

John Koowarta Reconciliation Law Scholarship 2015

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President LCA

The John Koowarta Scholarship is a highly prestigious award, which is now over twenty years old. It assists the best and brightest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law students throughout Australia and is the only national scholarship dedicated to helping Indigenous students realise their ambitions of becoming lawyers.

The Law Council of Australia (the Law Council) is committed to increased participation in the legal profession by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and some of the recent signs have been encouraging.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are still under-represented among law graduates, there is clear evidence that the number of Indigenous students enrolling in legal study is increasing from year-to-year.

This is translating into jobs for law graduates, which is in no small part due to concerted programs run by law societies and bar associations around the country, to assist Indigenous law graduates into internships, clerkships and graduate programs.

Many Australian law firms are directly involved, both in promoting employment opportunities and in providing pro bono assistance to Indigenous businesses and communities.

Today's students, graduates and lawyers are the role models and leaders of tomorrow.

The Law Council is very proud to count among the alumni of the John Koowarta Scholarship some of the leading lights in the Australian legal profession.

Terri Janke, the inaugural winner of the scholarship, is a leading world authority on Indigenous cultural and intellectual property and a successful lawyer, business woman and author. Terri was awarded Indigenous Lawyer of the Year in 2011 and NAIDOC Woman of the Year in 2012 and listed in the AFR/Westpac Top 100 Women of Influence in 2013.

Nathan Jarro, who won the scholarship in 1996, is now an up-and-coming barrister at the Queensland Bar and one of just a handful of Indigenous barristers practising in Australia. He is a mentor to several junior barristers and students and a true leader of the profession.

All previous recipients of the scholarship have graduated into successful professional careers, in private practice, at the bar, in the community sector, in the corporate world and in government.

The Law Council's aspiration is to see even more Indigenous students and lawyers embrace the law as a force for change and find their way into leadership positions, including becoming active members of the Law Council.

The Law Council is committed to serious and lasting change for Indigenous peoples, both through its promotion of Indigenous students and lawyers and in advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advancement.

Advised by its expert Indigenous Legal Issues Committee, the Law Council has been an unequivocal supporter of Constitutional change to recognise Indigenous Australians, their cultures, history and languages. This support has always been subject to the wishes and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Law Council was closely engaged in the process toward Constitutional change, from the establishment of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition in 2010 until the present. Its role has been to harness the goodwill of the profession, to help identify a proposal with the best chances of success, which is capable of support from Indigenous peoples and acceptance by more conservative elements of society.

There is still much work to do before a referendum can succeed but there is good cause for optimism.

In 2009, Law Council Directors unanimously approved a Policy Statement on Indigenous Australians and the Legal Profession. This document has guided Law Council advocacy on a broad range of issues, from recognition of land rights and native title reform, to progressive criminal justice measures and protection of human rights.

In 2011 the Law Council launched its Reconciliation Action Plan. The Plan is directed at promoting greater cultural understanding and respect, both in the study of the law and in the legal profession as a whole. A key achievement of this plan has been the development and implementation of Reconciliation Action Plans by a number of the Law Council's Constituent Bodies, each containing numerous practical and beneficial initiatives, driving change at the coal-face.

This work has, of course, complemented the significant achievements of law practices and barristers advocating and engaging in practical, meaningful projects, pro bono assistance and advocacy.

The John Koowarta Reconciliation Law Scholarship is one such initiative.

The Scholarship was established by the Law Council of Australia and the Commonwealth Government in 1994 and commemorates John Koowarta, a Winychanam [Win-eh-chan-um] elder from the Archer River region around Cape York.

The story of John Koowarta is one that's well known amongst the Law Council family. He was an inspirational man who pioneered Aboriginal land rights in Australia during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Today, he is revered as one of the most important figures in the progression of Native Title rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

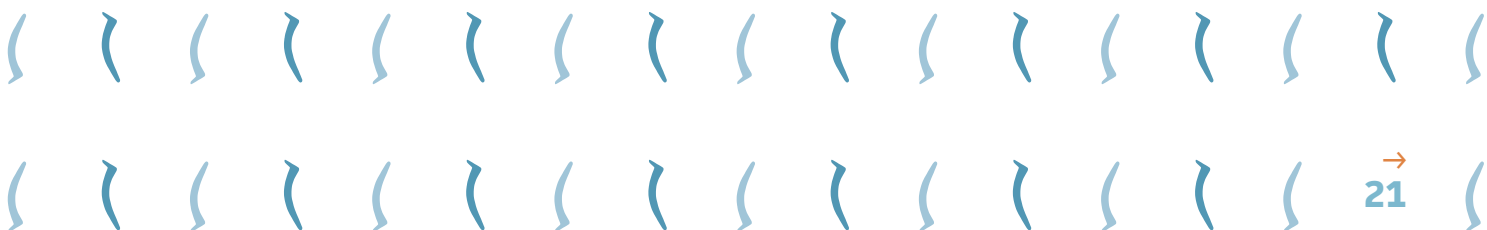
John Koowarta's legacy continues to inspire Indigenous people across the nation. And it's through the John Koowarta Scholarship that the Law Council is aiming to ensure his legacy lives on.

The ideals of the John Koowarta Scholarship shine through its recipients and represent the role the legal profession in Australia has to play in working towards reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Including the 2015 recipients, the Scholarship has now assisted twenty-seven Indigenous students toward the completion of their legal studies.

The Law Council is committed to promoting these programs and encouraging its Constituent Bodies to develop or contribute to programs that will address Indigenous under-representation in the legal profession.

This year the nomination process has again demonstrated a strong field of worthy recipients and awarding just two scholarships has been a very difficult task.



Scholarship recipients

Ms Allison Boland is an outstanding young law student and is in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Justice/Bachelor of Laws degree at the Queensland University of Technology. She is a Mardigan and Kooma woman from south-west Queensland. Her interest in becoming a legal professional is driven by a desire to break the cycle of contact with the criminal justice system in her family. Allison will be the first person in her family to become a legal professional.

By studying law, this young woman wishes to send a positive message to the young people in her community that gaining higher education qualifications will open up opportunities.

In her scholarship application, Allison said she believes a law degree is a tool that she can use to help effect social change in Australian society... the law is deeply interwoven with the economic, political and social world's and consequently, social change involves an engagement with the law.

At just twenty years of age, Allison has already demonstrated her initiative and passion for education as the co-founder of Project Imba. Imba means 'listen and learn' in Kooma language.

Project Imba aims to widen tertiary participation amongst under-represented groups. The Project especially focuses on improving access and retention of Indigenous high school students from Cunnamulla in Queensland.

Allison wants to continue to inspire young Murri students to go onto tertiary education and is committed to extending Project Imba to other communities including Charleville, Quilpie and Saint George.

Allison also helps to manage her own university's Indigenous policy and education strategy through her membership of the Indigenous Education and Employment Committee.

Eventually, Allison aims to become a barrister and advocate for her people and their rights in the courtroom. She wants to ensure that all Indigenous people have the opportunity to access culturally-appropriate processes in the criminal justice system and is particularly passionate about ensuring that Indigenous women have appropriate cultural support as victims in the criminal justice process.

Ms Tamara Kenny currently in her third year of a double degree in Arts/Law at the University of New South Wales, majoring in Indigenous studies and minoring in development studies.

Tamara is passionate about social justice and was inspired to study law to help others overcome disadvantage. Tamara hopes that by attending university and studying law, she will become a role model for her family and her community and they will be encouraged to follow in her footsteps and become empowered through education.

Tamara is also interested in understanding how policy devices, such as legal instruments, can be implemented in a way that helps to positively shape lives.

Described as a conscientious and hard-working student that is committed to her studies, Tamara also manages to find time to pursue extra-curricular activities, such as sporting competitions and fundraisers.

She is also the University's Nura Gili Indigenous Student Ambassador, a role that enables Tamara to help her fellow Indigenous students adjust to life on campus and tertiary education.

This bright young woman has also participated in Walama Muru, a student volunteer program where students give up a week of their break to visit an Indigenous community to complete projects based on the community's needs.

In support of this Scholarship, law societies and bar associations are encouraged to contribute to the John Koowarta Trust Fund. Donations will help build the fund and thereby increase the number of scholarships available for Indigenous legal students.

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