

Enhancing Our Connection to Country

AUSTRALIA'S
HIGH PERFORMANCE
SPORT STRATEGY

2032+





Purpose of this document

This document has been created by the High Performance (HP) Sport System's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group to provide practical advice to the organisations and people in the HP Sport System that have committed to the implementation of Australia's High Performance 2032+ Sport Strategy (2032+ Strategy). It supports them to establish comprehensive programs to enhance their Connection to Country.

This advice is offered to assist HP Sport organisations to proactively design systems, environments, services, and programs that prioritise, value, and embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their cultures, histories, and communities in the HP Sport System.

Implementing this advice will help HP Sport organisations to create culturally-safe, culturally-connected, and culturally-inclusive environments that make it more likely that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples can and will thrive in their organisation.

Recognising the work already done

The Advisory Group recognises that many organisations in the HP Sport System have already commenced activities and adopted practices and protocols that are creating a culturally-safe, culturally-connected, and culturally-inclusive environment within that organisation. Some of those organisations have made significant progress with this work.

This document will support organisations and people that are on their connection to country journey and may appreciate some guidance, practical advice, and support.

The suggestions in this document are not exhaustive, and the Advisory Group hopes that this guidance will inspire the sharing of practice and experience between organisations and between people, helping to achieve the collective aspiration of a HP Sport System that is culturally-safe, culturally-connected, and culturally-inclusive.

System-level initiatives

There are initiatives suggested in these lists of recommendations that address issues that extend beyond any one organisation or where a whole-of-system response is likely to create a more powerful effect. These initiatives would require implementation over a period of years and would be reliant on input from across the HP Sport System.



This document refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and cultures, histories, and communities in the plural, recognising the diversity that exists across more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups.

In addition to the influence of that diversity, each person will be influenced by where they grew up, their relationships with family and friends, their values, and life experiences.

There is no single experience shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in HP Sport organisations, and when applying the advice in this document, HP Sport organisations should always strive to understand and support people on an individual basis.



Our connection to Country

As we begin this journey of opportunity and progress for Australian High Performance Sport, we commit to enhancing meaningful connection with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, histories, communities, and culture.

We commit to working together, walking together, aspiring together, and achieving together.

Representing our country is the ultimate honour, and we are proud to represent it all in its entirety.

Australia's Aboriginal Peoples' culture is the oldest continuous living culture on Earth. It provides Australia with a unique and powerful place in the world, something that no other country can claim. Both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the First Peoples of Australia.

We welcome and will support our First Nations Peoples into our High Performance Sport System. We will connect athletes, coaches, administrators and our people to this culture, which will create a more equal opportunity for a stronger Australia as a sporting nation.

As part of this 2032+ Strategy, we in the Australian High Performance Sport System will promote and implement our principles of reconciliation and self determination to help create culturally safe environments that support First Nations Peoples to enjoy and maximise opportunities at every level of High Performance Sport, from administration to our sporting fields, to achieve at all levels of athletic excellence.

We commit to continually learning and seeking to improve our knowledge and appreciation about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their histories, so that it enriches and enhances the sporting culture for all within Australian High Performance Sport.

Sport is an important vehicle for building community identity and social cohesion. By increasing awareness of our First Nations Peoples cultures to everyone in the High Performance Sport System, we will unearth an environment in which we can have two-way knowledge sharing with mutual respect, coupled with an understanding, so that it becomes a common practice.

Beyond the importance of symbolism, the High Performance Sport environment will have practices embedded into it that provide culturally safe and diverse environments for everyone. We will honour and reflect the vast contributions of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their sporting achievements, and continue to celebrate their culture to improve the identity of our future athletes' representation.

Australia's High Performance 2032+ Sport Strategy outlines how the High Performance Sport System will work and consult with the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group to develop an action plan, and measure and monitor our commitment to this legacy, now and into the future.

There is a great strength for all Australians with a sporting culture that understands our collective histories and that seeks to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their living cultures and celebrates their achievements.

Our aspiration





A culturally safe, connected and inclusive HP sport environment

Our aspiration is that in implementing Australia's High Performance 2032+ Sport Strategy, the Australian HP Sport System will come to be characterised by environments and people that are connected to and deliberately include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their cultures, histories, and communities. Our people will have learnt from storytelling, be culturally aware, behave with integrity, and be accountable to enhance their Connection to Country.

A culturally-safe, culturally-connected, and culturally-inclusive environment in a HP Sport organisation will be characterised by the strong leadership of people who:

- **ACKNOWLEDGE** and build meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as custodians of the lands, waters, and seas where the people in that organisation live, train, and compete.
- **HONOUR** the contribution to the organisation and all stages of the journey of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes, coaches, performance support staff, officials, and administrators, past and present. They will also honour the land where the people in that organisation live, train, and compete.
- **EDUCATE** everyone and build a commitment to better understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to adapt the organisation's practices and protocols and people's behaviour to ensure and embed cultural safety for all.
- **CREATE** opportunities and relationships that actively support and promote in culturally-appropriate ways the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at the highest levels of Australian sport as athletes, coaches, performance support staff, officials, administrators, and as senior leaders and decision-makers.
- **LEAD** reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within that sporting organisation and serve as an example to the wider nation of the opportunities that reconciliation offers.





ACKNOWLEDGES CUSTODIANS

The Our Connection to Country statement declares that “we are committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters, and seas”. Organisations and individuals can demonstrate this commitment through initiatives such as:

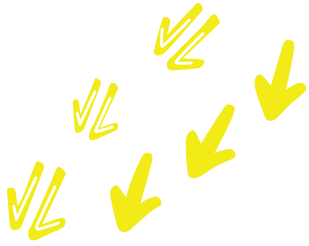
- Ensuring that people are aware of and understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and protocols.
- Including Acknowledgements of Country on websites and other appropriate documentation.
- Including Acknowledgements of Country or Welcomes to Country in appropriate activities, e.g., competitions, opening new facilities, commencing a season.
- Integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artwork into organisational symbols and artefacts, e.g., uniforms, document templates. This must be done in consultation with the artist to ensure the artwork is used appropriately and that the artist’s intellectual property rights are respected.
- Developing meaningful relationships with Traditional Owners in the areas where the organisation is resident and involving those Traditional Owners in what the organisation does. This might include seemingly simple actions such as meeting for a coffee and chat, or extending invitations to events and other significant occasions.

- Developing meaningful relationships with Traditional Owners in areas where the organisation is visiting and exploring ways to bring benefits to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community from the visit.
- Combining local community connection and involvement activities with those of other HP Sport organisations to seek opportunities to create a greater combined benefit than what could be created if each organisation conducted its activities separately.
- **SYSTEM INITIATIVE** Consulting Traditional Owners to understand cultural practices and protocols and how the Traditional Owners might like to be involved with any HP Sport organisation or activity that is happening or might happen on their Country; compiling that information.
- **SYSTEM INITIATIVE** Creating resources for HP Sport organisations, such as:
 - » A guide for engaging and building meaningful relationships with Traditional Owners (based on the consultation described above) and describing how they might appreciate being involved.
 - » A sport-focused resource for each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Country where HP Sport organisations are likely to be present; help visiting HP Sport organisations know what exists and how resources (including local businesses) and facilities might be accessed.

Measuring implementation

Each organisation must ensure that its measures are meaningful, relevant to its context, and informing achievement of intended outcomes. For this characteristic, organisations might consider:

- How well it is developing awareness and understanding of cultural practices and protocols
- Whether the organisation has developed its policy and resources to enable acknowledgement by everyone in the organisation
- Whether those acknowledgement activities are occurring as expected
- How the organisation is connecting with Traditional Owners and communities in areas where it is resident or visiting
- What efforts are being made to align acknowledgement activities with those of other HP Sport organisations to increase their combined effectiveness



HONOURS CONTRIBUTION

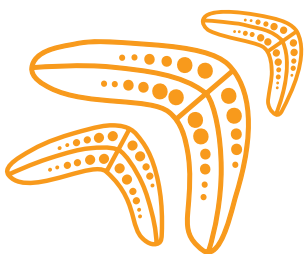
The Our Connection to Country statement declares that “we will honour and reflect the vast contributions of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their sporting achievements, and continue to celebrate their culture to improve the identity of our future athletes’ representation”. Organisations and individuals can demonstrate this recognition through initiatives such as:

- Identifying the extent and significance of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contribution to the organisation.
- Celebrating in public forums and promoting current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contribution to the organisation; as culturally appropriate, e.g., agreed with those individuals.
- Identifying their organisation’s deeper historical Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contribution, particularly from times when mainstream social attitudes meant that Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage may have been hidden or ignored.
- Celebrating in public forums and promoting the historical Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contribution to the organisation; as culturally appropriate, e.g., agreed with the individuals involved or their family.
- Honouring the land on which they live by taking the opportunity to walk on Country with Traditional Owners, where appropriate.
- **SYSTEM INITIATIVE** Developing a national program to enhance the awareness, connection, and relationship to the current HP Sport System of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes, coaches, performance support staff, officials, administrators, and senior leaders.
- **SYSTEM INITIATIVE** Building a national publicly-available resource that collates (from other HP Sport organisations) and promotes the real stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes, coaches, performance support staff, officials, administrators, and senior leaders to ensure that past and present contributions can be honoured and to inspire future contributions; as culturally appropriate, e.g., agreed with the individuals involved or their family.

Measuring implementation

Each organisation must ensure that its measures are meaningful, relevant to its context, and informing achievement of intended outcomes. For this characteristic, organisations might consider:

- Whether the organisation has undertaken activities to understand how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have contributed and are contributing to the organisation
- How the organisation is publicly honouring the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples past and present
- The extent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input to and participation in the process of understanding the contribution and in the development of the approach to public celebration



EDUCATES EVERYONE

The Our Connection to Country statement declares that “we commit to continually learning and seeking to improve our knowledge and appreciation about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their histories, so that it enriches and enhances the sporting culture for all within Australian High Performance Sport”. Organisations and individuals can enact this commitment through initiatives such as:

- Ensuring that all athletes, coaches, performance support staff, officials, administrators, and senior leaders have practical awareness, knowledge, and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and how HP Sport environments may present challenges to people from those cultures. Examples might include developing education programs such as:
 - » Why acknowledging Country is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and when and how to acknowledge Traditional Owners.
 - » Understanding and supporting the cultural obligations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, e.g., Sorry Business, family responsibilities.
 - » Understanding unconscious bias, racism, exclusion, barriers to access for people living with disability, and other forms of discrimination, particularly as experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and how they might show up in HP Sport, and what individuals can do about it (in themselves and with others).
 - » Specific topics relevant to the history, locations, and demography of that organisation.

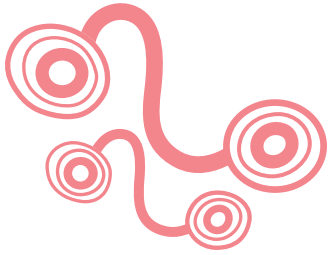
- Creating immersive experiences for athletes, coaches, performance support staff, officials, administrators, and senior leaders to deepen their understanding of and connection with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures, e.g., Walking on Country with Traditional Owners, where appropriate.
- **System initiative:** Curating and/or developing professional resources on the most common topics for educating athletes, coaches, performance support staff, officials, administrators, and senior leaders on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in order that they can create culturally-safe environments.
- **System initiative:** Undertaking research to identify systemic issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within the HP Sport System and developing education responses.
- **System initiative:** Developing programs and/or resources where non-Indigenous people involved in HP Sport organisations can hear from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes, coaches, performance support staff, officials, administrators, and senior leaders who are willing to talk about their experiences in previous roles in HP Sport; this must be done sensitively and with support available, to help others understand what helps and hinders contribution and success.

Organisations should note that not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples may have had access to the knowledge that can be developed through these programs, so programs should be open to all.

Measuring implementation

Each organisation must ensure that its measures are meaningful, relevant to its context, and informing achievement of intended outcomes. For this characteristic, organisations might consider:

- In addition to tracking the existence and attendance levels of education programs, organisations should also measure the impact of the programs to ensure they are fit for purpose
- Gathering evidence of meaningful changes made as a result of data and insights gained during education programs or activities, e.g., increased understanding of people’s experiences leading to changes in a pathway program
- Gathering data about the level of interest in better understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, i.e., whether the education programs are being requested or mandated



CREATES OPPORTUNITIES

The Our Connection to Country statement declares that “the HP Sport environment will have practices embedded into it which provide culturally-safe, diverse, and inclusive environments for everyone”. Organisations and individuals can pursue this through initiatives such as:

- Identifying and understanding the success factors (i.e., barriers to and enablers of participation) in that organisation’s HP program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as athletes, coaches, performance support staff, officials, administrators, and senior leaders.
 - Having clear, identified culturally-safe opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to succeed at the highest levels of the organisation as athletes, coaches, performance support staff, officials, administrators, and senior leaders. These might include ways to encourage and support the retention of former athletes in the organisation, supporting transition into a new stage of their journeys.
 - Having programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples pursue those opportunities; the design of these programs must be informed by the organisation’s understanding of the success factors.
- **System initiative:** Development programs that support culturally-safe opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to succeed at the highest levels of HP Sport in Australia, the programs may support organisation-specific opportunities and/or whole-of-system opportunities. e.g., for individuals who might be transitioning from athlete to another role in the HP Sport System, or individuals whose next career step involves moving from one HP Sport organisation to another.
 - **System initiative:** Consolidating the organisation-level knowledge of success factors to identify those of a systemic nature and/or where significant effort is required to marshal resources and cooperation from beyond the HP Sport System.
 - **System initiative:** Identifying opportunities to support endeavours such as multi-sport talent identification in more remote locations; the design of these activities might be informed by the knowledge of the organisations involved, and the ASC, about success factors.

Measuring implementation

Each organisation must ensure that its measures are meaningful, relevant to its context, and informing achievement of intended outcomes. For this characteristic, organisations might consider:

- Setting interim and ultimate targets that are ambitious
- How any targets will be informed by:
 - » Baseline levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation
 - » Success factors identified by that organisation
 - » The length of time required to develop sufficient proficiency, expertise, or experience to perform at the highest levels of the organisation
 - » The realistic potential impact of the initiatives that are being implemented



LEADS RECONCILIATION

The Our Connection to Country statement declares that “we in the Australian High Performance Sport System will promote and implement our principles of reconciliation and self-determination to help create culturally-safe environments that support First Nations Peoples to enjoy and maximise opportunities at every level of High Performance Sport”. Organisations and individuals can pursue this outcome through initiatives such as:

- Where an organisation has made significant progress in establishing cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, it might consider:
 - » Engaging in a truth-telling exercise within the organisation to understand past and, where safe to do so, current instances of unacceptable behaviour and/or practices that have been targeted towards or that disadvantaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within the organisation.
 - » Developing organisation responses that prevent the unacceptable behaviours and practices from recurring.
 - » Where appropriate, undertaking processes to redress the wrongs done within the organisation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- **System initiative:** Studying the effects of RAPs in HP Sport organisations to identify leading practices that can then be shared with other HP Sport organisations with the expectation of increasing the effectiveness of more RAPs.
 - » Developing and implementing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) for the organisation, including such elements as procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned organisations and employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Measuring implementation

Each organisation must ensure that its measures are meaningful, relevant to its context, and informing achievement of intended outcomes. For this characteristic, organisations might consider:

- Whether the organisation has a RAP in place
- What type of RAP (Reflect, Innovate, Stretch, or Elevate) the organisation has, as this indicates for how long the organisation has been on its reconciliation journey
- The progress made against the current RAP
- The experience of implementing any previous RAP/s
- The level of readiness within the organisation for a truth-telling process
- Whether or not the organisation is addressing anything identified in a truth-telling process



Ensuring Achievement

Achieving greater relationships and connection between the Australian HP Sport System and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is anticipated to make an important contribution to greater participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across the HP Sport System. That greater participation has the potential to be in each organisation in the HP Sport System, across all roles, and at all levels.

For that outcome to be realised, the Our Connection to Country statement cannot be regarded as symbolic; each organisation must take considered, deliberate action to achieve enhanced connection. Where organisations have already made progress in developing their culturally-safe, culturally-connected, and culturally-inclusive environment, they must continue those efforts to consolidate and extend the good work they've already done. Where organisations have not yet made progress, they can use this document to get started with confidence in the knowledge that it provides guidance from the HP Sport System's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group.

To ensure that implementation of the statement is tracked, each organisation in the HP Sport System that has signed up to the 2032+ HP Sport Strategy will be invited to report its progress across the five characteristics of a culturally-safe, culturally-connected, and culturally-inclusive environment described in this document. Annual reporting will be provided to the HP2032+ Leadership Group.

The HP Sport System's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group strongly encourages HP Sport System organisations to ensure that their process of assessing the impact of their initiatives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Peoples includes those Peoples; the Productivity Commission offers guidance on such evaluation processes (<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/indigenous-evaluation/strategy>).

In addition to this formal reporting, every organisation is encouraged to share informal updates and insights as initiatives are undertaken.

The HP2032+ Leadership Group will consider the reports and publish a system-level report every year, presenting a consolidated view of the state of the implementation of the Our Connection to Country statement and plans for future initiatives. That report will showcase successes to inspire the pursuit of even deeper Connection to Country, as well as seeking to influence the flow of resources so that progress is reinforced.

The inspirational role models whose success will be enhanced by the realisation of the Our Connection to Country statement and implementation of the advice in this document will support enhanced health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across Australia.

Organisations in the HP Sport System seeking more information or to share ideas and insights on developing culturally-connected and culturally inclusive HP Sport environments can contact the 2032+ HP Sport Strategy Implementation Team at winwell@ausport.gov.au

Working together,
walking together,
aspiring together +
achieving together.



20
32+