

WELCOME TO COUNTRY announcement

read at the opening of the conference

I wish to acknowledge that we are meeting on the lands of the Cadigal clan who are the Traditional Owners of the Sydney Region.

From following is a message from David King to the Conference on behalf of the Gundungurra Tribal Council and the Gundungurra People with full respect and acknowledgement to the Traditional Owners of this land.

Welcome to Country? (With a question mark)

It is unfortunate that I cannot be here to open the Fifth National Wilderness Conference as the meeting of tribes in Mungo National Park was moved to coincide with the conference dates. We hope to bring a strength and unity within the Traditional Owners of our lands in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and I'm saddened that the Blue Mountains World Heritage meeting was moved forward one week, as I wanted to spend time at this conference.

Who will return first? Why the question mark in Welcome to Country?

The beauty of my traditional landscape is breathtaking and nothing matches this in my opinion. Last Saturday I had the pleasure of visiting sites quite close to urbanisation but was saddened when I realised the areas I went to and viewed from peaks were waiting for its people to return. The artwork and tools were left there for when they returned but no-one came back.

We need to be first in ensuring that the land which could so easily be destroyed are kept as dwelling places for the safety of this planet and its flora and fauna. We need to keep the paths of the planet open. We need to ensure we carry on and return first before others who will only view it as a path to development and destruction of the world as we know it.

I support keeping the remaining large natural areas intact for the earth needs its wild places. The indigenous people and conservationists should work together in a spirit of co-operation and understanding. We need to map our country to see how it works before it becomes more of a barren wasteland.

I wish you a successful conference and continued success in our struggle to preserve these areas. Please remember we may be the only ones who stand for the voices of my ancestors and the plants and animals of this country.

I hope we return first and that I will always have a Country to welcome people to.

David King son of Aunty Mary Gundungurra Elder