

John Koowarta

Reconciliation Law Scholarship Presentation Ceremony 2010



Two outstanding Indigenous law students, Krista McMeeken, of Perth, and Merinda Dutton, of Sydney, have received the Law Council's John Koowarta Reconciliation Law Scholarship at a function in Canberra.

There have been 15 previous recipients of the John Koowarta Scholarship, all of whom have gone on to successful professional careers.

The scholarship is one small measure towards 'closing the gap' between Indigenous citizens and all other Australians. Indigenous Australians are under represented in the legal profession; a statistic that the Law Council is committed to addressing.

The Law Council welcomes the opportunity to assist Indigenous students in completing their law degree and attaining admission as legal practitioners.

The scholarships, funded through the John Koowarta Reconciliation Law Scholarship Trust, have previously assisted 11 Indigenous law students to complete their legal studies and go on to admission as lawyers.

The John Koowarta Scholarship was established by the Law Council of Australia and the Commonwealth Government in 1994.

The Scholarship commemorates John Koowarta, a Winychanam elder from the Archer River region around Cape York.

The John Koowarta Reconciliation Law Scholarship is awarded to the best and brightest Indigenous students studying for admission to the legal profession.

As most here will be aware, last month the Law Council launched its Policy Statement on Indigenous Australians and the Legal Profession.

A significant aspect of the Policy is the Law Council's commitment to promote and assist legal study by more Indigenous Australians.

A number of the Law Council's constituent bodies manage funds or programs to assist Indigenous lawyers.

The NSW Bar Association operates a fund to assist Indigenous law students, while other Bar Associations manage similar programs.

Indigenous mentoring programs are also managed by a number of Law Societies, to assist legal practitioners to engage and mentor Indigenous students through the course of their studies, up until admission.

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

Law Council President, Mr. Glenn Ferguson, is urging law societies and bar associations to contribute

to the Koowarta trust fund.

Donations will help to build the fund and thereby increase the number of Scholarships available for current and aspiring Indigenous legal students.

Krista McMeeken

Krista is in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Laws degree at the University of Western Australia.

Besides her excellent academic achievements to date, Krista is heavily involved in extra-curricular and volunteer activities, including:

- being an Assembly Master of Ceremonies at NAIDOC¹ week in 2007;
- Assistant Coach for Senior Citizens Sporting Programs;
- a 'Follow the Dream Alumni' Board Member 2009; and
- National NAIDOC Committee Reserve Member 2008-2011.

Krista is also an avid footy fan, having been the District Fremantle Football Fan Club Secretary.

Krista's remarkable achievements to date have been recognised through a number of awards including:

- Western Australia's Outstanding Aboriginal Female of the Year 2007;
- Western Australia's NAIDOC Youth of the Year 2008;
- National NAIDOC Youth of the



Year 2008;

- RSL Youth Ambassador 2008;
- Young West Australian Citizen of the Year Nominee 2008; and
- Winner of Wesfarmers Indigenous Youth Scholarship as WA Citizen of the Year Recipient in 2009.

And we are also advised Krista was selected for the 2009 United Nations Youth Association American debating tour, with an international contingent selected to compete against universities across the United States.

Krista aspires to be a legal officer in the Royal Australian Air Force and is also interested in working with Aboriginal Legal Services.

Merinda Dutton

Merinda is in her fourth year of a Bachelor of Jurisprudence/Bachelor of Laws degree at the University of New South Wales.

Merinda is an outstanding young law

student, completing her Bachelor of Laws degree at the University of NSW with some very impressive results to date.

Merinda is also active in the community and has:

- worked as a teaching assistant at the Kingsford Legal Centre (which operates through the University of NSW);
- worked as a volunteer at her university Law Faculty's Indigenous Legal Centre where she has undertaken research and writing tasks and assisted in the compilation of the Centre's Indigenous Law Bulletin; and
- she has been a supervisor at the Nura Gili Winter School, which operates an holistic education program based on Indigenous knowledge, traditions and beliefs.

Merinda has completed work experience at The Daily Examiner (which is the local newspaper founded in Grafton, NSW) and was selected as a Qantas Indigenous Cadet.

She aspires to be a leader in her community, having participated in the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' Indigenous Leadership Program. She has participated as a team organiser for the UNSW Indigenous Games and as a Student leader in a number of committees and forums.

In 2009, Merinda received the Robert Riley Scholarship from the Foundation for Young Australians.

Merinda's passion for the law arose from her interest in self determination and social justice for Indigenous Australians.

Footnote:

1. *National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC). NAIDOC Week is held across Australia every year in the first week of July, to celebrate Indigenous cultural diversity and raise awareness of the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

Court Boxes

The Law Society provides Court Boxes at the Supreme Court in Darwin and the Court House in Alice Springs. Annual rental is \$385 (inc. GST) for government departments and \$192.50 (inc. GST) for sole practitioners or per partner for firms (to a maximum of \$1,925 inc. GST). Court boxes are billed annually in advance or pro-rata for the remainder of the year at the time the court box is rented. Replacement keys are available from the Society at a cost of \$11 (including GST).