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UWA law student, Sophie Coffin, wins 2020 John Koowarta Scholarship

University of Western Australia (UWA) law student, Sophie Coffin, has been awarded the John Koowarta Scholarship for 2020.

Sophie is a proud Ngangumarta/Yindjibarndi woman from Port Hedland WA and currently finishing her Juris Doctor. Her passion for human rights, social justice and intellectual property informs her aspiration for a career in the protection of the intellectual property rights of Aboriginal artists in Western Australia.

“I have always been extremely interested in human rights law, and our rights as Aboriginal people at an international, United Nations level,” said Ms Coffin.

“Therefore, I want to use my legal training to ensure such artists are protected, so I can act as a gateway between the cultural, artistic process, and the commercial side.

“I want to ensure artists benefit, their art is respected, and rights protected. Our culture is so critical for generational knowledge, the preserving and protecting of that sacredness is of paramount importance to me,” said Ms Coffin.

Law Council of Australia President, Pauline Wright, who presented the scholarship to Ms Coffin, said Ms Coffin is an exceptional, intelligent and hardworking young woman who cares deeply about her community and her Aboriginal heritage.

“Sophie’s admirable desire to apply her legal education to protect the intellectual property rights of Aboriginal artists is sure to make a difference not only to the lives of individual artists, but also to the way the Indigenous arts system currently operates to the detriment of whole communities”, said Ms Wright.

“Sophie demonstrates great promise and is truly well deserving of this scholarship”.

In addition to her studies, Sophie is actively involved in her community. In recent years she has represented the UWA at the National Indigenous Legal Conference in Darwin, participated as a WA representative at the Uluru Statement from the Heart Youth Summit in Cairns, and was crowned Miss NAIDOC in 2018.

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.

The scholarship honours John Koowarta, a Winychanam Elder, who pioneered Aboriginal land rights in Australia during the late 1970’s and early 1980’s.

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