

ERIC LAW, AM



Wakka Wakka elder Eric Law was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2015 ... not a bad effort for a youngster who started school in the 1950s at what was then known as the Cherbourg Mission School.

Eric's journey has included service in Vietnam, the life of a teacher in country schools and then a return to Cherbourg to become superintendent of the then-Aboriginal Reserve, later Mayor of the independent council and currently serving as a Murri Court Magistrate.

Born in Cherbourg in 1950, the son of Vincent Frederick Law, a proud Wakka Wakka man and returned soldier, and Marjorie Clevens, a Bigambul woman from NSW.

After finishing high school in Murgon in 1967, the year of the referendum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizenship, Eric was conscripted and shipped off to Vietnam in 1969, working at the Australian Taskforce Headquarters in Intelligence.

On his return, Eric graduated with a teaching degree in Townsville with the first 20-strong First Nations student group to go through university. Following a teaching position as a school principal in the Torres Strait, he worked with Bob Katter in the Aboriginal and Islander Affairs Qld department and eventually was appointed Superintendent of the Cherbourg community at a time when former Aboriginal reserves like Cherbourg became governed by an elected council, instead being governed from Brisbane. Eric was elected to the second Cherbourg Council and served as Mayor during the 1980s.

Eric returned to teaching, at Nurunderi TAFE and then Catholic education, taking on the role as chairman of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Education committee. In 2013, Eric was presented with the "Aunty Joan Hendriks Spirit of Catholic Education Award for Reconciliation" by State Governor Penelope Wensley for his work at St Joseph's.

These days Uncle Eric is still heavily involved in activities in Cherbourg including a group of local youngsters who have been running the annual Cherbourg Anzac Day service. He's also a member of the committee that runs The Ration Shed Museum and historical precinct at Cherbourg.

Eric has been married to Shirley for nearly 50 years and they have five children.