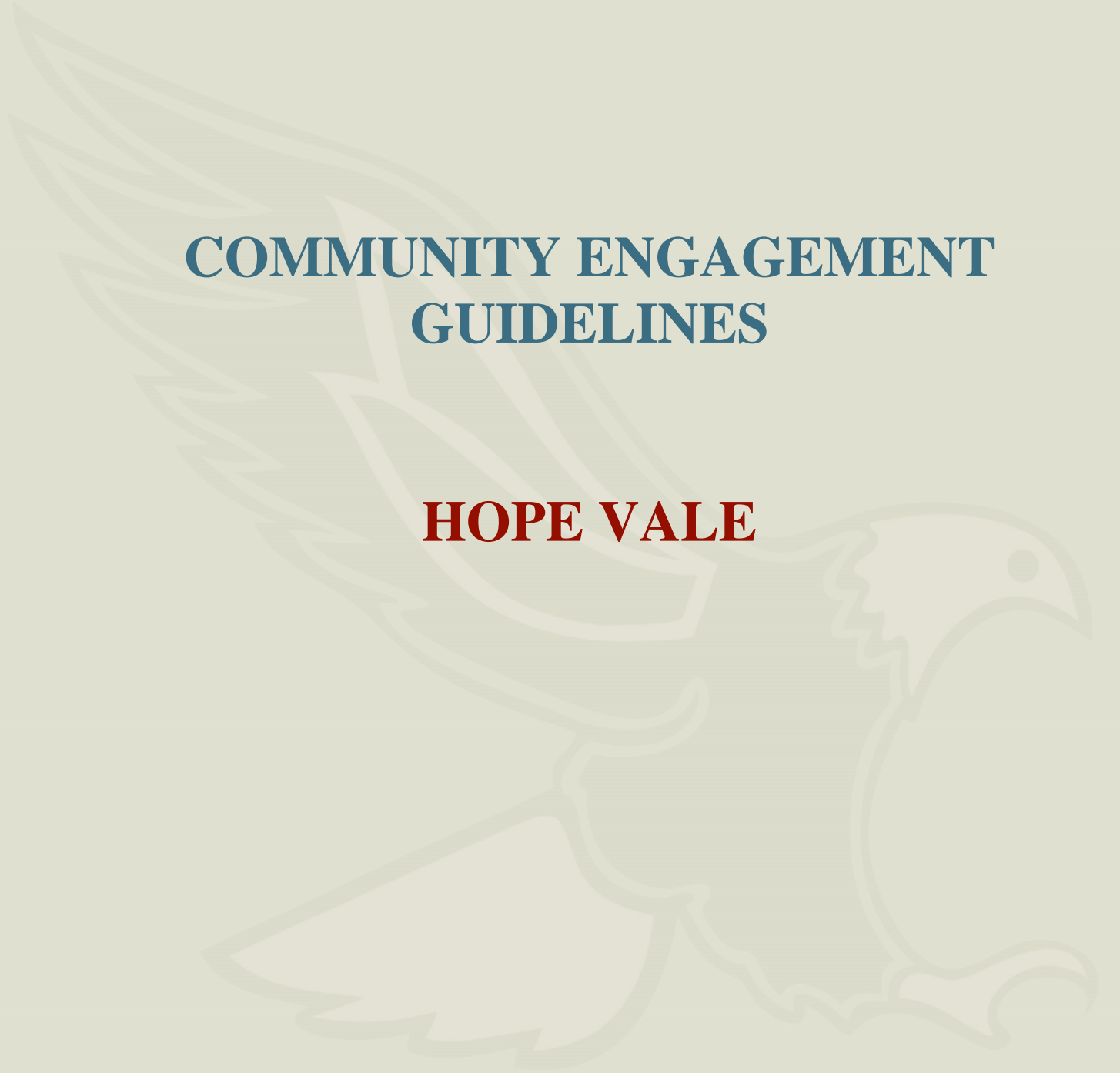





FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

## HOPE VALE



A large, faint, stylized outline of a bird, possibly a booby, is positioned in the background of the page. The bird is shown in profile, facing right, with its wings spread. The outline is composed of simple, thick lines, giving it a graphic, almost tribal appearance. It occupies a significant portion of the page's width and height, serving as a subtle background element.

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 disparities and protocols in order to gain respect and effectively engage with the community. The appreciation of cultural mores 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 HOPE VALE COMMUNITY

### Location Climate and Demographics

Hope Vale is situated 46 kilometres north-east of Cooktown on the east of Cape York Peninsula. Current population is estimated at 826 (2008), with approximately 94 percent of the total population being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin.

The community is within the traditional lands of the Guugu Yimithirr people which spans from the Annan River south of Cooktown, north to the Jeannie River and west to Battle Camp. The land comprises rich fertile red soil with many freshwater springs, palm tree lined rivers and sand dunes.

Hope Vale can experience particularly high temperatures throughout the day and night with the average temperatures in the wet season between November and April ranging from 29.4°C to 32.2°C during the day, and 23.2°C to 25.6°C at night. The dry season from May to September is only slightly cooler with the highest night-time temperature of approximately 22.9°C and the highest temperature during the day of approximately 28.4°C. Due to the hot humid climate, summer clothing is the normal dress.

As Hope Vale is in the cyclone area of Queensland, from November to May each year visitors should be mindful of 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.

### Access

Hope Vale is approximately 367 kilometres (5 hours) by road north of Cairns via Cooktown, with 12 kilometres of unsealed road between Cooktown and Hope Vale. In the wet season (November to April), sections of both the sealed and unsealed road may be closed due to flooding. Caution should be exercised at all times as conditions can change without warning and vary dramatically between the wet and dry times of the year. It is therefore advisable to contact the local council or police to seek advice on local road conditions if you are a first time traveler in the area.

## Brief History

Hope Vale was established as the Cape Bedford Mission by Johann Flierl, a missionary of the Lutheran Church in 1886, with a settlement at Elim on the beach. The community was intended to be a refuge for the Guugu-Yimidhirr people due to the effects of the Palmer River gold rush on the Indigenous population.

During World War II the entire population of Hope Vale was relocated from Elim and interned at Woorabinda near Rockhampton. Relocation was due to the belief that the residents of Hope Vale (being a mission established by the German Lutheran Church) may cooperate with the advancing Japanese Army. Relocation took a heavy toll on the Aboriginal population with 28 mortalities within the first month and one-quarter of the population dying over the next 8 years.

Hope Vale was re-established as a Lutheran Mission in September 1949, but the first families did not return to the Mission until 1950 and comprised Indigenous people from the Hope Valley and Cape Bedford Missions. As the original community at Elim lacked sufficient water resources, the township was moved approximately 20 kilometres inland to its present site. The community incorporates an area of 110,000 hectares and in 1986 was the first Aboriginal community to receive a Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) wherein it would be governed by a local Aboriginal council empowered to make by-laws, appoint community police, and manage infrastructure, work schemes and other council imperatives. Visitors wanting to access Hope Vale area including Elim Beach (or any other DOGIT community) are required to inform the Regional Operations Centre (ROC) or council of their movement while in community.

Community services available in Hope Vale include the primary school, arts centre and general store with ATM, post office and banking services available at the Council Administration Offices. There is also a range of community facilities including a health clinic, environmental health support unit, aquatic centre, child care centre, women's shelter, home and community care facility, employment services, disability support, child safety, seniors and youth support services, community justice group, and Magistrates Court. Hope Vale also has a new multi-purpose centre and business services centre hub.

The Hope Vale community also has a strong choral singing tradition. The choir has performed on tour and at the Queensland Music Festival.

## Clan Groups and Languages

The Hope Vale population is comprised of 13 clan groups including the Dhuppi, Nukgal, Binthi, Thitharr, Dharrpa, Ngayumbarr-Ngayumbarr, Dingaal, Ngurrumungu, Thaanil, Gamaay, Ngaatha and Burunga Clans.

Hope Vale Congress Aboriginal Corporation is a representative body for the 13 clan groups. The body is comprised of members from each clan deciding on matters relating to land management for their respective clan group areas.

In addition to these clans, the community is made up of the Guugu Yimidhirr speaking peoples, the Yiidhuwarra (traditional owners of Barrow Point, Flinders Island, and the South Annan), the Bagaarmugu, Muunthiwarra, Juunjuwaara and Muli people plus the Gungarde and Bulgoon people from the south, the Kings Plain's Thukuun Warra people and the Sunset Yulanji people from the Maytown area. The most common Indigenous language spoken in Hope Vale is Guugu Yimithirr. The Australian Society for Indigenous Languages has a list of dictionaries for Aboriginal languages at <http://www.ausil.org.au/node/3717>.

## Outstations

The traditional lands of the Guugu Yimithirr people lie between the Annan river south of Cooktown, north to the Jeannie River and to the west of Battle Camp. There are a total of 33 outstations, most of which are only occupied in the dry season.

## 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 relationships are between those you wish to consult and other members of the community e.g. the council, government and non government organisations.
- Consider are all the major leadership groups going to be represented or consulted e.g. councillor, elders, justice group, ROC or FRC Local Commissioners.
- Do you know the nature and origin of the issue or problem. Is there a history or background 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 beforehand the information needed 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 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, 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 both the council and the ROC. 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, particularly from outside agencies. Consideration of this fact will greatly enhance the relationships with the Shire Council and the 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 within 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 go about organising the meeting without offending important people and community leaders and Elders.

Follow up with other government or community service providers in relation to their established networks e.g. 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 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 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.