

POSITION STATEMENT

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

Introduction

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) recognises the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the oldest continuous living cultures¹ and the Traditional Custodians of the land. AILA respects their wisdom, insights and connections to the land – the same land - 'country' - which is the central focus of our profession.

This position statement recognises landscape architects' professional responsibilities to the land ('Country') and its people.

As landscape architects who engage with the land – *places; people; cultures; histories; stories; natural systems and built context* - we seek to build relationships with the Traditional Custodians, and aim through our Position Statement and Reconciliation Action Plan, 2018, for a 'Connection to Country' basis in all projects. By collaborating with the Traditional Custodians and learning from their ancient knowledge of land and waters, we can improve our understanding of and care for the landscape.

Whilst many Landscape Architects already include respectful consultative processes in their practices, there has never been a co-ordinated AILA national approach². Our Reconciliation Action Plan, 2018, begins a national journey to encourage all members in a better understanding and respect for the complex intrinsic values of 'country' and spirituality. It aligns with our international obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) 2007 and with the organisation's responsibilities to our

¹ Estimated at 65,000 years.

² Until now, Reconciliation actions have largely been dependent on the initiatives of individual members and some State Chapter Committees.



professional peers and members in accordance with the AILA Constitution and Charter.

Key objectives

We appreciate the deep connections and knowledge that Traditional Custodians have with their 'country' - lands, seas, rivers and skies - and seek through collaboration to respectfully and sensitively integrate these understandings into meaningful landscape planning and design.

Key objectives include:

- Establishing protocols to achieve effective, meaningful and productive communication with local Traditional Custodians about landscape, urban design and infrastructure projects and research.
- Being relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, by engaging in collaborative discussions, and being open to change.
- Ensuring project procurement processes respond to cultural considerations of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Developing methods and practices for project-specific design processes that ensure a respectful and sincere process for embedding Indigenous knowledge and values into landscape projects.
- Ensuring that project-specific design processes empower the relevant local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities by building their capacity.
- Increasing our own and broader community knowledge and understanding of the complexity and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, and the socio-cultural implications of settlement and colonisation.
- Providing experience-based Indigenous ideas and histories within landscape architecture degree courses through close consultation with local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Securing structured and funded pathways to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the landscape architecture profession. This would include skill-sharing, mentorship, university scholarships, traineeships, or other systems that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to study and be employed within the profession.
- Promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'voices' in policy, media and legislative discourse about our landscape, cities and places.



- Establishing ‘*story*’ as a medium for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander input into pre-design frameworks, design processes and outcomes. *Story* provides a platform for appropriate representation of past, present, and future understandings and meanings about Country and identity.

AILA position

AILA advocates that engaging with, learning from, and building relationships with the local Traditional Custodians of ‘Country’ becomes standard practice by:

- Encouraging governments to establish protocols to enable landscape architects and other built environment professionals to achieve effective, meaningful and productive communication with local Traditional Custodians for all significant landscape, urban design and infrastructure projects. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders would be included in the process of establishing protocols to direct appropriate and effective ways for this to be achieved.
- Ensuring local and state government project briefs include engagement with the local Traditional Custodians of ‘Country’ as part of project initiation and consultation for relevant projects.
- Ensuring local governments include engagement with appropriate Traditional Custodians of the land when developing and updating community land management plans and open space strategies.
- Supporting methods for appropriate engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and design techniques that enable their cultural knowledge, values and spirituality to be embedded within landscape projects in a way that is both respectful and meaningful.
- Supporting constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and adoption of the Makarrata (2017)³ for governance at the Federal level, (particularly in the first instance in relation to ‘truth telling’).
- Advocating for more investment in scholarships and traineeships to support greater representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in built environment professions.
- Advocating to the Australian Government, universities and professional bodies that they (continue to) encourage and support

³ Uluru Statement from The Heart (Makarrata 2017):

<https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/final-report#toc-anchor-ulurustatement-from-the-heart>



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their studies in landscape architecture.

- Supporting research and education to help government, land developers, and built environment professionals broaden their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and connected landscape systems.

Our intention is to deepen our collective understanding of the connection to values and uniqueness of 'Country' and the critical importance of acknowledging and embracing this connection for mutual understanding and respect.

The following *case studies* have been selected by members of the AILA National RAP Committee as demonstrating Reconciliation actions⁴ by AILA members. The list is not necessarily exhaustive, and will be added to over time.

⁴ There is a fine line between what may be deemed 'Reconciliation' or 'Decolonisation' actions: Reconciliation requires building collaborative partnerships.

