

Womin djeka meeram biik biik. Boonwurrung Nairm derp bordrupen uther weelam.

Come with purpose to my beautiful home, land of the two bays. My name is Gheran Yarraman Steel and I am a proud descendent of the Boon Wurrung People of the Kulin Nations.

It is my great pleasure and my honour to be able to welcome you here to Country today. This is a tradition that has been practiced for thousands of generations. It has been passed down from one generation, into the next generation, and the next generation, over a thousand times and it is something that I am very proud to be able to do for you here today.

I would like to acknowledge those who came before me, those people who have made it possible for me to be here and talk about Welcome to Country, and what it means and some of our wurrungi biik. I would like to honour my mother N'arweet Carolyn Briggs and my Great Great Grandmother Parbin-ata Louisa Briggs for passing this knowledge on to me, so that I can pass it on to you.

The Welcome to Country is what we call Tanderrum and it is an invitation – conditional invitation to Country. And the condition is that you come with purpose. So, identify what your purpose is. What is the reason for you coming here today?

The second part is instructing you and clarifying with you what are the laws and customs you have to abide by while you're out there trying to achieve your purpose on our Country. These laws and customs go all the way back to our creation story – the story that has Bundjil creating the lands, the rivers and the creeks with his great spear. He creates the Kulin people and the Boonwurrung People, and he teaches us that we are responsible for this great beautiful country that he has created. So, we have to provide to it, and it has to provide to us. We have this circular relationship. But we also have to protect this country from people that are not responsible for it. So, we have to ask all visitors to keep two promises while they are on Country.

The first promise is really simple – don't harm the land, don't harm the children of Bundjil. The second promise is to honour and respect the laws of Bundjil. So how do we honour and respect laws that we might not be aware of? Suffice to say, I can only give you a high-level perspective of what those laws are by describing what the pillars are, the foundations of those laws. So, the first foundation, or the first pillar I would like to talk about is this pillar of knowledge. Knowledge is such an important thing to Indigenous communities. The way that we think of knowledge is not only a way that you might think of it in a more academic sense, but the way we think of it in a community sense, so community not just being the people around today, but also the people who were here 2000 years ago, 5000 years ago, and the people that will be here in 5000 years' time. That is also a community, it's an intergenerational community.

So how do we maintain that connection to that intergenerational community? And it is through knowledge that we do that. That's the way that we maintain the truth and the continuity of that knowledge. Ensuring that the stories that need to be passed down, are passed down, and those stories remain consistent for thousand and thousand and thousands of years. And they have done so. They've maintained stories that still have great importance to us today that have their origins 6000 thousand years ago, 26,000 years ago. And those stories are really important to how we interact with Country today. And that's how we connect intergenerationally.

The other areas that we need to connect is more in a horizontal plain. So, who are the people around today? How do we interact with the great diverse communities? We look at that AIATSIS map of Australia and we see that there are 250 Aboriginal language groups across Australia. How do we operate as Aboriginal people, considering that we are all think differently, we all have different

belief systems and languages, and values and customs? How do we do that? We do that through valuing, firstly, we have to value that diversity. We have to value all the different opinions and experiences that everyone brings to the table, because that strengthens us as a community. It provides us with this greater lens of understanding. But we also have to harness that diversity by identifying the things that we have in common. What is it that brings us all together? What is the thing that we are trying to achieve? We call this pillar djeembana.

Finally, I've talked about community and I've talked about the intergenerational time. We also have to talk about the space. So, the place where we are today. How do we think about Country? When Indigenous people think about Country they are not just thinking about physical spaces. We are thinking about all the things that have occurred for thousands of generations on that Country. And all the things that will occur into the future. What's happened onto Country. What's happened on the lands where we live and where we work for the last 80,000 years. The greater understanding that we have of that 80,000 years of history, the greater connection we build with that Country. And if we can build that connection, then we harness that responsibility for Country, and we protect that Country.

So, if we can honour those three foundational pillars of our wurrungi biik, I can say in the words of my ancestors once again Womin djeka meeram biik biik. Boonwurrung Nairm derp bordupen uther weelam.

Thank you.