

# Cultural Advice

for People working with Aboriginal Communities  
in the Pilbara and Yamatji Regions




*Nyangumarta Boys on Country*

country  
culture  
people  
future



Yamatji Marlpa  
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



This booklet was produced with the advice and guidance of Traditional Owners from the Pilbara and Yamatji regions of Western Australia. Cultural protocols and rules vary greatly between regions and individual communities. This booklet is a very short summary covering some aspects of some cultures. Each meeting will be different so if you have any questions, please speak with your Community Liaison Officer.

*Wilgie Mia, Wajarri Yamatji Country*



## Before the Meeting

### Specific Sensitivities

Ask your Community Liaison Officer or meeting leader if there are any sensitivities to be aware of at the meeting, including topics, questions or any names that are not ok to say.

### Sorry Business and Law Business

People will often have to travel several days for Sorry Business (funerals) and Law Business (cultural ceremonies). Some cultures will have specific places they will travel to for these practices. It is important not to disturb people when they are at these places.

Always avoid planning meetings during these times and be prepared for meetings to be cancelled due to these reasons.

### Appropriate Clothing

Women should avoid tight or revealing clothing. Long trousers or skirts that fall

below the knee are generally fine.

### Food

During a mourning period some people will not eat certain foods like red meat, kangaroo meat or fish. Meeting participants might have certain medical conditions such as diabetes that affect their diet. People may refuse food for these reasons, so it's good to ask beforehand what people can and can't eat. Be sure to have a variety of food available.



*Pilbara Law Business*



*Gnulli Country*

## At the Meeting

### Avoidance Relationships

Some meeting members may not be able to speak or look directly at one another out of a deep respect for their cultural relationship. For example, some people may not be able to sit together at a meeting, go on a survey together or share the same car. Speak with your Community Liaison Officer or meeting leader to find the best way to facilitate these relationships.

### Meeting Outcomes

- If you are addressing a meeting, be straightforward in your presentation and give clear answers to questions.
- Be aware that yes/nodding or silence doesn't always mean agreement.
- To make sure you have the right understanding of the meeting outcomes, check with your Community Liaison Officer. It may be necessary for the Community Liaison Officer to speak

with attendees after the meeting, to get feedback and responses.



*Badimia Country*

### Speaking for Country

Different people have cultural responsibilities over different parts of country. When talking about going onto country, ask to make sure you know the right person to speak to about that part of the land.



*Kurama Marthudunera Country*

## Going on Country

If you are going out on country for a meeting or a field trip, always ask where you can and can't go. If you don't ask, you could step somewhere that could get you into trouble.

If you are out on a trip or going for a swim, always let someone know where you are going. This is for your own safety and to make sure you don't disturb important sites and places.

### Important

- Don't take anything off the country, including rocks and shells.
- If you are doing anything that might disturb the country (e.g. breaking tree branches to make a campfire) make sure you ask first.
- If you pick something up, make sure you put it back where you got it from.

## Photographs

- As a general courtesy, always ask people's permission before taking photographs. One way of doing this is to ask for people join you in another area if they would like to be part of a photo.
- If you intend to use a photograph in a publication, online or for any public purpose, you need to seek permission from the people involved.
- This includes images of country (landscapes) or photos of art, carvings and artefacts. These can be culturally sensitive and also require permissions.

**NOTE:** Photographs, film and voice recordings of deceased persons can cause great distress. For this reason, it is important to get permission for each publication, even if permissions for a photograph may have been given in the past.

This photo has been removed for cultural reasons

## After the Meeting

After a meeting, ask your Community Liaison Officer how they felt the meeting went and if there was anything you could do differently next time.

### Decision Making

Traditional decision making can take time. It might take several weeks for people to come to the right decision on important issues. Do make sure you plan for decision-



making time in your schedule. Rushing decisions or putting pressure on people can result in uncertainty and will waste time in the long run.



*Ngarlawangga Agreement Signing*



### **When in doubt, ask!**

Aboriginal people will want to help you conduct they meeting in the best way possible. Sometimes an Elder or even someone of a similar age to you may sit down next to you and quietly advise you. They are trying to help and guide you on appropriate conduct.

Community Liaison Officers are the mentors and educators for non-Aboriginal people coming to the meetings. If you have any questions, they are the people to check with.

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