

# Caring For Country

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lived in Australia for around 120,000 years and have always held a responsibility for caring for Country. There are many cultural protocols and practices still in use today to protect, care for, and maintain the health, strength and well-being of Country.

Before the British invasion, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities relied on the land for food and shelter. How did they care for the Country while relying on it for their survival?



## Food

**Before colonisation, what did Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples eat?**

They ate a wide range of fresh plants and animals.

**Where did these things come from?**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ate things that grew and lived naturally on their lands and in the waters near their homes. Although they did not have fences or tractors, many First Nations communities practised farming by growing grains and trapping eels, using complex techniques and methods that they used for millenia.

## Tools, weapons, baskets and other items

**Where did the materials for things like tools, weapons and baskets come from?**

There were no shops or factories from which to buy materials, so First Nations peoples had to source materials from the plants, animals, and earth around them.

For example:

- baskets and nets could be reeds and grasses
- wood could be used to make weapons, canoes and bowls
- stones could also be used for weapons or for crushing or grinding materials
- animal skins could be used for warmth
- ochre could be used as paint
- shells or bones could be used as fishing hooks.

All the products that were used came from natural materials that were (mostly) readily available.



## Waste

### **If things broke or wore out, what happened to them?**

Many broken things could be mended or turned into new items. However, because all of the items used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities were made from natural materials, items that needed to be thrown away decomposed quickly and didn't leave behind litter or pollution.

### **What do you think would have happened with bones, uneaten food and shells?**

In some cases, they would have burnt and buried this waste, but there is a lot of evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples disposed of their waste in mounds called 'middens'. Any waste that was made up of plants or meat would have just rotted away.

Although many First Nations peoples no longer rely on Country for food and shelter, Country still holds significance culturally and spiritually, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to be custodians of the land who carry the responsibility to care for and protect the environment for themselves and for future generations.

Don't we all have a responsibility to look after and care for our environment for current and future generations?

