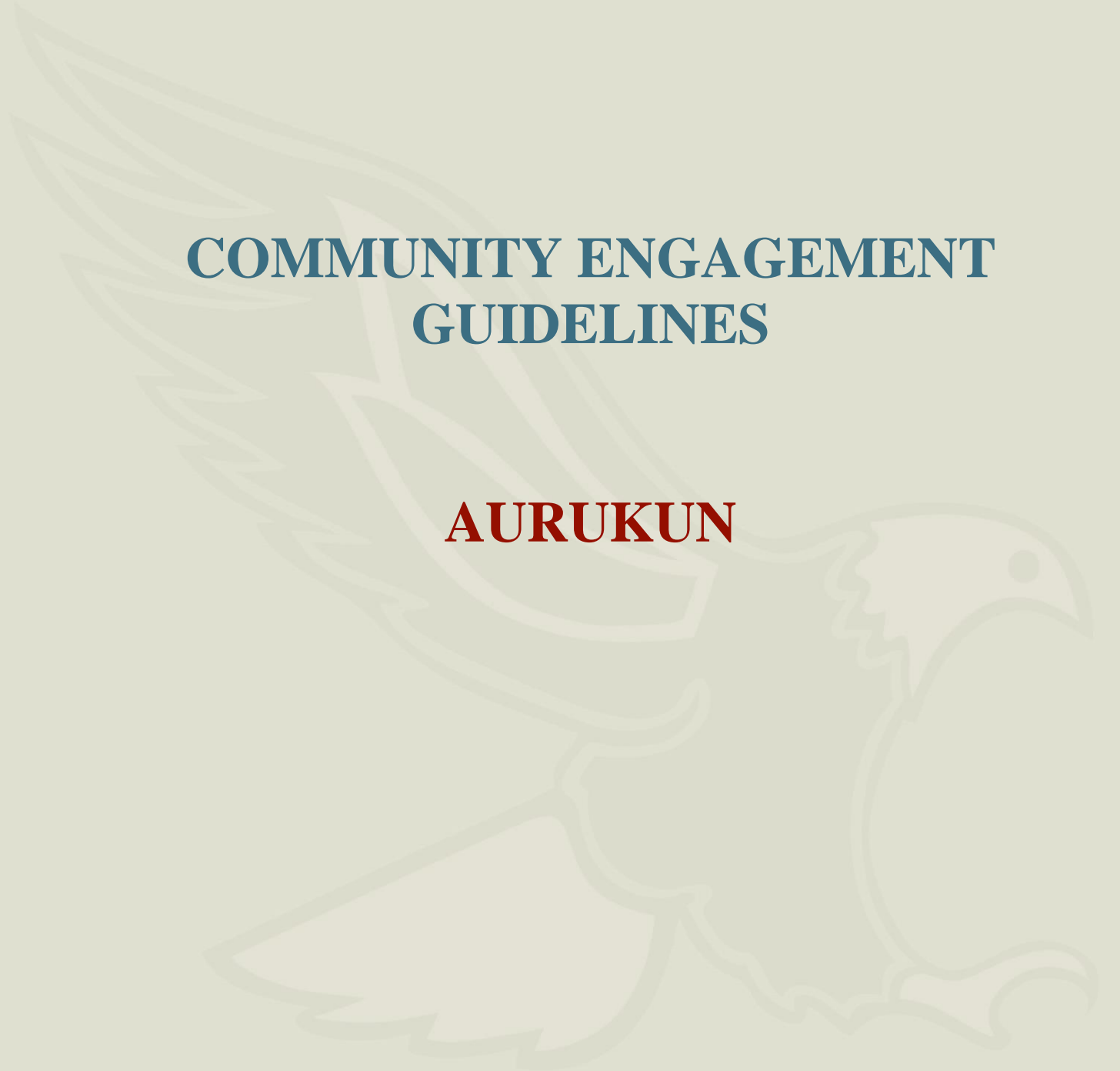





FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

AURUKUN



A large, faint, light-colored illustration of a bird, possibly a swan or a similar waterfowl, is positioned in the background of the page. The bird is shown in profile, facing right, with its wings spread as if it is about to take flight or is in the middle of a stroke. The illustration is rendered in a simple, clean line-art style.

The Commission would like to thank the Local Commissioners for providing advice and guidance into the development of this document in regard to their specific communities. The Commission also wishes to acknowledge receiving information and support to produce this document from partner Queensland and Australian Government agencies and departments.

The Commission recognises we are visitors to the country we travel across and work in and that many of our Local Commissioners are Traditional Owners and Elders of their communities. The Commission acknowledges and pays our respects to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Teachers of these lands. To those of the past whose unseen hands guide the actions and decisions of the Commissioners today; to those of the present working for their communities and setting an example for the next generation and to those of the future, the Elders not yet born who will inherit the legacy of our efforts.

COMMUNITY PROTOCOLS

Prior to visiting any community it is important that one has some knowledge of its history along with an overview of how to engage with members of the community. The need for protocols is not solely an Indigenous or Aboriginal issue.

Community protocols establish modes of behaviour and communication which demonstrate respect for individual residents and the diversity of other cultures.

The Australian Aboriginal culture differs significantly from the Australian non-Aboriginal culture. It is therefore essential to understand the relevant cultural requirements and protocols in order to gain respect and effectively engage with the community. The appreciation of cultural differences including understanding the position and status of people within the local Aboriginal community assists in successfully engaging with Indigenous peoples. Additionally cultural protocols may also vary between communities, and between people within communities.

Different cultural groups may have different attitudes towards matters such as:

- forms of greeting and leave-taking
- use of names and titles
- deference to authority or seniority
- eye contact
- silence
- sexual matters
- modesty
- shaming
- swearing
- physical touch
- directness in speech and in asking questions
- the right to seek and the obligation to impart knowledge

Failure to understand the difference in attitudes may inhibit or prevent effective communication between a visitor and a community member.

OVERVIEW OF AURUKUN COMMUNITY

Location Climate and Demographics

The shire of Aurukun covers an area of 7,500 square kilometres and is located on the western shore of Cape York Peninsula, 900 kilometres north-west of Cairns and 200 kilometres south of Weipa.

The community is bordered by the Holroyd River and Pormpuraaw Deed of Grant in Trust lands to the south, Cook Shire and Archer Bend National Park to the east, the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cook Shire to the west and Cook Shire to the north. The northern boundary is fragmented, with the Shire of Aurukun having jurisdiction over two separate parcels of land not joined to the main part of the Shire.

The estimated resident population of Aurukun Shire as at 30 June 2008 was 1,196 people and the population is predicted to remain relatively stable. Projections prepared by the Planning Information and Forecasting Unit (PIFU), Department of Infrastructure and Planning indicate that the expected population of Aurukun will be between 1,130 and 1,250 people at 2016.

The median age group of Aurukun Shire is approximately 10 years younger than the median age group for Queensland generally, both present and projected. In 2006 the median was 26 years of age, whilst predictions for 2026 are 29 years of age and 2031, 31 years of age. The population is predominantly Wik (traditional owners) with 17 tribal groups represented. The prevalent language spoken is Wik Munkun, with English being a second or third language.

Aurukun can experience particularly high day and night-time temperatures with the average temperatures in the wet season between October and April ranging from 31.1°C to 35.5°C during the day and 21.9°C to 24.2°C during the night. The dry season from May to September is only slightly cooler with the highest night time temperatures approximately 21.4°C and the highest temperature during the day approximately 34.3°C. Due to the hot humid climate, summer clothing is the normal dress.

Aurukun is in the cyclone area of Queensland. From November to May visitors should be mindful of forecasts and should heed Bureau of Meteorology advice and warnings when issued. Rainfall during this period can be exceptionally high and road conditions can change quickly sometimes making travel impossible for long periods.

Access

Aurukun is approximately 900 kilometres north-west of Cairns via the Peninsula Development road, which is unsealed for most of the distance. Driving time is approximately 10 to 12 hours time from Cairns. Aurukun can also be accessed by an unsealed road from the major regional township of Weipa, which is 200 kilometres north. This trip generally takes approximately 2 1/2 hours.

Due to the wet season the road is often closed for long periods (approximately November to April) and as most of the road is unsealed, caution should be exercised as conditions vary dramatically between the wet and the dry times of the year. It is advisable to contact the local council or Police to seek advice on local road conditions before travelling.

Brief History

Aurukun was established as a Mission in 1902 with the reserve being managed under the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (Qld) by the Presbyterian Church of Australia, which later became the Uniting Church of Australia. Aboriginal people were relocated from a large surrounding area, many against their will, to the mission settlement. Today's township is on the site of the original mission.

In 1978, the Queensland Government elected to take control of both Aurukun and Mornington Island reserves. Both communities were against this and protested, seeking the help of the Commonwealth Government.

After lengthy negotiations, legislation for self-management of the two reserves was introduced into Federal Parliament and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Queensland Reserves and Communities Self-Management) Act was passed on the 7th April 1978. On the same day, the Queensland Government revoked self management and subsequently neither the Queensland Act, nor the new Commonwealth legislation applied to the area.

Further negotiations took place between State and Federal Ministers. Subsequently agreement was reached whereby local authorities would be created for the former reserves and the land would be leased to the newly created councils for a period of fifty (50) years. The Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act came into force on 22 May 1978. This Act constituted the Aurukun Shire Council and granted it as Aboriginal Land.

On 13 October 2005 a ground breaking agreement was signed in Aurukun and announced by the Federal Court, which recognised co-existing land rights between pastoralists and the Wik and Wik Way peoples of Western Cape York. Justice Richard Cooper handed down a native title consent determination recognizing the Wik and Wik Way peoples' native title rights and interests covering 12,530 square kilometres of land. The decision formed the final chapter to the 1996 High Court decision wherein it was determined that native title could coexist with a pastoral lease. In October 2000 the Wik and Wik Way people's native title claim was determined, recognizing traditional rights over 6,136 square kilometres of land.

On 11 October 2012 at a special hearing of the Federal Court in the remote Indigenous community of Aurukun, Queensland's most enduring Native Title claim was finalised after the Federal Court recognised the Wik and Wik Way People as native title holders of land in Far North Queensland. Australia's legal system now formally acknowledges the rights of native title claimants to camp, hunt, fish and gather in the area, maintain areas of significance and conduct ceremonies in accordance with their traditional laws and customs. The claim covers 5,184 square kilometres of land and waters and includes land on the western side of Cape York Peninsula between Weipa and Aurukun. The determination means the Wik and Wik Way People now have Native Title over 19,672 square kilometres of land between Embley River and Edward River and west of the Peninsula Development Road.

- On 18 September 2013 the Newman Government made history with the largest single Aboriginal freehold deed issued since the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* was enacted, with Assistant Minister David Kempton presenting the deeds to the Deputy Mayor of Aurukun Angus Kerindun, Aurukun Shire Councillors Vera Koomeeta and Edgar Kerindun and Ngan Aak-Kunch Directors. Under the land transfer, the Queensland Government transferred: 735 hectares of land within the Aurukun Shire Lease and unallocated state land, to Ngan Aak-Kunch Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Body Corporate (RNTBC) to administer on behalf of the Wik people
- 286 hectares of town and reserve land, to the Aurukun Shire Council to be held for the benefit of Aurukun residents.

Following the transfer, the Shire Lease was cancelled and the land became Aboriginal freehold land. The deed formally recognises Aboriginal ownership of more than 736,000 hectares of land on the Western Cape York Peninsula at Aurukun.

Clan Groups and Languages

There are approximately 50 Clan estates clustered along the narrow coastal flood plain and occupying a very large expanse in the forest and savannah woodland country of the upland around Aurukun. The people own this land by right of clan birth and ties to country. There are a large variety of languages and dialects in the Aurukun district, all belong to a generic language group known as the Wik group. The Australian Society for Indigenous Languages has a list of dictionaries for Aboriginal languages at <http://www.ausil.org.au/node/3717>.

Language groups associated with the area are:

Principal Language	Sub Language
Wik Ngathan	Wik Ngathan Keyangan
Wik Munkun	Wik Munkun Kugu
Wik Liyanh	Wik Liyanh Uwanh
Wik Ngatharr	Wik Ngatharr Muminh
Wik Ep	Wik Ep Ugbanh
Wik Me'anh	Wik Me'anh Mu'inh

Although by 1980 Wik Munkun and English had become the dominant languages of the Aurukun area and Wik Munkun was the first language of most children. Several hundred people also have partial or excellent knowledge of Wik Ngathan and most languages have at least some surviving speakers. Also many adults, and most children have knowledge of many of these languages, in many instances people have full competence in up to four or five languages.

Outstations

Whilst the majority of people reside within the Aurukun community during the wet season, in the dry season (April to November) many community members choose to reside on their traditional homelands and outstations, which have only very basic accommodation and infrastructure facilities.

Aurukun Shire Council is responsible for the management of the fifteen Outstations listed below.

Name	Distance	Travel Time
Aayka	30 nautical miles	10 hours 4wd, 15mins air
Bullyard	41 nautical miles	1 day 4wd, 20 mins air
Emu Foot	11 nautical miles	2 hours 4wd, 5 mins air
Hagan's Lagoon	10 nautical miles	2 hours 4wd, 5 mins air
Kawkie South	30 nautical miles	10 hours 4wd, 15 mins air
Kencherang	30 nautical miles	9 hours 4wd, 15 mins air
Love River	25 nautical miles	4 hours 4wd, 10 mins air
Southarm	20 nautical miles	20 minutes by sea
Stoney Crossing	18 nautical miles	1 hour 4wd, 10 mins air
Tiitch	30 nautical miles	10 hours 4wd, No airstrip
Ti Tree	38 nautical miles	12 hours 4wd, 19 mins air
Tunkaniin	41 Nautical Miles	1 day 4wd, 20 mins air
Walgnall	44 nautical miles	1 day 4wd, 20 mins air
Wathaniin	400 km	9 hours 4wd, 15 mins air
Wutan	5 nautical miles	10 mins by sea

COMMUNITY VISITS – PROTOCOLS

When planning a visit to a community you should consider the following points:

- Trips may need to be delayed as a result of tribal rituals and ceremonies. It is particularly important to respect 'sorry business' following the death of a community member. Sorry business may mean that people cannot be contacted for weeks at a time.
- Have a clear understanding of the purpose of your visit and your role.
- Consider who the people you wish to consult are.
- Consider whose business it is, according to local culture. Who are the appropriate people/organisations to contact? What is the appropriate way to contact them?
- Consider what positions the people hold.
- Consider whether they are part of the formal elected representatives (council), or another government department, community group.
- Consider what the relationship is between those you wish to consult and other members of the community e.g. the council, government and non government organisations.
- Consider whether all the major leadership groups are going to be represented or consulted e.g. councillor, elders, justice group, Local Program Office (LPO) or FRC Local Commissioners.
- Do you know the nature and origin of the issue or problem, is there a history or background as to why you need to consult with a particular group?
- Try to foresee possible questions or contentious issues, and work through possible solutions or options for handling those issues beforehand.
- Consider whether the topic covers one or more agencies' jurisdiction e.g. is the Shire Council involved, or another government department.

- If other agencies are involved ensure that they are aware of any visit and what you will be consulting on. Perhaps a representative from that agency may wish to attend the meeting.
- Consider what information you can share as a part of the consultation process.
- Remember those being consulted may not have the same background information as you, so prepare the information needed beforehand, so that the consultation is valuable and productive to both sides.
- Be prepared to concede or give ground in the consultation/negotiation process. Attempt to foresee potential barriers to specific issues e.g. government policies, practical environmental matters, legislative constraints and potential areas of conflict with other groups. Remember concepts of time are different and sometimes more value is placed on other priorities. Therefore have a flexible timetable to allow for fluctuating and changing arrangements which can occur with little or no notice due to a range of community issues.

When visiting a DOGIT or shire community, prior to organising travel arrangements check with the council and Local Program Office as to the suitability of your visit to the community by:

- Inviting the managers and/or administrators of key organisations relevant to the consultation issues e.g. shire council, LPO, Elders, councils etc to a central meeting place; and/or
- Requesting a meeting at their organisation to discuss the key issues relevant to specific organisations. This should be done initially by telephone. Explain the following when discussing the visits.
 - Expected arrival date - for remote communities all visitors should notify both the council and Local Program Office (LPO). If the meeting is with the council it would be preferable to arrange the visit to coincide with the council's normal monthly meeting. Councils have considerable demands upon their time, consideration of this fact will greatly enhance relationships with the Shire Council and the Local Program Office personnel.
 - Expected departure date.

- How long you will need to talk. Depending on the issue(s) it may require a series of visits over a period of time.
- Where you will be staying (finding accommodation is not always easy).
- Why you need to visit.
- Who else you might like to talk to while in the community or the organisation you are visiting.
- Who else is travelling with you.
- Ask permission to advertise your visit (if appropriate).
- Advise all stakeholders within community of your intended visit; and
- Confirm all of the above in writing.

Formal Meetings

It is vital you establish and then maintain credibility in the community, do not attempt to organise a formal meeting if you are not known by anyone in the community. You should have contacts in the community who can give you guidance on how to organise the meeting without offending important people and community leaders or Elders.

Follow up with other government or community service providers in relation to their established networks e.g. LPO, justice groups, Centrelink, Cape York Partnerships or other government and non-government agencies. You may be able to tap into existing processes.

You will need to identify the groups or individuals in the community who are able to distribute information and whose suggested solutions are generally accepted. Meeting agendas are more profitably discussed with these groups or individuals.

Planning a Formal Meeting

When you plan a formal meeting you will need to consider the following:

- Introduce yourself prior to setting up a meeting by:
 - Telephone
 - Letter and/or
 - Personal introduction.

With remote communities, telephone contacts are preferred to letter, and personal visits are preferred to telephone.

- Decide whether the meeting needs to be formal or informal (be guided by advice from the community, community contact, or local stakeholders).
- Explain why the meeting was initiated. Include date and time, agenda items, who will be attending and provide any information prior to the meeting that is available to you.
- When selecting a suitable venue, if indoors (and if applicable) be aware of the different levels of comfort zones for participants e.g. ventilation, heating, room layout and atmosphere. Be mindful of possible costs, e.g. paying for the hire of the hall, refreshments etc.
- If possible use the local community hall or resource centre.
- If possible consider conducting the meeting under a tree or near a river. Be guided by your networks and/or Aboriginal contacts.
- Be punctual. Do not make people wait for you.
- Take minutes of the meeting including action items. Include the purpose of the meeting, location of the meeting, attendees, apologies and outcomes.

When to Hold a Public Meeting

Public meetings should be run in partnership with a local representative. Where possible, seek assistance from local Aboriginal leaders or the Local Commissioners. They will advise you as to when you're able to speak. Do not interrupt or correct the speaker when they are introducing you. If there is a vital need to correct something, do it without embarrassing the other person when your turn comes to speak.

Meetings are not the usual way communities reach agreements. Meetings are used to confirm that agreement has been reached. Actual decisions occur outside the meeting process. You should treat the meeting as an informative process.

Be aware of exceptions as some communities or agencies may utilise the meeting not only as an information gathering forum but also to make decisions and subsequently advise you of outcomes.

The timing for holding the meeting must be mutually convenient. You cannot expect people to assemble when it is convenient for you. People in the community have their own duties to complete, and these are important to them.

It is important that you also consider the following:

- There is a cultural practice called 'Murri time'. You may view this as tardiness, lateness or even a sign of disrespect. However, in Aboriginal culture Murri time is more accurately defined as a different concept of time and values, where there is less value placed on clock time.
- Pay days are usually shopping days and are therefore not convenient.
- The number of meetings is determined by the outcomes your organisation and the community desire. That is, meetings could be a one-off event, incremental or ongoing.

When Speaking at Public Meetings

You **should not** use public meetings to extract information or make final decisions on issues. You will therefore need to:

- Avoid professional jargon. Always speak in plain language. Check that there is understanding of what you have said. A little extra time spent can reward you with time saved in the long run.
- Avoid cross-examining any person about their opinions.
- Avoid asking a person about their source of information.

- Avoid being too blunt with any situation where there is need to correct what another person has said.
- Avoid personal names and references e.g. “Well John over there reckons this is a good idea” or “I heard people in the community say this is a good idea”.
- Avoid direct criticism.
- Avoid causing anyone to suffer a loss of personal dignity.
- Practice being indirect and develop the art of distancing yourself from an idea.
- Indigenous people are visual people so where possible, show information in a presentation.

Asking Questions at Meetings

Do not expect many questions from community members at public meetings. In Indigenous communities, it is considered inappropriate and rude to be too curious or inquisitive. Indigenous people resist answering too many questions because it can be seen as going against their idea of independence and privacy.

Do not make assumptions and always clarify matters throughout the process. Do not pose hypothetical questions. Indigenous people deal in practical real issues. In no way should you assume that no answer to a question is indicative of them not listening or not being interested in what you are saying. Indigenous people like to process the information presented prior to commenting.

Feedback and Follow-up to Community Meetings

It is equally important in promoting and maintaining your engagement with the community to ensure that any issues raised by agency representatives or community members which cannot be resolved in the first instance, or for which you have given an undertaking to resolve, are followed up and a resolution sought in a timely manner. The community should be kept abreast of outcomes reached, and if necessary, given further input into the negotiation process. Avoid making promises you cannot keep. Not following through with something you have promised may not seem of importance to you, but it is likely to be judged harshly by the community.

Be mindful of the need to:

- Provide further information if required and show continued interest in the outcome.
- Recap on important points or decisions reached at the meeting.
- Reiterate the benefits and positive aspects of the meeting.
- Remind members of any upcoming or follow-up meetings and the opportunity for further negotiations if applicable.
- Avoid negative remarks.
- Document action points in the minutes for all parties to be revisited at follow up meetings.
- Should issues be raised regarding other agencies not in attendance at the meeting which require investigation, ensure those issues are relayed to the appropriate parties for actioning.
- Provide minutes of the meeting to attending parties.
- Demonstrating that outcomes are being effectively sought will ensure that all parties take ownership in the process.

Expected Behaviours Whilst in the Community

It is expected that you conduct yourself in a professional manner at all times whilst undertaking your business. It is important to behave in the following manner when moving around the community:

- Be modest in your behaviour.
- Speak clearly, in a normal tone. Avoid speaking too fast when interacting with community members.
- Walk at a moderate pace and avoid the temptation to take shortcuts.
- Avoid being intrusive in your general behaviour.
- Dress appropriately; women in particular should avoid wearing too much make-up, high heels or any clothing which may be considered revealing.

The Commission acknowledges that everyone has the freedom to behave and dress as they wish. However, the above behaviours will show respect and assist you in becoming accepted within the community and therefore hopefully more successful in your desired outcome.

Sorry Business

Strict protocols apply following deaths in Indigenous communities. The mourning period is referred to as 'sorry business'. Sorry business often means that engagement with the community will not be possible for a period of time. Proceed with caution in your dealings during and after sorry business. In the first instance contact the Local Coordinator and Local Commissioners to determine when, under what circumstances and in what manner your meeting in the community can proceed.

Most importantly, the name of the deceased is no longer used out of respect for that person. In many cases any person in the community who shares the same Christian name as the deceased is also no longer called by their Christian name. Instead another name is used from the particular dialect, or their second Christian name may be used. Custom varies between communities, and also varies according to the status of the deceased person.

Taking Photos

There are strict protocols to taking photos in Aboriginal communities.

- Prior to taking any photos you must ask permission.
- If you wish to take photos of the community as a whole you must ask the local council office for permission.
- If you wish to take photos of community people you must seek permission directly with the individuals involved.
- Prior to any photos being published you must seek and receive permission from either the council or the individual.

Conducting Home Visits

When visiting community member's homes:

- Call out from the front yard, and wait.
- Enter into the yard when invited.
- It is not polite to enter a person's home unless you have been invited inside by the individual.
- Most community people will prefer to talk with you outside of their house if you are unknown to them.

Silence

Silence is an important and valued part of communication between Aboriginal persons. It may indicate a desire to think about a matter, or a desire to become comfortable with a social situation. It may also simply be a way of enjoying another's company in a non-verbal way.

Sign Language and Gestures

Sign language and gestures are significant aspects of communication in traditional Aboriginal culture. Sign language may be especially important during times of sorry business. Many gestures are common to Aboriginal people throughout Australia, particularly those which are intended to identify relatives or other people. For example: two arms, crossed over and held in front of the body (as if in handcuffs) means 'policeman'. Other, more subtle gestures are also common. In particular, movements of the eye, head and lips may be used to indicate direction of motion, or the location of a person or of an event being discussed.

Non-Verbal Communication

In face-to-face communication, a significant proportion of what is conveyed consists of para-linguistic or non-verbal communication. Tone of voice, facial expression, and eye movement, gestures and posture are all highly significant elements of communication.

Communicating with Individuals

The general rules for effectively dealing with Indigenous people in community comprise two principles, politeness and respect.

Although to a non-Aboriginal person unfamiliar with Indigenous people, personal and cultural protocols might seem complex and in some cases unfathomable, a person can in most cases be reasonably confident that by treating people with respect and sensitivity they will achieve the appropriate outcomes, and will gain respect from the individual and the community.

It will greatly assist to have an Aboriginal person to accompany and advise you if possible. Although as stated, there are no hard and fast rules in personal protocols. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- A visitor should behave as a visitor.
- A visitor should only go where invited or given permission.
- A visitor should respect confidentiality about issues relating to other Aboriginal communities. It must be understood and respected that an Aboriginal person generally cannot speak about, or on behalf of another person's country or their business, unless given permission by the custodians and/or traditional landowner to do so.