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Law Council
OF AUSTRALIA

2024 John Koowarta Reconciliation Law Scholarship

Speech delivered by Mr Greg McIntyre SC, Law Council President-elect at the Law Council's Gala Dinner in Canberra.

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I have the honour of presenting the John Koowarta Reconciliation Scholarship to its 2024 recipient.

The John Koowarta Scholarship is a national scholarship dedicated to helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law students achieve their ambition of becoming a lawyer. It was established in 1994 the Honourable Robert Tickner, then Minister For Aboriginal Affairs, with a $200,000 grant for the Commonwealth Government, in memory of John Koowarta, who passed away in 1991.

John Koowarta was a catalyst for change.

He applied to the Aboriginal Development Corporation on behalf of the Wynchanam People to purchase the Rokeby Pastoral Lease in the vicinity of the Archer River on Cape York. The contract of purchase was completed, but in order for the lease to be transferred it needed to be approved by the Queensland Cabinet. The Queensland Government had

A policy of not approving any grant of land to Aboriginal people and refused to approve the transfer. A complaint of racial discrimination was made to the Race Relations Commissioner, Al Grassby. He convened a compulsory conference, in exercise of his power under the Racial Discrimination Act. The Queensland Crown Solicitor, acting on instructions from the Queensland Government wrote to him advising that they would not be attending because they had nothing to say. A certificate was issued under the Act, which provided the trigger enabling the commencement of litigation.

In 1980 I was handed a file which contained an opinion and a draft Statement of Claim prepared by Dr Bruce McPherson QC.

The case which followed involved a number of young lawyers: a 32 year old Paul de Jersey QC, led by a slightly older 43 year old, Ron Castan QC for Koowarta. The Commonwealth supported the argument for the Plaintiff, the Commonwealth Solicitor-General Sir Maurice Byers led a 35 year old Robert French. Following the High Court decision, the matter was remitted to the Supreme Court. An application was made challenging a claim to Crown privilege. Rob O'Regan QC was briefed to lead a 31 year old Pat Keane. Rob was unavailable on the day the application was to be argued, so Pat ran the argument, successfully.

I am proud to announce that the recipient of the 2024 John Koowarta Reconciliation Law Scholarship is Corey Blyth.

Corey is a University of NSW law student who has already shown leadership, generosity of spirit, ability and potential and I truly hope that Scholarship assists in some small way in Corey reaching the heights he is clearly destined for.

During his studies Corey has attained outstanding grades and has worked as a legal intern, most recently at the NSW Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. He has also given back through his research assistant work on social policy projects, tutoring fellow and prospective Indigenous law students at UNSW and volunteering within his local community.

Corey, I look forward to watching your career with interest.

Congratulations.

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