



**Yamatji Marlpa**  
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



country  
**culture**  
people  
future

# Cultural Advice

for people working with Aboriginal groups  
and communities in YMAC's Pilbara and  
Yamatji Regions of Western Australia.





**This booklet was produced by Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) 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 brief introduction covering some key aspects of some Indigenous cultures in our regions.

The guide is intended to provide advice on how to approach and prepare for meetings and working alongside Traditional Owners.

Each group will be different. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to speak with meeting organisers beforehand and ask any questions to help your understanding.

For YMAC coordinated meetings, staff can talk to the relevant Project Officer or Regional Manager in our Geraldton or Hedland offices for advice.

## YMAC VALUES:

**Respect and Understanding**  
**Professionalism**  
**Integrity**  
**Collaboration**

## WARNING:

Aboriginal people are warned that this publication may contain images of deceased people.

COVER IMAGE: Nyangumarta boys on Country



# BEFORE A MEETING



On-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River

## SPECIFIC SENSITIVITIES

Ask the Project 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 okay to say.

## SORRY BUSINESS AND LORE BUSINESS

People will often need to travel several days for Sorry Business (funerals, which often happen on a Friday) and Lore Business (cultural ceremonies generally held from November to late February every year though exact times differ from year to year). 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. If you need to make contact with a community member during this time speak with the Project Officer or the Regional Manager. They can make initial contact with the person to determine whether they are ready to take calls.

## 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.

## ELDERS

Speak with the Project Officer about being introduced to people (including Elders and other key people) prior to the meeting. Elders are traditional custodians and are recognised by their people as holding special knowledge about their people's Country and traditions. Show them respect. Listen carefully to what they have to say. Where possible ask to be introduced to everyone, if not possible introductions should be done with discretion so as not to create a perception that some people are more important than others.



Burringurrah Rangers on Country

# AT A MEETING

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS AND COUNTRY

For non-Aboriginal people, acknowledging Country and Traditional Owners is a way of showing respect and goodwill towards meeting participants.

If you are unsure about how to pronounce a word – such as the traditional name for a person's Country - ask the Project Officer, meeting leader or Regional Manager to assist you before-hand.

## 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 Project Officer or meeting leader (Geraldton region), or the Regional Manager or meeting leader (Pilbara region) to find the best way to facilitate these relationships.

## GREETING

It is natural for many people to reach out and shake hands with people, especially when you meet them for the first time.

Be mindful that for some Traditional Owners, having someone hold out their hand for a handshake can make them feel uncomfortable.

It is recommended you either wait for someone to reach their hand to you first, or seek feedback from the meeting organiser as to what is most appropriate for your particular meeting.

Similarly, some people are unsure as to whether eye contact is appropriate or not. There are similar protocols in both of YMAC's Yamatji and Marlpa regions, with most people being okay with eye contact. It is of course something that should be gauged when meeting someone for the first time. You will be able to tell by their body language or how the other person is responding, and you can adjust your behaviour accordingly.



Baiyangu Traditional Owners celebrate signing the Ningaloo ILUA with State Government and YMAC representatives



## AT A MEETING (CONT.)

### IMPORTANT

Don't take anything off the Country, including rocks and shells, and especially stone tools and artefacts.

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.

### 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 Project Officer or Regional Manager (for Pilbara region). It may be necessary for them to speak with attendees after the meeting, to get feedback and responses.



Pilbara Lore meeting

## AT A MEETING (CONT.)

### 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.

To find out who these people are, ask the Project Officer or Regional Manager. Sometimes they may also need to ask the relevant Research or Heritage staff member to seek confirmation that this person is still the nominated representative for their people.

### 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.

### PHOTOGRAPHS

- As a general courtesy, always ask people's permission before taking photographs. One way of doing this is to ask for people to 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. Please note that taking photographs, recordings or footage of Aboriginal heritage sites for commercial reproduction or publication requires a permit under Regulation 10 of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* and Regulations 1974.



Nyangumarta  
Country

**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.



# AFTER THE MEETING

## AFTER THE MEETING

After a meeting, ask the Project Officer or Regional Manager 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 or more for people to come to the right decision on important issues. A Board or Claim group or other meeting of community representatives may need to take place.

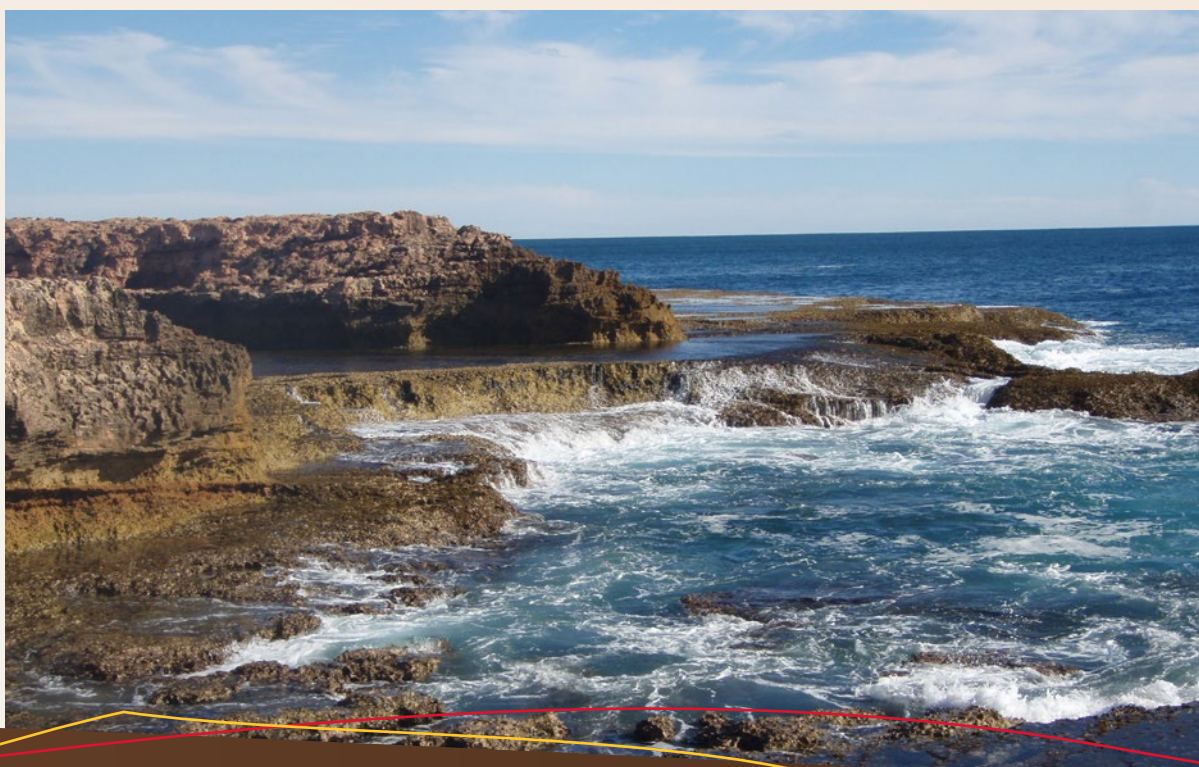
Do make sure you plan for decision-making time in your schedule.

Rushing decisions or putting pressure on people can be counter-productive and result in decisions that are not resilient and may waste time in the long run.



Kurama  
Marthudunera  
Country

Baiyangu  
Country





## WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK!

**Aboriginal people will want to help you conduct the 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.

YMAC Project 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.

Badimia Country







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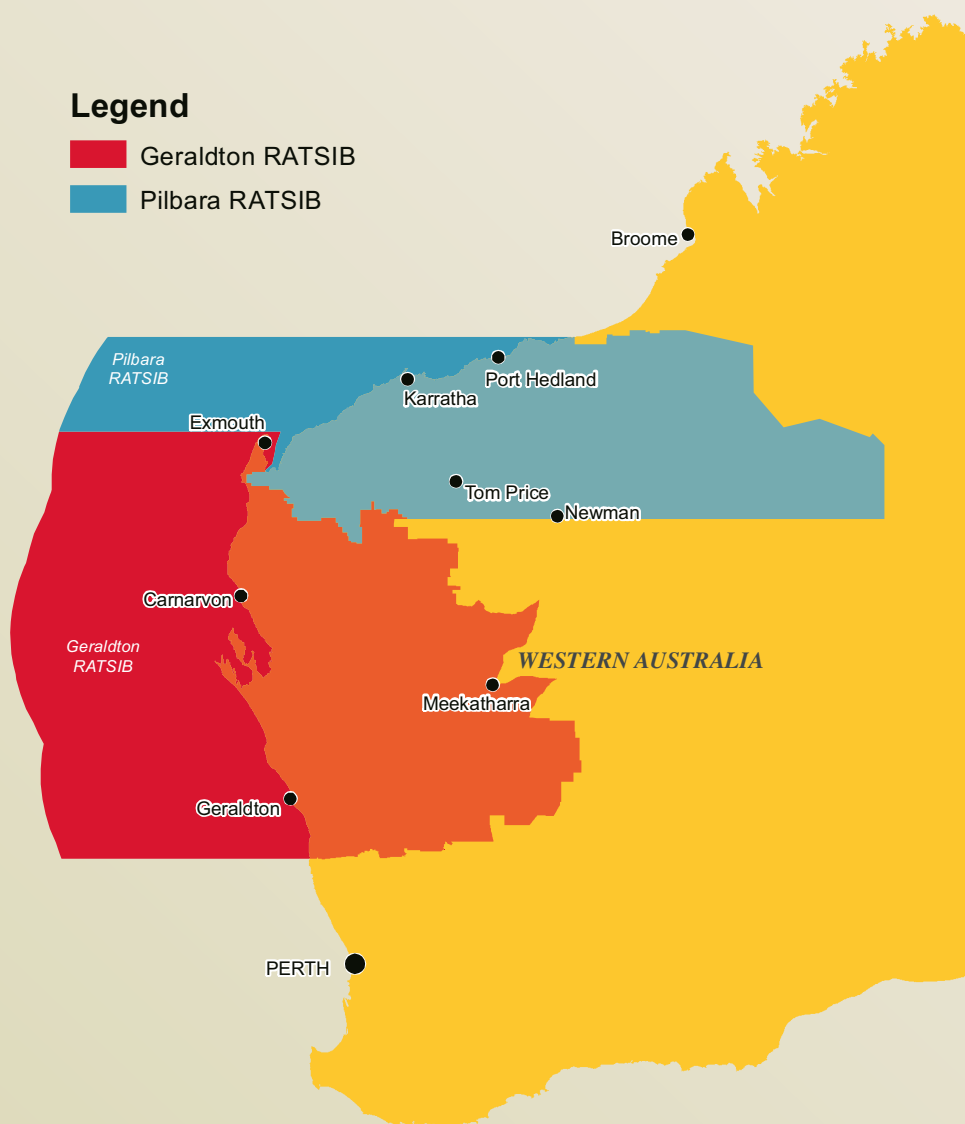
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## YMAC MAP

REPRESENTATIVE ABORIGINAL/TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER BODY (RATSIB) AREAS

### Legend

-  Geraldton RATSIB
-  Pilbara RATSIB



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