



## Recommended Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terminology

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### 1. Introduction

QUT acknowledges the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play within the QUT community. Using respectful and inclusive language and terminology is an integral component of strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider university community. These guidelines outline QUT's preferred approach when communicating with or about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and issues. It aims to ensure there is consistent understanding and accurate use of language and terminology across the university community.

### 2. Application

These guidelines apply to all staff, students, and members of the QUT community. The responsibility of ensuring the use of appropriate language and terminology rests with all members of the university community. They align with the QUT Staff Code of Conduct which requires that everyone be treated fairly, honestly, and respectfully, and with proper regard for their rights and obligations (refer [B/8.1 QUT Staff Code of Conduct](#)).

### 3. Acceptable Terminology

QUT's preferred collective terms to be used when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are:

- ✓ 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and
- ✓ 'Indigenous Australians'

#### *Use of 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'*

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' should be used when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people collectively in all university communication. For example:

- ✓ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ✓ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- ✓ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers
- ✓ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff

The term should always be capitalised and written in full and only used as an adjective in association with a noun. In the correct context, it is acceptable to refer to a distinct group as separate from the other. For example:

- ✓ Aboriginal students
- ✓ Torres Strait Islander students

### ***Use of 'Indigenous Australian'***

The use of the term 'Indigenous Australian' when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples collectively is also acceptable. When using the term 'Indigenous Australian', it should always be capitalised. For example:

- ✓ Indigenous Australians
- ✓ Indigenous Australian students
- ✓ Indigenous Australian researchers
- ✓ Indigenous Australian staff

The term 'Indigenous' on its own (for example Indigenous students or Indigenous staff) should be avoided as it is not necessarily specific to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## **4. Abbreviations and Acronyms**

The use of abbreviations and acronyms to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is not acceptable and should never be used. For example:

- × ATSI students
- × A&TSI staff
- × TSI communities

Their use is considered offensive and reduces the cultural diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and implies one distinct group. Using abbreviations in tables, charts or surveys because of limited space is not advisable. However, when forming part of an acronym to describe an organisation or program, abbreviations are commonly used and accepted. For example:

- ✓ NATSIHEC (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium)
- ✓ AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies)
- ✓ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency)

## **5. Regional or Geographical Terms**

Regional or geographical terms are local terms often used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to refer to themselves. There may be some circumstances when these terms are appropriate, for example, when it is part of an organisational name. Otherwise, these terms should not be used, unless directed by a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

## **6. 'People' or 'Peoples'**

The word 'peoples' acknowledges that there are two distinct cultural groups. The word 'people' or 'peoples' are both acceptable. For example:

- ✓ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lived in the country we now know of as Australia for tens of thousands of years.
- ✓ During my time in QUT, I have worked alongside many amazing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## 7. Other Associated Terms and Definitions

### ***‘First Peoples’/ ‘First Australians’/ ‘First Nations’***

‘First Peoples’ and ‘First Australians’ are collective names for the original people of Australia and their descendants and are used to emphasise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived on this continent prior to European settlement. ‘First Nations’ is a term that is predominantly used in North America to refer to Canada’s Indigenous peoples and historically it is not used in Australia when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. ‘First Nations’ is generally used when referring to International law as it is the preferred global term used in treaties and covenants. ‘The first Australians’ or ‘the first peoples of Australia’ are also terms used quite frequently by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves.

### ***‘Elder’***

An ‘Elder’ is an identified and respected member of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Elders generally hold key community knowledge and are expected to provide advice and support to community members. Age alone does not necessarily distinguish an Elder. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples acknowledge Elders as ‘Aunty’ or ‘Uncle’ as a sign of respect, even if they are not related. When using the term ‘Elder’ it should always be capitalised.

### ***‘Mob’***

‘Mob’ is a term identifying a group of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people associated with a particular place or country. ‘Mob’ is more generally used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Therefore, it may not be appropriate for non-Indigenous people to use this term unless this is known to be acceptable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with whom you are communicating with or about.

### ***‘Country’***

‘Country’ is a term used to describe a culturally defined area of land associated with a particular culturally distinct group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### ***‘Traditional Owner’/ ‘Traditional Custodians’***

‘Traditional Owner’/ ‘Traditional Custodians’ are terms that are used in the context of an Acknowledgement of Country. They relate to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person or people directly descended from the original inhabitants of a culturally defined area of Country.

### ***‘Welcome to Country’***

A ‘Welcome to Country’ is a ceremony performed by Traditional Owners of the land and/or sea where an event is taking place to welcome visitors. It can therefore only be performed by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person with ancestral ties to the place where the welcome takes place. It can take many forms including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language and/ or English.

### ***‘Acknowledgement of Country’***

An ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ is a demonstration of respect for the Traditional Owners of the land on which a meeting or event is being held. It is recognition of the continuing relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their Country. An Acknowledgement of Country is usually given at the beginning of a meeting, speech or other formal occasions. Unlike a Welcome to Country, it can be given by a non-Indigenous person or an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who does not have ancestral ties to the place where the event is taking place.

## 8. General communication advice

When communicating with or about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is also advisable to consider the following:

- It is always best to ask Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people how they would like you to refer to them.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples often use different terms, sometimes using traditional language or Aboriginal English, to refer to themselves depending on where they are from. It is not appropriate to assume that these terms can be used without appropriate consent.
- Do not use the words Aboriginals, Aborigine or Aborigines as people may associate this terminology to periods of colonisation and assimilation.
- Outdated terms such as full-blood, half-caste and quarter-caste are extremely offensive and should never be used when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- The term 'black' and 'blackfellas' can have both positive and negative connotations. While it can signify solidarity, unity and political activism against racism to various groups around the world, it has been used also to devalue and victimise people on the basis of their skin colour. It is not appropriate to assume that these terms can be used without appropriate consent.
- Use a 'strength-based approach' to communication with and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by focussing on strengths – agency, success, resilience, capability and resources. Avoid using 'deficit discourse' that represent people or groups in terms of deficiency – absence, lack or failure, particularly in comparison to non-Indigenous people.

### Related information

- MOPP B/8.1 QUT Staff Code of Conduct
- [QUT Style Guidelines: Indigenous Australian Messaging](#) (QUT staff access only)
- [QUT Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country resources](#) (QUT staff access only)

### Modification History

Date	Sections	Source	Details
17/08/2021	All	Office of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Strategy)	Revised guidelines