

OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE NEWCASTLE INDIGENOUS PRE-RECRUITMENT COURSE

Ray Watt Pavilion Newcastle University

11.30 AM 2 March 2009

Sharon Grierson MP

Firstly I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, the **Awabakal** people, and pay my respects to elders past and present and to any other elders here today. Thank you to Auntie Sandra for your warm welcome to country.

I also extend a warm welcome to the family and friends who have come along to support you today and to the great crowd from the local indigenous community. Your support will be very important to these young men and women over the next 8 weeks.

It really is a great honour for me to be with you today to open this Indigenous Pre-Recruitment Course (IPRC), on behalf of the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, the Hon. Warren Snowdon MP.

I know Warren would want to be here. He is also the Member for Lingiari in the Northern Territory and has always been a loud and passionate voice in our caucus for the advancement of indigenous people. So today's event would have been very special to him. He will be taking a special interest in your progress as I will too.

This course builds on the first one delivered jointly in Townsville last year by DEEWR, FaHCSIA and Bindal Sharks, and of course the Australian Defence Force.

This course will provide you with a head start to understanding job opportunities in the Australian Defence Force - and direct assistance with the recruiting

processes that are often difficult for the individual to find their way through alone.

I'm very pleased that the second IPRC course is taking place in Newcastle. In Newcastle the local Aboriginal population is relatively young, with a median age of 22 years. 32.3% of the Indigenous population are aged less than 15 years, which is almost double the numbers in the non-Aboriginal community (17.2%). But unemployment in the 15-24 age group is higher as well.

So creating new opportunities and employment pathways for Aboriginal youth is particularly vital.

This program is part of the ADF Indigenous Employment Strategy, and demonstrates a commitment to the long-term employment of Indigenous Australians. During this course, you will be given opportunities to improve your fitness – although looking at this group of young people you're a fit and good looking group. You will also be involved in leadership skills and boosting your self confidence and feeling of self worth. You will also get to visit several of our key Defence Bases and see first hand what employment with the ADF will be like.

The ADF sets very high standards and the only time they relax those is when they allow Members of Parliament to join the Defence force for brief periods! I've actually undertaken some defence service on a patrol boat off Darwin. As the oldest person on the ship I was very impressed with the commitment of the young people. Not only were they professional in their duties, they were caring as well. About halfway through my deployment a delegation came to see me. They had decided I was obviously missing home and brought me a video of a Knights football match to help me through. Very thoughtful!

In her welcome Auntie Sandra Griffin mentioned caring for 'mother earth'. It's my observation that defence personnel have a strong appreciation and connection to

the natural environment. In fact the fishing off Darwin from the patrol boat was exceptional!

The 8 week course also incorporates a week long Indigenous Leadership module in Canberra and I look forward to meeting with you again at Parliament House to hear first-hand your experiences so far.

From the first course, two graduates from the Townsville course are now into their 6th week of training at Kapooka. A third graduate is scheduled to enlist on 27 April. Four others are either undergoing bridging education or waiting on education results. Two others are waiting on the 6 month limitation to undergo another aptitude test at Defence Force Recruiting. And one has an application being processed for the Queensland Music Academy which is... in itself... a wonderful outcome.

And that's how this course is designed – everyone should have a wonderful outcome.

Looking at the high quality of the candidates and the course program that DEEWR, FaHCSIA and Defence, working with Alliance People Solutions, have assembled; I have full confidence that, if you apply yourselves, this course will be even more successful.

One significant change to this course is the appointment of a full time Indigenous course mentor. Warrant Officer Class One Colin Watego is also our Master of Ceremonies today and I'm sure that you will all get to know Colin very well over the next 8 weeks.

I am confident that you will do yourselves and your families proud. Be confident in the quality of the training that you are about to undertake. Be prepared to

work hard and understand that we have the utmost respect for what you are doing and fully intend to support you every step of the way.

Good luck to you all and I look forward to hearing about positive experiences and outcomes at the completion of this course.