

GARETH WARD MP

**Member for Kiama and Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier
– Illawarra and South Coast**

“I would like to acknowledge the Dharawal people, the Traditional Custodians of this Land. I would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present. I would like to extend that respect to Aboriginal people present today”.

Acknowledgements:

Federal Members, State Members, Local Government Representatives, State Sporting Organisation Representatives, Special Guests, Sports Celebrities

- I am delighted to be here this evening to join with you in celebrating three decades of supporting regional based young athletes in their pursuit of sporting achievement.
- We are lucky to live, work and play in this burgeoning region where some of the best sporting facilities are located and of course, the region that played host to the Academy Games for three years in 2012, 2013 and 2014.
- Programs like those offered by the Illawarra Academy of Sport are vital to developing talented athletes.
- I think of the achievements of champions like Ryan Gregson and Medeline Heiner in track and field ... cricketers Phil Jaques, Brett and Shane Lee ... cyclists Rochelle Gilmore, Josh and Ben Kersten, Caleb Ewan ... Kookaburras Kieran and Blake Govers, Tristan White, Flynn Ogilvie ... Lawn Bowlers Leif Selby, Karen Murphy and Brett Druprez ... netballers Sarah Barrett and Leah Shoard ... League identities Brett Stewart, Craig Fitzgibbons, Shaun Timmins, Craig Fitzgibbon and Josh Morris ... Wallabies Al Kanaar and Dan Palmer ... champion surfers Sally Fitzgibbons, Michael Lowe and Dylan Longbottom ... Olympic gold medallist Rower David Smith ... Paralympian gold medallist Siobhan Paton ... and Commonwealth Games medallists swimmers David and Emma McKeon.
- There must be something special about the Illawarra to produce such a wealth of riches from the area. There is one common denominator that should be recognised ... they are all Illawarra Academy of Sport graduates.
- The Academies are an important part of the sport pathway providing quality coaching and other support to athletes ... education and advancement opportunities to local coaches and officials ... and they leverage community support for sport in regional areas. They coordinate sport volunteers in regional areas to assist athletes reach their potential and develop sport locally.
- Academy scholarships enable young people to develop their skills not only as sportspeople but as leaders in their communities. Their development both on and off the field is made possible through the efforts of the Academies' tireless volunteers, knowledgeable coaches and innovative administrators.

- I am reliably informed that in its thirty years of operations, this Academy has offered over 5,000 scholarships to talented young athletes in the Illawarra, Southern Highlands and South Coast area that it services.
- Each year the Academy has a number of athletes achieve Junior Australian representation across a range of its sports.
- The NSW Government through the Office of Sport is proud to support all the regional academies in NSW.
- I would like to acknowledge the contribution of parents, volunteers, sporting organisations, and academy staff.
- Congratulations to the 2015 academy athletes and the coaches, support staff members and educators that make their achievements possible.
- I would like to acknowledge the dedication, determination and foresight of people like the inaugural Illawarra Academy of Sport Chairman, the late Tom Penrose and his successors the Late Ted Tobin OAM, Graham Hamilton and current president Mr Brian Weir PSM. Through their vision and leadership, the Illawarra Academy of Sport pioneered the regional academy model in Australian sport and remains the leader in regional academy programming in NSW.
- I congratulate the Illawarra Academy of Sport and all of those who have had the honour to be part of this great organisation over the past thirty years and will watch keenly into the future as the Academy continues to grow and make a valuable contribution to the sporting landscape of not only the Illawarra Region but the State of NSW and Australia.

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