

The Earth Funerals Project

Considerations for engagement between the Earth Funerals Project
and the First Australian Peoples

Statement of Recognition and Intention

Recognition:

The Earth Funerals Project recognises that the First Australian Peoples have been living sustainably on this continent for at least 65,000 years - making them the oldest living culture on the planet. We recognise their roles as the first artists, astronomers, engineers, chemists, land managers, field naturalists, herbalists and healers, musicians and story-tellers of this land. We acknowledge their perception of the immensity of time, and their ability to conceive the world as a whole place. We recognise their understanding of the intimate connection between scientific knowledge systems, culture, and health and wellbeing.

We recognise that colonisation began with the arrival of the First Fleet from Britain in 1788. We recognise that impacts of colonisation continue today and include despoiled landscapes and generationally traumatised First Peoples. We recognise that the First Peoples of Australia are rediscovering and reconnecting with their culture and identity.

We recognise that the Western mind has steadfastly and disrespectfully blinded itself to the significance of the relationship of the First Peoples with the land. Western knowledge is fragmented in comparison to the deep and complex connectedness between people, spirit and place nurtured by First Peoples. Western approaches have systematically partitioned science, land management, and ecology; Indigenous knowledge systems integrate them.

We recognise that without acknowledgement of our compromised consciousness, borne of ingrained racism embedded in current policies, processes and structures, there will be no healing. We recognise that stereotypes can be used to espouse convenient mistruths - such as that urban-dwelling Aboriginal people are 'not real Aboriginals'. We recognise that ignorance can be used as a mechanism for avoiding responsibility.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up hundreds of diverse and unique cultures where each has its own language, protocols and connection to country. These cultures are shifting, complex and resilient in nature and many are evolving into vibrant, contemporary forms - Aboriginal culture is reemerging. We recognise that continuing high culture, creation stories, language and songs have the potential to heal people and the land.



We acknowledge the significance of the Mabo decision in 1992 voiding the *terra nullius* claim. We recognise the Rudd government apology in 2008 as a foundation for conciliation. We recognise the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart as the contemporary position of the First Australian Peoples.

We recognise that involvement of the First Australians is important to the Earth Funerals Mission, and that relationships are at the heart of, and key to, cross cultural collaboration. We understand the need for respect and attentive listening in collaborating with each unique community.

Intention:

The Earth Funerals Project will seek to understand the cultural protocols that guide both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and other Australians working in this space. We seek to understand the unique history and culture of each community as an important first step in cross-cultural collaboration, working in a practical and flexible manner.

We will reflect on, and be prepared to share, our own cultural and historical backgrounds to be better understood, and to better understand our reactions and responses. We will avoid appropriation and accommodate to the fact that Aboriginal protocols include who can and cannot share certain aspects of knowledge.

Always, we will invest time identifying stakeholders and forming relationships. We will invite First Peoples communities to collaborate with us. We will show respect by asking individuals: what is your name, where are you from, who's your mob? We will engage at a local level, and seek guidance and consent of appropriate elders.

We will work to identify and eliminate the ongoing inequality and racism created by colonialism. We will seek to build capacity in all communities. We will allow the science of Western culture to work hand in hand with First Peoples' knowledge so they learn from each other and restore life to land that has been decimated. We will avoid paternalistic and culturally inappropriate ways of working.

We will value the Earth as more than just a commodity and a resource. We will seek to create a living connection with the land, and in turn, allow the land to nurture and heal us. We will seek to design, develop and implement projects in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We will foster a culture of respect, transparency and kindness.

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