

This Protocol Guide has been developed to support organisations to help understand Noongar protocols and how to work with Noongar people in a way that is respectful of culture and community.



Elders May McGuire and Elsie Hume at National Native Title Conference Welcome to Country 2008

## *Noongar People*

The Traditional Country of the Noongar people's covers the entire south-western portion of Western Australia. This extends from Leeman in the north-west to beyond Cape Arid in the south-east. Archaeological evidence establishes that the Noongar people (alternative spellings: Nyungar/Nyoongar/Nyoongah/Nyungah/Nyugah/Yunga) have lived in the area and had possession of tracts of land on their *country* for at least 45,000 years. The Noongar people (Noongar meaning 'person') are one of the largest Aboriginal cultural blocks in Australia. There is no evidence that there has been any other group than Noongar in the South West.

Noongar are made up of fourteen different language groups (which may be spelt in different ways): Amangu, Yued/Yuat, Whadjuk/Wajuk, Binjareb/Pinjarup, Wardandi, Balardong/Ballardong, Nyakinyaki, Wilman, Ganeang, Bibulmun/Piblemen, Mineng, Goreng and Wudjari and Njunga. Each of these language groups correlates with different geographic areas with ecological distinctions.

Noongar people speak their own language and have their own laws and customs. Those laws and customs were characterised by a strong spiritual connection to 'country'; caring for the natural environment and for places of significance; performing ceremonies and rituals; collecting food by hunting, fishing and gathering; providing education and passing on law and custom through stories, art, song and dance.

While the effect of European settlement has been profound, many significant aspects of Noongar Culture and society have been retained and are still practiced by the Noongar people.

Dooroom Dance Group perform at SWALSC celebration of National Aborigines and Islander Day of Observance Committee (NAIDOC) July 2007



## Welcome to Country Ceremony

A Welcome to Country ceremony gives traditional owners, the Noongar peoples, the opportunity to formally welcome people to their land. This ceremony should be undertaken by Elders acknowledged as such by their family and community. To assist you in facilitating access to Elders you can contact the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council.

There is no exact wording when conducting Welcome to Country. The content of the ceremony should be negotiated between the agency and the provider with reference to the nature of the event and the community practices. Generally, the provider will offer participants local Noongar history and cultural information and

will go on to welcome delegates/participants to the country/land. This can be facilitated through the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council or alternatively an Aboriginal organisation in your local area which will entail an administrative fee.

It is important that event organisers allow enough time to discuss with Traditional Owners what form of *Welcome to Country* ceremony will be undertaken at an event and if any particular protocols or customs need to be observed by those in attendance.

You should expect the Welcome to Country to be well prepared, thoughtful and respectful acknowledgement to both Noongar and the audience. At the conclusion of the

Welcome the audience should feel that they have been reminded of the Noongar people as the original owners of the land.

When considering a Welcome to Country ceremony, it is important to consider the following factors:

- **Fee for service**
- **Information about the Event where the ceremony is required**
- **Appropriate equipment the Elder or community member is required to use if applicable, for example, a microphone and being on a stage**



*L-R Elders Beverley Port-Louis, Charlie Shaw, Fay Slater, Les Eades, Colin Headland, Theresa Walley, Eric Hayward, Barbara Corbett-Councillor-Stammner, Carol Pettersen, Cheryl Taylor, May McGuire and Peter Phillips Noongar Dialogue 2010*

# Organising a Welcome to Country ceremony

## Fee for service

In providing cultural services such as Welcome to Country, artistic performances and ceremonies Aboriginal people are using their intellectual property. As such, providers of these services should be appropriately remunerated.

A Welcome to Country is often requested for events, conferences, functions or meetings. This may consist of a single speech, in language or English or it may include a cultural performance (a song or dance), or it may be a combination of these. It is important to remember that the Noongar representative/s must be comfortable with all the arrangements.

It is normal practice that some form of payment is made either to individuals or to an organisation for providing such a service. The exact form and amount of payment is negotiated and agreed between the representatives/custodians and the event organisers. The Fee is negotiated with the Elder and could range from \$500 - \$1,000 if a cultural performance is requested.

## Information about the Event

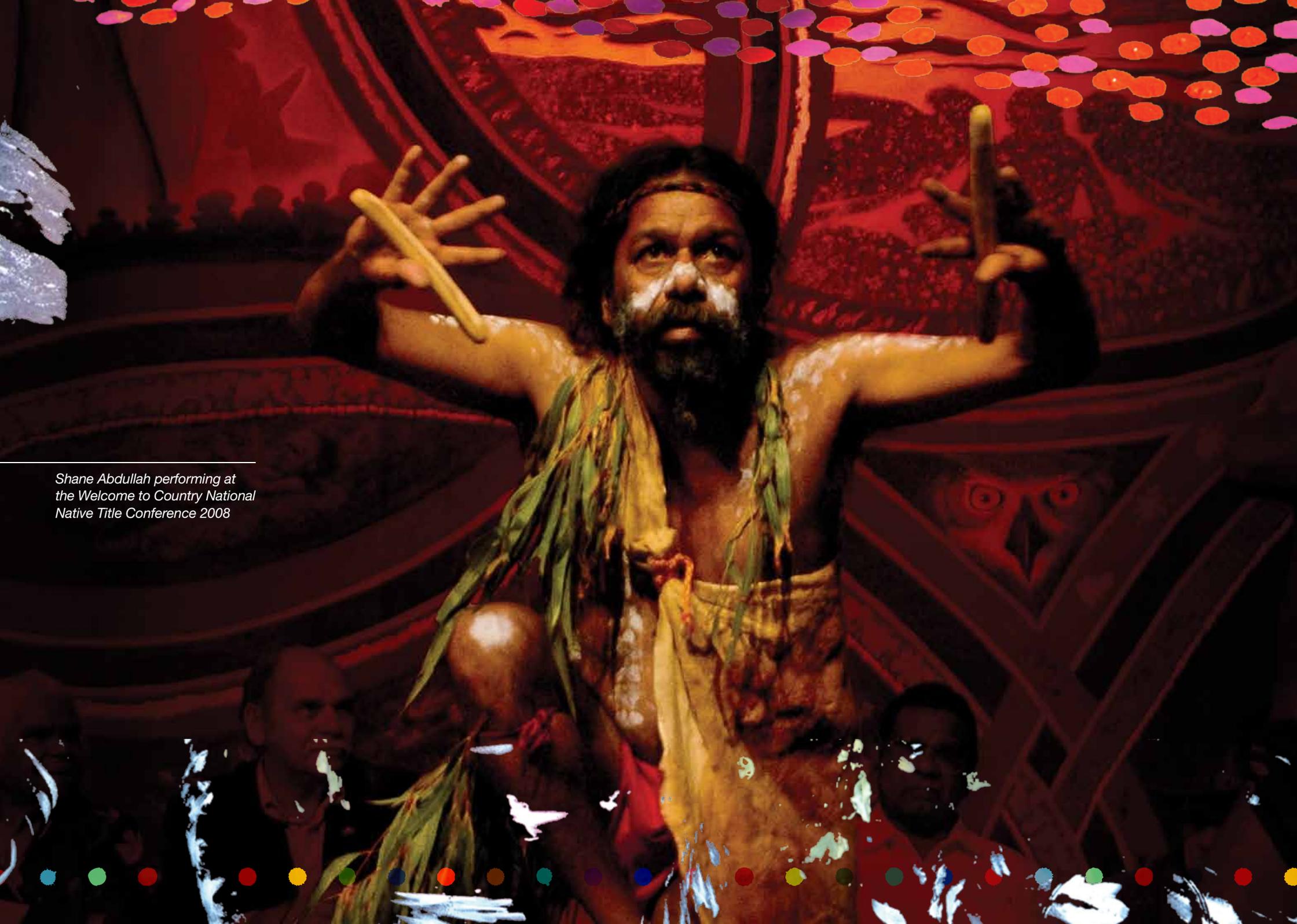
Contact the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council or alternatively an Aboriginal organisation in your local area.

- Provide the following :
  - Introduction – Who you are
  - What the organisation requiring the service is about and what event they will be providing the service for (i.e.; Conference, Dinner or Special Occasion)
  - Date
  - Time
  - Place/where required
- SWALSC or local organisation will contact the Elder and pass on your contact details
- Check the phone contact is correct and if it is the one that you will be able to contact them on the day or follow up prior to the event
- If you are unable to make contact you are welcome to call SWALSC for support

## Providing contact details

If the Elder agrees to the job let them know the following:

- Who will meet them
- Who will be their escort/chaperone for the event (with our Elders they would like to be treated as one would any dignitary) and should be treated as such
- Will they be bringing anyone else for company (this is good to offer as it makes the Elder feel more at ease)
- If there is any particular dietary requirement (if food and drinks are provided tea and coffee especially)
- What the arrangements will be for payment of their fee
- Whether it will be necessary to provide an ABN for the fee to be paid, or where a Statement by Supplier Form will be accepted

A photograph of Shane Abdullah performing a Welcome to Country ceremony. He is a man with a long beard and hair, wearing a traditional Indigenous Australian outfit made of green and yellow leaves and a yellow loincloth. He has white ochre on his face and chest. He is holding two wooden sticks, one in each hand, raised in a gesture. The background is a large, circular mural with a red and orange color scheme, featuring a landscape with trees and a large owl-like face. The scene is lit with warm, red and orange lights, and there are colorful circular patterns in the top and bottom corners of the image.

*Shane Abdullah performing at  
the Welcome to Country National  
Native Title Conference 2008*

## Prior to the event

Contact the Elder a three-five days before the event and check if they are still available and finalise arrangements (this allows enough time to source another if they are unavailable for any particular reason – e.g. illness, family reasons or sorry business).

## At the event

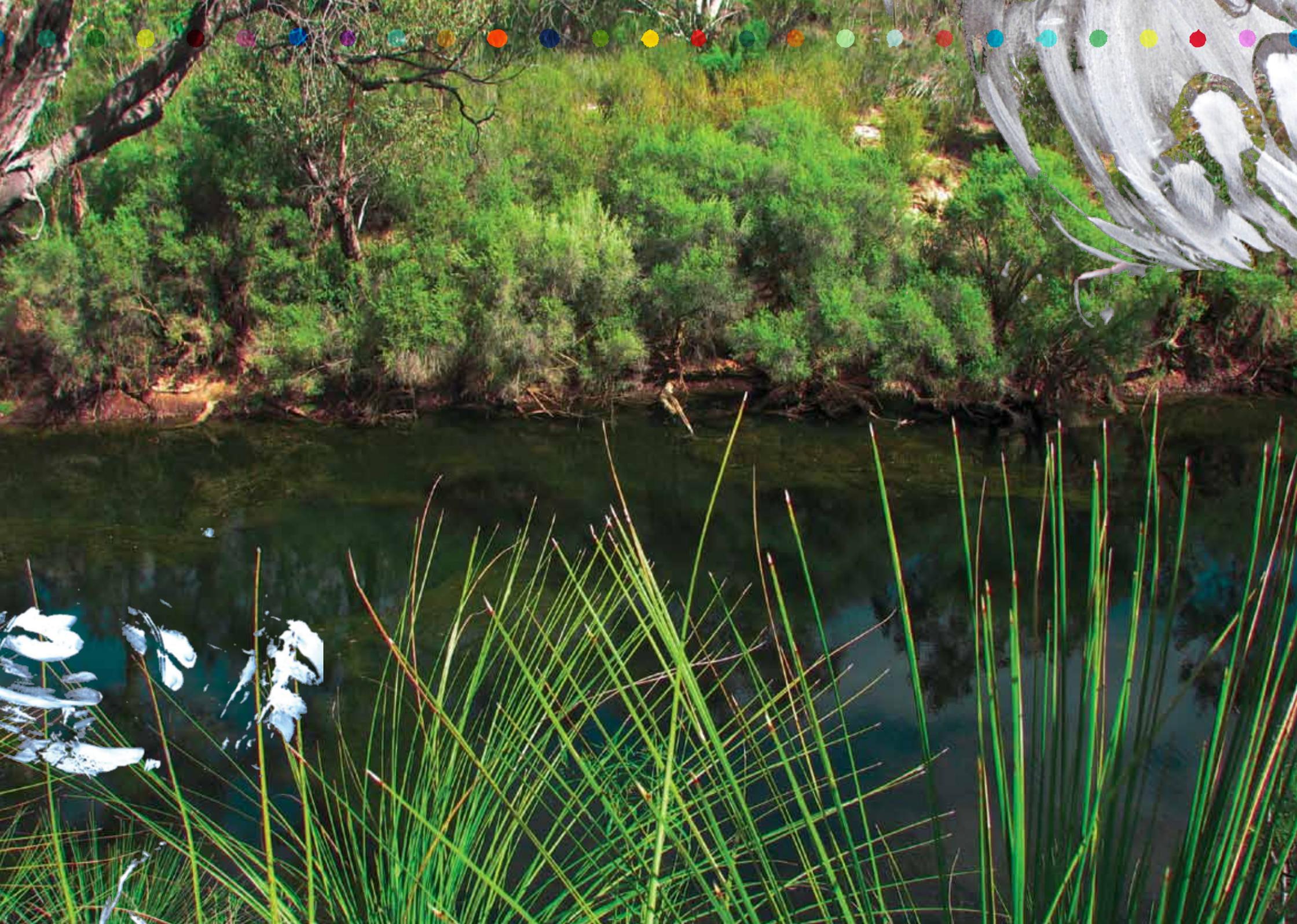
- Introduce and allocate a person to take care of the Elder on arrival
- Let them know the order of proceedings – what time it starts who will bring them to the front etc
- Who will introduce them – make sure that person is introduced to them prior to proceedings
- Make sure their title and name is right in acknowledging them following their speech
- All parties speaking after the Elder/Representative should acknowledge the Elder/Representative for the Welcome to Country
- Include them in the celebration (ask them if they would like to stay for the evening or would they prefer to leave shortly after the Welcome)
- Don't leave the Elders unaccompanied at any time (make them feel special, because they are our very important people)

## After the Welcome Ceremony

The first speaker/MC should always acknowledge and thank the Elder for their contribution.

## After the event

Send a letter of thanks for their participation.





## Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgment of Country is a way that non-Aboriginal people can show respect for Noongar heritage and the ongoing relationship of traditional owners with the land.

The Chair of the meeting, or the principal speaker begins the meeting by acknowledging that the meeting is taking place in the country of the traditional owners. Those who acknowledge the country, can 'acknowledge all the traditional owners of the land' or can 'acknowledge the traditional owners of this land' without naming those people.

Typical Acknowledgement of Country statements can include:

- 'I/We wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Whadjuk (Perth region) people. I/We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region;
- I/We would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the Noongar people
- I/We would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on Aboriginal land and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Noongar people in this land

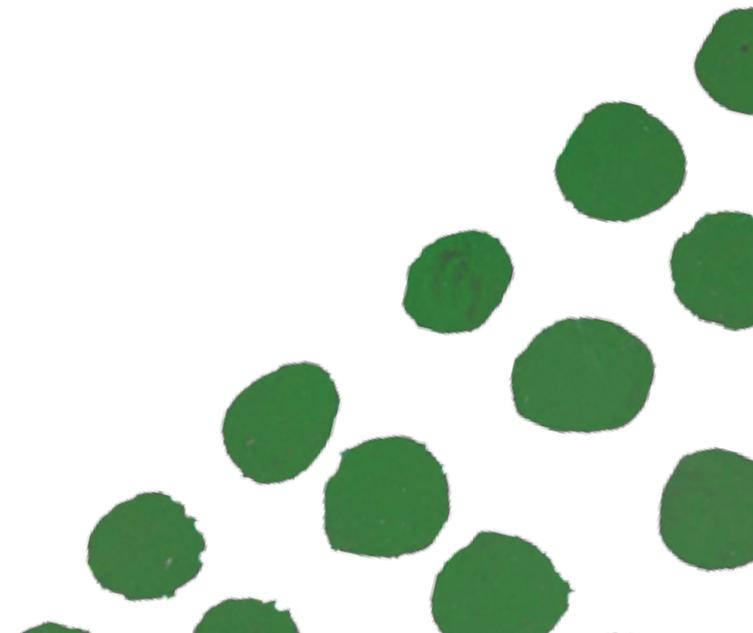
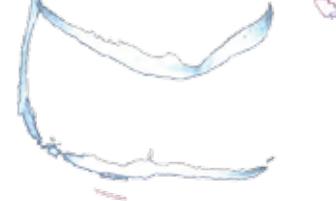
## Contact

**South West Aboriginal  
Land & Sea Council**

**1490 Albany Highway  
Cannington WA 6107**

**Ph: 08 9358 7400**

**Fax: 08 9358 7499**







# Glossary of Terms

## Elders

Elders are our keepers of knowledge in family and community. They are usually Elder people but some families may agree to a younger person to take on this cultural responsibility. This is the family's prerogative. SWALSC does not decide who the Elders in our community are.

## Noongar

Noongar language word is a generic and accepted term which is used to broadly identify Aboriginal people who come from the South West region of Western Australia. It is estimated that there are approximately 30,000 Noongar people living in the south west making this group the largest Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia.

Sometimes spelt Noongah, Nyungar, Nyoongar, Nyoongah, Nyungah, Nyugah Yunga.

## South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council

The South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council is 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 the Noongar native title claims, while also advancing and strengthening Noongar culture, language, heritage and society.

## Traditional Owners

Aboriginal representatives of the traditional language group that inhabited the area prior to European settlement and are recognised as traditional owners by local Aboriginal communities.

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*Trevor Stack Gya Ngoop  
Dance Group at SWALSC  
celebration of National  
Aborigines and Islander Day  
of Observance Committee  
(NAIDOC) July 2007*





South West Aboriginal  
Land & Sea Council

**Produced by  
South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council**

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Photographs courtesy SWALSC,  
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