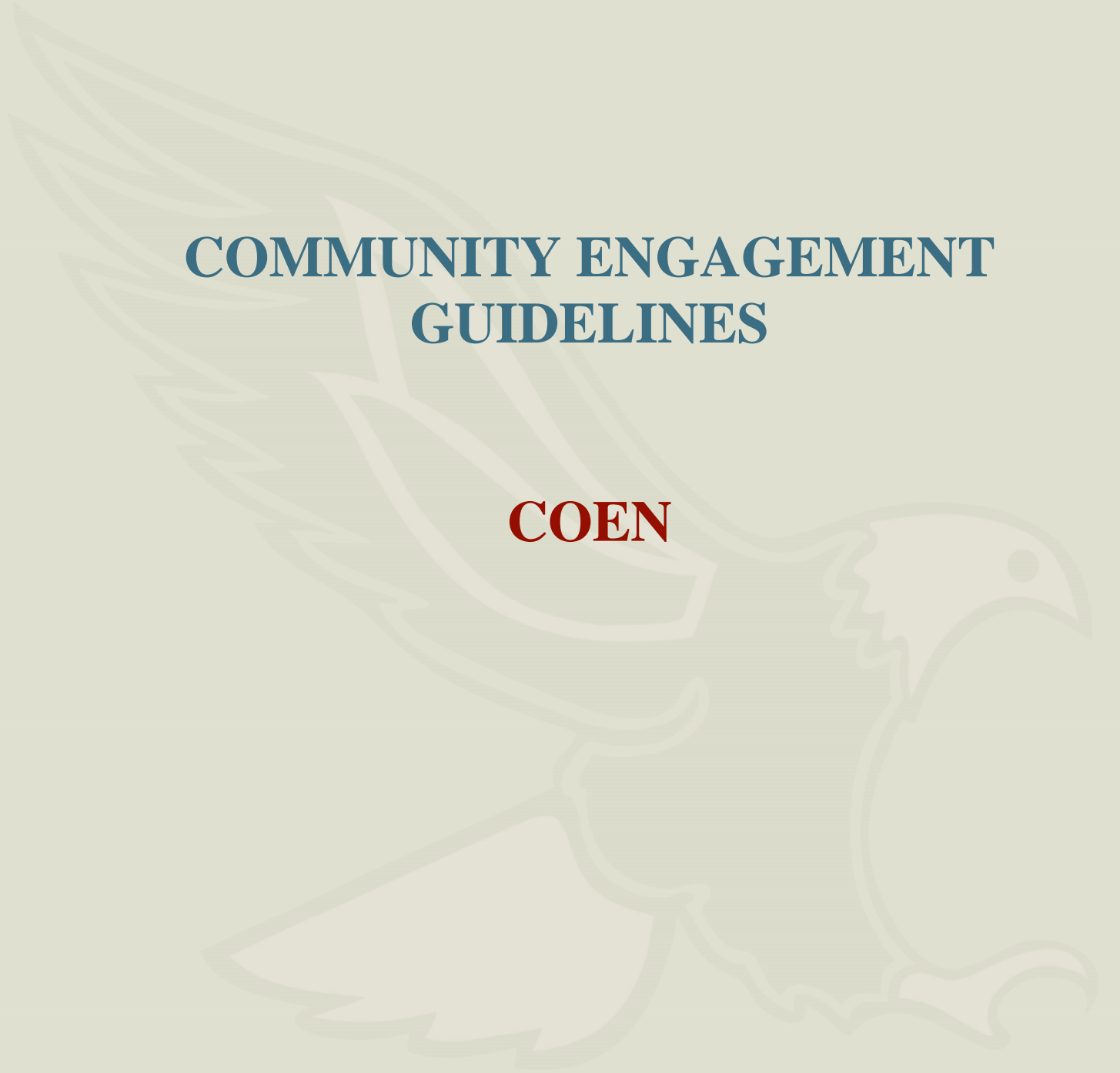





FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

COEN



A large, faint, light-colored illustration of an emu is positioned in the background, spanning across the middle and right side of the page. The emu is shown in profile, facing right, with its wings slightly tucked and its tail feathers visible.

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 Coen it is important that one has some knowledge of its history along with an overview of how to engage with members of the Aboriginal 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 disparities and protocols in order to gain respect and effectively engage with the Aboriginal community. The appreciation of cultural morays 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 COEN COMMUNITY

Location Climate and Demographics

The township of Coen is located in central Cape York, approximately 600 kilometres north-west of Cairns and comprises 14.5 square kilometres. The permanent population is estimated at 246 people, 80 percent of which are Aboriginal.

Coen can experience particularly high day and night-time temperature fluctuations with a maximum temperature in the wet season, between October and April of over 34°C and a minimum temperature in the dry season from May to October (winter) of around 17°C. Due to the hot humid climate, summer clothing is the normal dress.

As Coen is in the cyclone area of Queensland, from November to May visitors should be mindful of weather forecasts during this period 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 short periods in the dry season and for months in the wet season.

Access

Coen is part of the Cook Shire. The town is located on the single major road and transport route servicing Cape York, the Peninsula Development Road. The Peninsula Development Road is unsealed for most of the distance and driving time from Cairns is approximately eight hours to Coen.

In the wet season the road is often closed (approximately November to April) for several months. Due to most of the road being 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 Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation (CRAC) or Police to seek advice on local road conditions. When roads are impassable the only transport available is via air charter or regular scheduled Skytrans flights from Cairns, which operate three times a week.

Brief History

Aboriginal people have occupied, and carried out their cultural traditions on and maintained the land in central Cape York Peninsula for many thousands of years. Coen settlement history commenced as a fort built beside the Coen River by Robert Sefton in 1876, as a result of Robert Sefton and William Lakeland discovering the Batavia/Wenlock River goldfield in 1873. The gold rush at the Palmer River was well underway at the same time and a track was forged from the Palmer River through to Coen between 1878 and 1880. The Coen gold field was subsequently proclaimed in 1892, though the boom was to be short lived and over by 1910.

Due to the building of the overland telegraph track, between 1883 and 1887, the area was quickly populated with the establishment of the Great Northern Mine and various cattle stations. Chinese merchants also settled Coen, following on the heels of the gold rush and capitalizing on the opportunity for trade. Sandalwood was a prime export and was felled and exported with the assistance of the local Aborigines.

The Indigenous people of the region originally comprised several language groups living in discrete areas. From the 1873 Palmer River gold rush to the end of the 'Wild Time' after the passage of the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act in 1897, the Indigenous people developed strategies of guerilla warfare to hamper European settlement, only to be dispersed by the Native Mounted Police. During and after the 1930s, adults and children were forcibly removed to the Lockhart River Mission and later to Bamaga. Those who had not been forcibly relocated were not advised where their families had been taken. This treatment continued into recent history. In June 1961, twenty three permanent residents were removed from Port Stewart Lamalama settlement and transported to Thursday Island and then Bamaga. Their houses were burnt down and their dogs were shot. An Aboriginal reserve was eventually established in May 1944 on 14 acres of land.

Many of the earliest Aboriginal residents of Coen were those who lived on the Mt Croll cattle Station. Others were lucky enough to gain exemptions from the various Government Acts that controlled the lives of Aboriginal people on Missions and Reserves until the 1960's. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Aboriginal population of the small Coen reserves increased dramatically due to the introduction of award wages for Aborigines in the pastoral industry. This led many Indigenous stockmen to lose the jobs and a subsequent decline in the involvement of Indigenous people in station life.

Today, the residents of the Coen area originate from several different language groups.

These include:

- The Lamalama people from the Port Stewart/Lakefield National Park area.
- The Northern Kaanju or Wenlock people from upper Wenlock River and Batavia Downs.
- The Southern Kaanju people from parts of the McIlwraith Range area.
- A number of Wik groups, particularly the Mungkana from Merepah and topside Mungkana peoples with interests in parts of Rokeby National Park (Langi Outstation).
- The Olkolo people with interest in Glen Garland Station to the south west of Musgrave.
- Town based people and Ayapathu people with links to the south of Coen.
- A variety of individuals or small groups with links to other areas, the Umpula of Lockhart River and a cluster of languages from around Princess Charlotte Bay such as Kugu Thaypan.

Most of the major language and family groupings have clear outstations and land claim or land acquisition aspirations. In May 2012, the LNP State Government led by the Premier Campbell Newman handed 381,560 hectares of land in the Mungkan Kandju National Park to its traditional owners the Wik Mungkan, Southern Kaanju and Ayapathu People. A further 75,074 hectares of land previously revoked from the Archer Bend section of the park was also transferred to the Oyala Thumotang Land Trust representing the traditional owners of the land.

On the 23 September 2013 the Lama Lama traditional owners and the Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement (TUMRA) Steering Committee celebrated the accreditation of their TUMRA agreement at the Port Stewart Community Hall. The TUMRA is a collaborative partnership between Lama Lama People, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sporting and Racing.

The community is serviced with a primary school, Queensland Ambulance Service field office, a Police Station operated by two officers, Magistrates Court, primary health care centre, Wellbeing Centre, kindergarten, child care centre, Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries Information and Inspection Centre, Environmental Protection Agency (Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service), Queensland State Emergency Service and Volunteer Marine Rescue.

Clan Groups and Languages

Coen became the meeting place of the Wik and Kaanju speaking peoples, and other regional Aboriginal people working on surrounding stations and mines. English is now the major language spoken in Coen, however, some of the other Indigenous languages still spoken in the area are Lamalama, Wik Mungkan, Ayapathu, Kaanju, Olkala, Southern Kaanju, Umpula and Morobalama. The Australian Society for Indigenous Languages has a list of dictionaries for Aboriginal languages at <http://www.ausil.org.au/node/3717>.

Outstations

During the dry season (May to November) many Indigenous residents of Coen choose to reside at their traditional homelands and outstations. The population in these outstations varies from year to year depending on family movements.

The following are the outstations associated with Coen:

Name	Clan	Distance from Coen	Travel Time
Glen Garland	Olkala	149 Kms	4 Hours
Meripag	Wik Mungkan	120 Kms	2.5 Hours
Wenlock River	Northern Kaanju	150 Kms	3 Hours
Station Creek	Ayapathu	50 Kms	1 Hour
Stoney Creek	Southern Kaanju	120 Kms	2.5 Hours
Birthday Mountain	Southern Kaanju	60 Kms	1 Hour
Port Stewart	Lamalama	100 Kms	2 Hours
Langi Lagoon	Wik Mungkan	80 Kms	1 Hour

Port Stewart is the most established outstation and has a semi-permanent population of the Lamalama people.

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 an Indigenous person. 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 is it, 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 if they are they a part of the formal elected representatives (council), another government department, or a community group.
- Consider what the relationship is between those you wish to consult and others e.g. the council, government and non government organisations.
- Consider whether all the major leadership groups going to be represented or consulted e.g. councillor, elders, justice group, Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation (CRAC), Government Coordination Officer (GCO), Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC), Regional Operations Centre (ROC) 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 to make the consultation 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. 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 Coen, prior to organising travel arrangements check with CRAC, GCO, ICC and ROC 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, CRAC, GCO, ICC, ROC, 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 CRAC, GCO, ICC and ROC. If the meeting is with CRAC it would be preferable to arrange the visit to coincide with CRAC's normal monthly meeting. Councils have considerable demands upon their time, particularly from outside agencies. Consideration of this fact will greatly enhance the relationships with the Shire Council, CRAC, GCO, ICC and ROC personnel.
 - Expected departure date.
 - How long you will need to talk, depending on the issues 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 at 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 whenever possible.

Formal Meetings

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

Follow up with other government or community service providers in relation to their established networks e.g. CRAC, GCO, ICC, ROC, 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 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, attendees 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 Indigenous people 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 Indigenous people or agencies may utilise the meetings 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. Indigenous people 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 and 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 Indigenous people at public meetings. 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 a 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 Indigenous people to ensure that any issues raised by agency representatives or Indigenous attendees 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. Meeting attendees 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 others.

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.
- Provide minutes of the meeting to attending parties.

- 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.
- 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:

- 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 societies. The mourning period is referred to as 'sorry business'. Sorry business often means that engagement with the Indigenous people 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 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 a group you must ask CRAC, GCO, ICC or ROC for permission.
- If you wish to take photos of individuals 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 or knock on the front door.
- After knocking, stand away from the door to ensure their privacy.
- 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.