

Eulogy for Graeme Wilson

Australian High Commissioner Andrew Byrne

- . I am honoured today to represent the Australian Government in remembering the enormous contribution of my colleague Graeme Wilson.
- . Many of you will know Graeme through his role as RAMSI Special Coordinator.
- . But beyond that particular role, Graeme was a very accomplished Australian diplomat, who was loved and respected wherever he served.
- . Indeed Graeme had already accomplished a great deal in his life before he joined the Department of Foreign Affairs as a Graduate Trainee in 1983.
- . He had played Australia's most popular sport at the highest possible level, as a ruckman for South Melbourne in the Victorian Football League.
- . (Those of you familiar with Australian Football will know that it's now called the Australian Football League and the team Graeme played for are now the famous Sydney Swans. You'll also know that playing in the ruck – especially in the era in which Graeme played – required a lot of physical courage. It was not for the faint-hearted.)
- . That achievement alone – playing sport at the highest level - is something reserved for the very best; but Graeme was never one to rest on his laurels
- . After working as a teacher in his 20s – including stints in both Melbourne and France - Graeme began a third career, this time as a diplomat.

- . He was one of the older graduates in the class of 1983, having already lived a full and successful life. As you would expect for a man of such character, Graeme quickly began to rise up through the ranks of Foreign Affairs.
- . In his first decade as a diplomat, Graeme was posted to Port Vila and then Paris.
- . The promotions kept coming and Graeme was soon given his own post, as Consul General in Noumea.
- . Returning to Canberra, he was appointed Chief of Protocol before being posted to Mexico City as Ambassador.
- . In 2009, as you all know, he returned to a part of the world he loved – the Pacific – and became Special Coordinator of RAMSI. Others have spoken about his contribution here, and I won't repeat that. Suffice to say that in my short time in Honiara, I've heard nothing but praise and admiration for the way Graeme conducted himself. To say he is remembered well in Solomon Islands would be a great understatement.
- . Last year, Graeme was appointed High Commissioner to South Africa, his fourth head of mission appointment. It was there, of course, that he tragically fell ill and died.
- . When our diplomatic network first learned of Graeme's death, the collective shock was palpable.
- . But that very quickly gave way to recollections of Graeme, stories about him and tributes to him from all the places he'd served.

- . And a common theme in all those recollections, stories and tributes was the warm feelings which were held by so many people for Graeme.
- . He is remembered as a great sportsman, who did much to promote Australian Football and cricket wherever he went.
- . He's remembered as a fine and dedicated diplomat, who served his country with distinction in vastly different places – Pretoria and Port Vila; Noumea and Mexico City; Paris and Honiara.
- . But most of all he is remembered as one of nature's great gentlemen. A man who was kind and warm towards everyone, no matter their background.
- . Graeme is remembered as someone who showed us that it's perfectly possible to be successful and decent at the same time. In fact the two attributes go hand in hand.
- . So vale Graeme Wilson, elite sportsman; senior diplomat; husband and father; and wonderful, much-loved man. You will be missed in so many places around the world, and remembered with great fondness wherever Australian diplomats serve.