

# Reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Issues

This resource provides quick guidelines to support media professionals



## THE MEDIA'S ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

- Whether deliberate or unconscious, those working in the media have the power to influence how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are perceived and understood.
- Reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples without taking appropriate steps to ensure cultural protocols are followed can be incredibly damaging.
- It is your responsibility as journalists to ensure reporting is both factual and respectful.

## LANGUAGE

- Before you begin your story, consider the use of language and terminology when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- The most common and widely used terminology is "Aboriginal" or "Torres Strait Islander" person or peoples.
- If you are wanting to say "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" more than once in a story, it can be interchanged with "Indigenous people".
- When in doubt, ask how an Indigenous person would like to be referred to. "Aboriginal", "Torres Strait Islanders", and "Indigenous" should always be dignified with a capital 'A' and 'I'.
- Aboriginal should never be abbreviated and Torres Strait Islander should be used in full and not shortened to 'TSI'

## APPEARANCE

- Like many cultural groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have diverse skin tones, features and appearances.
- It's easy to make assumptions on whether you think someone 'looks' Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Asking someone about the "percentage" or "ratio" of their heritage can be offensive because of the way people were classified during the Stolen Generations.
- If you have a number of images to select from, ask yourself why you selected a certain photo and whether the skin tone of the person featured in the photo, or location affected your decision.

## DIVERSITY OF VIEWS

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples all have very different opinions, views and perspectives about the things that affect their individual lives, their communities and their families.
- It is important to canvass a range of views and not rely on one "Indigenous perspective".
- The broad spectrum of views can be based on geography, political persuasion, profession, expertise, age, gender or socio-economic background.
- Also consider using Indigenous opinions in non-Indigenous stories too.

## DEATH AND THE DECEASED

- There are cultural protocols around using the name and image of a deceased person.
- In some communities, using the deceased person's name - out loud and in writing - or showing photographs of that person is restricted during the mourning period.
- Practices vary from community to community, so be mindful before reporting on the death of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.
- Consider providing suitable warnings at the beginning of the content to warn audiences that a deceased person's imagery or name is being used.

## ACCESS AND PERMISSION

- If you are wanting to film in an Indigenous community, area or cultural site - it is best to check with the relevant Land Council as to whether you need to gain permission.
- In many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities some sites, images, objects and knowledge are sacred.
- 'Sacred and secret' refers to information and material that is restricted under cultural laws.
- Be aware that in some instances, community members may prefer to deal with people of the same sex in certain contexts.
- There are other cultural practices which, while they should not necessarily inhibit reporting, should be handled with appropriate care. When in doubt, ask!

## QUICK REMINDER CHECKLIST

- Have you **researched the community** you're going into—the country, the people and appropriate protocols?
- Are you visiting any **sacred sites**? If so, have you sought permission to do so?
- Is the use of **language appropriate and accurate**?
- Have you addressed the "Aboriginal-Torres Strait Islander-First Nations-Indigenous person" question, by asking **the people** you are reporting on **their preferred terminology**?
- If reproducing **deceased people's images**, has permission been sought from the family or clan representatives for the proposed use?
- Has a **deceased warning** been placed in a prominent position at the beginning of the story, after discussing the proper wording with relevant family and community members?
- Is your story canvassing **a range of Indigenous opinions**?
- Have you considered how Indigenous people are portrayed including through **language, character and cultural symbols**?
- Are you **respecting the lands and cultural property** of Indigenous people?
- Before and after your story is disseminated, have you **taken time to reflect on how it may impact** the community you are reporting on?

