



**Media Release**

**16 May 2018**

## **New Citizens take the pledge**

The Barkly region is now home to five new Aussies following an Australian Citizenship Ceremony this week.

Barkly Regional Council Mayor Steve Edgington officially swore in Mrs Mere Vakadurivalelotuvou, Mrs Somsri Harris and her daughter Miss Punyeesar Tonghan, Mr Raphael Paragas and Ms Lara Pulumbarit as Australian citizens in front of family, friends and peers in the Council Chambers on Wednesday, 16 May.

Richard James presented a Welcome to Country for the ceremony, with Councillors Kris Civitarese and Sid Vashist in attendance to celebrate this special occasion.

“I am proud to formally welcome our new Australian citizens, and welcome them all to be part of the Barkly community,” said the Mayor.

### **Somsri Harris and Punyeesar Tonghan**

Somsri Harris grew up in Buri- Ram, Thailand, and studied to become a nurse; working at Phayathai 2 Hospital in Bangkok. During a holiday in Phuket she met her husband Roger Harris and a year later, in August 2007, the couple had a daughter, Punyeesar Tonghan. Somsri and her family lived in Melbourne for a few years before moving to Tennant Creek in 2013. Somsri landed a job with the Childcare Centre and completed her Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care. She then went to work in aged care at Pulkapulkka Kari Nursing Home as a personal care assistant completing her Certificate III in Individual Support & Certificate IV in Ageing Support and a Diploma of Nursing (EN). She is currently studying for her Bachelor of Nursing with Charles Darwin University. Somsri says she likes the remoteness of Tennant Creek, the weather, the local people, her job and all the opportunities this place has given her. She says Australia is an interesting country with a fascinating culture, and she is constantly learning from her work and study.

### **Raphael Paragas**

Raphael comes from Baguio city in the Philippines where after college he became a nurse. In March 2011 he was given the opportunity to work in the Federated States of Micronesia for more than two years. He was then transferred to Australia in May 2013 to broaden his horizons in practicing nursing. In November that year Raphael accepted a transfer to



Tennant Creek Hospital where he works as a nurse. He enjoys the laidback and simple lifestyle here, the friendly people, the multi-cultural society and the diverse Aboriginal culture. There are many opportunities in Australia and Tennant Creek but it has been the people, their friendliness and kindness, which has motivated Raphael to stay. Raphael is proud to become an Australian citizen and he agrees with friends and family when they say it is by far the best country to live in.

### **Lara Pulumbarit**

Lara Pulumbarit is originally from the province of Bulacan in Philippines. A year after she graduated from Bulacan State University in 2012 Lara came to Australia with her mother and sister. Her father, who was already living in Tennant Creek, was successful in his permanent residency application for his family and so in March 2013 Laura found herself immersed in the Barkly region. Lara settled into life in Tennant Creek quickly. Aside from being a small and quiet town, she says the whole community is friendly and everyone is ready to give a helping hand and a fair go. Lara now works for the Tennant Creek Hospital as a catering staff member in the kitchen. Lara says Australia, and in particular Tennant Creek, has provided her and her family with so many opportunities and so much genuine support without caring about race, colour or gender. It is for these reasons that Laura is honoured and happy to be a part of Australia and to become a citizen.

### **Mere Vakadurivalelotuvou**

Mere Senigigia Vakadurivalelotuvou was born in the village of Salia on the remote island of Nayau, Fiji. There, she went to school and college to become a primary school teacher. She also met and married her husband Kolinio, and they had a daughter. Mere and her daughter moved to Sydney, in New South Wales, in 2011 to live with Kolinio, who had moved there a few months earlier. Then in January 2015 she came up to Tennant Creek to visit a friend she knew for many years in Fiji. Mere only spent a week here before deciding she would start a new life in Tennant Creek. She loved the weather and the people and found work at the Tennant Creek Childcare Centre. Mere's husband, who became an Australian citizen in September last year, came up to join her a few months later. Since moving to Australia, and in particular Tennant Creek, Mere is grateful for all the job opportunities with Mere also working part-time at the not-for-profit organisation, ITEC Health. She appreciates the improved lifestyle, higher standard of living and the chance for a better education and future for her daughter.

**Media Contact:** Ktima Heathcote 08 89620027 or [ktima.heathcote@barkly.nt.gov.au](mailto:ktima.heathcote@barkly.nt.gov.au)