Welcome to Country

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Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar

Thank you for the opportunity and inviting me here this evening — to share with you my story and ‘Welcome to Country’.

Kiya Wangoo Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar — Hello and Welcome to Whadjuk Noongar Country.

I begin by acknowledging we are meeting on Noongar land and I pay tribute to our traditional owners.
Welcome to Country introduces you to our home and to our people — past present and future — and to you all. It is a respectful and significant form of greeting from one person to another, or from one tribe to another for those who are not from this country. It is an acknowledgement of our dreaming and our ancestors, our warriors and the keepers of our culture; it acknowledges our families who have passed before us and all living things on, and around, our Mother Earth.

Even though we live in Noongar country many people do not really know what that means. In fact, Noongar country covers a vast expanse of area encompassing the metropolitan area; lands to the north of the state; the great southern and; the south west area.

My own place within Noongar country centres on the metropolitan area — Bunbury, Busselton, and the Margaret River area in the heart of the south west. I belong to three language groups: the Wardandi tribe, Whadjuk, and the Bibbulman people of the south west.

Kiya Wanjoo Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar Nininy Noongar Boodjar Noonook Nininy.

Ngaala Kaaditj Noongar Moort Keyen Kaadak Nininy Noongar Boodja. We acknowledge the Noongar people as the original custodians of this land.

Noongar is the name for Aboriginal people in the metropolitan area, the wheat belt and the south west region.

Of the fourteen language groups, the people who live in the Perth region are known as the Whadjuk people.

Noongar people have been grateful and graceful keepers of our nation for many, many years — we respect the earth our mother, and understand that we belong to her — she does not belong to us. In all her beauty, we find comfort, wellbeing and life that creates a home for everyone that has become a keeper of Noongar Country.

Noongar spirituality lies in the belief of a cultural landscape and the connection between the human and spiritual realms. The dreaming or the nyitting, is the period before living memory when spirits rose from the earth, and descended from the sky to create the land forms and all living things.

Dreaming stories laid down the laws for social and moral order. Noongar people recognise the ‘Waugal’ or the rainbow serpent, as the creator of life. The Waugal or
the rainbow serpent dominated the earth and the sky creating waterways and people. It is a central figure in Noongar culture. Noongar people believe the Waugal gave life and sustenance to people who in return and became custodians of the land. The continuity of our belief system is passed down from generation to generation by our Elders. They have the ability to comprehend the knowledge and to maintain it in an unchanging way, Noongar spirituality is the connection to nature and country.

A river is a spirit home and we go there to visit our ancestors; we throw sand to let them smell us; when someone dies, we go there and sing them Home.

Noongar people say the Waugal came out of the earth; sometime it went Kardup Boodjar — under the earth — and sometime it went Yira Boodjar — over the earth — and it made Bilya — the river system; the Kaart — the hills and ngamar — the waterholes. It created the Derbal Yerrigan — now known as the Swan River — which means where the estuary is filled up to by the winding river.

To the Noongar traditional owners and custodians of the Swan River, the Derbal Yerrigan has remained at the heart of our culture and heritage for more than 40,000 years. The knowledge given by our Noongar elders about the Waugal has been passed on for thousands of years. Noongar people believe that, if you harm the resting of the rainbow serpent or his earthly beings at the place of water, then the country would dry up and die — our stories reflect this belief.

These are just some of the reason why the Waugal — the rainbow serpent — is so special to us — that is why we all need to respect the land that we share here together; we all need to walk softly on this land, use its gifts with care, love and tenderness, just as importantly we all as brothers and sisters should nurture and love one another so that we can all live together in harmony and mutual respect.

Look, listen, understand and embrace all the elements of Noongar Country that is forever our home.

Wangoo Wangoo Niga Noongar Boodjar.

On behalf of the Noongar people and Elders, Welcome to Noongar Country.