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## EMBARGOED MEDIA STATEMENT

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### Indigenous Marathon Project inspires distance running

The achievements and success of the Indigenous Marathon Project's (IMP) Graduates right across the country have provided the footprint of inspiration for 2016, with a record number of applications received for the 2016 squad.

The IMP is a key program of the Indigenous Marathon Foundation (IMF), established in 2009 by world champion marathon runner, Robert de Castella that annually trains and mentors a squad of 12 Indigenous Australians to run the New York Marathon with just six months of training.

The IMP also provides a compulsory educational pathway with all squad members required to complete a Certificate III in Fitness.

In just seven years, the IMP has ignited a running culture in Indigenous communities across the country where distance running was once unheard of.

The IMP has since Graduated 53 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island men and women, who have inspired a ripple effect to thousands of other Indigenous Australians nation-wide.

The 2016 IMP squad includes six female and six male runners who were selected from a record number of 183 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applications from, small remote, regional and city Indigenous communities nation-wide.

The 2016 IMP squad includes:

Men	LOCATION
Zibeon Fielding, 22	Mimili APY Lands, SA
Billy Bell, 27	Heywood, VIC
Jesse Thompson, 24	Mt Druitt, NSW
Saliman Bin Juda, 25	Thursday Island, QLD
Wade Mongta, 19	Bodalla, NSW
Wayne Sloane, 22	Condobolin, NSW
Women	LOCATION
Tahnee Sutton, 27	Adelaide, SA
Kimberly Benjamin, 22	Perth, WA
Jacinta Smith-Robins, 28	Melbourne, VIC
Kristika Kumar, 24	Nowra, NSW
Candice Love, 27	Murray Bridge, SA
Megan Highfold, 29	Broome, WA

Indigenous lawyer from Broome, Megan Highfold, was incredibly inspired by 2014 IMP Graduate, Adrian Dodson-Shaw who went on to become the first Indigenous Australian to travel to the North Pole and also finish the North Pole Marathon.



"I saw the incredible impact the program had on Adrian and his life, and I knew this was my last shot. I turn 30 this year and that is the age limit to be part of IMP.

"I am so passionate about the health of my people, particularly mental health. It is such a chronic issue in the lives of Indigenous Australians and I am determined to influence positive social change and continue the legacy Adrian has already created," she said.

Similarly, Murray Bridge representative, Candice Love, has seen the impact of IMP following 2013 IMP Graduate, Luke McKenzie and more recently 2015 Graduate, Daniel Lloyd.

IMP annually selects, educates, and trains a group of outstanding Indigenous Australians to compete alongside 47,000 other competitors at the world's biggest marathon.

The IMP also provides an educational pathway with all squad members required to undertake a Certificate III in Fitness as a compulsory part of the program.

IMP, now in its seventh year, has mentored and trained 53 Indigenous runners cross the finish line of a number of major international marathons, including New York, Boston and Tokyo.

Squad members begin their 2016 marathon journey with stories of hardship, sacrifice and determination as they face a gruelling six months of training to prepare for one of the biggest challenges of their lives.

IMP Founder and former World Champion marathon runner, Rob de Castella, said the record number of high quality applications highlighted the powerful message being sent to Indigenous Australia.

"This year we received nearly 200 applications from Indigenous people who are committed to driving change, and through running, encouraging healthy lifestyles in their communities.

"Many applicants were inspired by IMP's 53 Graduates and have witnessed their life changing transformation, in addition to watching the Graduates continue to achieve long after their marathon finish.

"Our primary goal is to promote healthy lifestyles, increase pride, instil a sense of achievement and have a positive impact on social dysfunction and lifestyle related illnesses," he said.

Head Coach and Manager, Mick Rees, undertook a two month national tour conducting trials in 26 regional, remote and city communities across the country.

He said the next six months is one of responsibility and sheer hard work for the squad members.

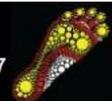
"I couldn't be more proud of the squad we have selected and I know they will embrace this opportunity, and they are equally aware of the work ahead to reach their marathon goal.

"To arrive at a squad of 12 from 183 incredibly worthy and talented applicants was extremely tough, and I was extremely impressed that so many of the unsuccessful applicants indicated they would be back again next year to try again.

"The 2016 squad represents a significant cross-section of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures from major cities, regional centres and small remote communities.

"They embrace the qualities of resilience, strength of mind and character, and an unquestionable determination to inspire their communities, their families and just as importantly, themselves.

"The next six months will change their lives. And they're ready for the challenge," he said.



The squad will meet for the first time in Canberra on 11 May for their first training camp which will also include training sessions and the first units of their education component, aimed at assisting with employment in health related fields.

Athletes will be pushed to their limits throughout the year as they participate in camps and running events in the Gold Coast, Sydney and Alice Springs.

The final squad to travel to New York in November will be announced following a 30km time trial in Alice Springs in September.

*For more information, or to arrange an interview, please contact Communication and Fundraising Manager, Kellie O'Sullivan – [kellie.o@imf.org.au](mailto:kellie.o@imf.org.au), (02) 6162 4750, 0437 699 950. More information about IMF and IMP can be found at [www.imf.org.au](http://www.imf.org.au).*

