History
NSW Public School teachers prompted the development of this document ‘Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country’. It responds to needs expressed by teachers who want to show respect, understanding and to acknowledge and promote Aboriginal education within their schools.

In 2001, the NSWTF Aboriginal Education Coordinator and Aboriginal Members Committees developed the first NSW Teachers Federation protocol guide ‘Welcome to Country’ and ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ document.

The NSWTF acknowledges the work of John Watkins, who in 2001 as Minister of Education, took up the commitment and practice of ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ as he visited NSW Public Schools.

In 2004, the NSWTF, Department of Education, and AECG worked collaboratively to produce the ‘Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country’ support document.

In 2008, we saw a new beginning to Federal Parliamentary Opening procedures with the inaugural ‘Welcome to Country’ Ceremony. Further to that another memorable and historic event occurred on the 13th February 2008 with the National Apology to the Stolen Generation.

Contacts
NSW Teachers Federation
23–33 Mary Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010
Telephone (02) 9217 2100, 1300 654 369
Facsimile (02) 9217 2368
http://www.nswtf.org.au

On behalf of NSWTF Aboriginal Education Coordinator and NSWTF Aboriginal Members Committees. Authorised by the General Secretary, John Dixon, March 2017. 17103

Legend to artwork
- Circles represent the schools TAFE and Aboriginal Policy
- Paths forming the connections linking each to the other, creating a oneness in their commitments to Aboriginal education
- Ants are teachers, students and community
- Communities are represented by the dots in the background.

‘Uniting’ Val Saunders, 1999
‘the sharing of knowledge in the common goal of learning.’
Cultural significance of ‘Welcome to Country’ and ‘Acknowledgement of Country’

Australia is made up of many different Ist Peoples Clans or Groups, each having their own Country, Culture, Language, Beliefs and Customs.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a unique relationship to the land. This involves a responsibility to look after the environmental and spiritual wellbeing of their Country.
- Traditionally, when Aboriginal people travelled they would not enter another’s Country until they were welcomed by the Traditional Owners of that land.

‘Welcome to Country’:
Welcoming people to Country is a Traditional practice, which has special significance. The ‘Welcome to Country’ should only be delivered by the Aboriginal people in their own local homelands and community. This could be an Elder, an adult or a child (depending on the protocols of their community) belonging to that Country.

‘Acknowledgement of Country’:
This can be performed by Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people, both children and adults.

Why should I perform this ceremony?
- Respect, Responsibility, Understanding, Knowledge, Relationships, History.
- Encompassing Aboriginal Acknowledgements and ceremonies into official events and daily proceedings provides opportunities to recognise and pay respect to Aboriginal Peoples’ Culture and Heritage. It also communicates to the broader community the Cultural Heritage of Aboriginal Peoples and promotes mutual respect and understanding.

- ‘Welcome to Country’ and ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ is official protocol within NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF), Department of Education, NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and other government departments enabling the wider community to share in Aboriginal Culture and Heritage. This process facilitates a better understanding of Aboriginal peoples and develops strong relationships within the wider community.

When do I do a ‘Welcome to Country’ and/or ‘Acknowledgement’?
- ‘Welcome to Country’ is usually performed at the commencement of any gathering by the local Aboriginal people of that Country.
- ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ is also performed at the commencement of a gathering, meeting and/or function by the Chairperson, Speaker, an Elder and/or Student. Where the name of the Traditional Custodians is known, it is specifically used. Where it is not known, a general Acknowledgement is given. Any speaker may give an Acknowledgement of Country before their presentation.

Where do I get advice?
When planning an event, you are recommended to consult with the Aboriginal Education Committee within your school or workplace and the local Aboriginal organisations in your community, and/or the AECG to provide advice on:

- the Traditional Custodians of the specific lands
- the appropriate level of Aboriginal recognition
- the appropriate ceremonies and performances

How do I respectfully address and perform this ceremony?
The ‘Welcome to Country’ and ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ given below are only examples of what someone could say if addressing any formal or informal gathering. These examples can be used as a guide or a starting point and people are encouraged to develop their own meaningful words that are relevant to that gathering.

Example of a ‘Welcome to Country’:
- As a representative of the _________ people of this land, I would like to Welcome you to our Country and pay respect to our Elders who have gone before us and those who are present here today. I would also like to recognise our Non-Indigenous people who have joined with us today.

Examples of an ‘Acknowledgement of Country’:
- I would like to Acknowledge the ___________ people, the Traditional Custodians of this Land. I would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present. I would like to extend that respect to other Aboriginal people and/or colleagues present today.
- I would like to respectfully Acknowledge the ___________ people who are the Traditional Custodians and First Peoples of the land on which we stand.
- I would like to show my respect and Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and First Peoples of the Land on which this meeting takes place.

‘...People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person…’
‘...country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow…’

Deborah Bird Rose, Nourishing Terrains