

## Foundation offers future as a diplomat



LYNDON MECHIESEN

Frank Lowah, at the University of Queensland's St Lucia campus in Brisbane, has raised his sights from fishing to politics

JUSTINE FERRARI



FOUR years ago, Frank Lowah was a schoolboy and apprentice butcher in Cairns, playing rugby union and aiming to become a fisherman, like his father.

Today he is studying for a degree in international studies at the University of Queensland, with

the ambition of becoming a diplomat.

But after spending last year working in the office of former Labor senator and minister Mark Arbib, Mr Lowah, 20, has not ruled out standing for parliament one day.

"I'm still interested in politics but I'd rather be a diplomat, for the travel and to be able to help people overseas," he said.

"So I'd like to do a stint overseas, but I would like to run for political office, for my local electorate or the Senate. But I'll take it as it comes. I got to where I am just taking opportunities as they come, not rushing into anything, so I'll keep doing that."

Mr Lowah's dreams changed

after he was given the opportunity to finish school in Brisbane at St Peter's Lutheran College, which he said opened his eyes to the choices available to him.

A Torres Strait Islander who grew up in Cairns, Mr Lowah said his focus then was playing rugby and bumming around on weekends with his friends and cousins.

"Schoolwork always came second — you played rugby and everyone worked for the council, or I thought I'd try to work as a fisherman. That was the expectation of teenagers in Cairns, and I fell into that vibe," he said.

In 2009, aged 17, Mr Lowah was awarded a scholarship by the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, which supports indi-

genous students in their education, paying fees to attend private boarding schools, helping them find jobs, apply for tertiary courses and supporting students in residential colleges for those going on to university.

"When I attended St Peter's, in the first year, all the kids weren't like the kids at home, they were focused and everyone had high hopes. I knew I could do more, but I didn't have that atmosphere where kids are pushed to do more," he said.

In Year 12, Mr Lowah was one of a group of AIEF students who did a week of work experience with parliamentarians in Canberra, which sparked his interest in politics as a way of helping peo-

ple in the community and bringing about social change. So when offered the opportunity after leaving school to work in Mr Arbib's office, Mr Lowah jumped at the chance, and moved to Sydney.

But that led to the next change in his life plan. While working for Mr Arbib, Mr Lowah met the New Zealand ambassador and was wooed by the idea of diplomacy, as well as the combination of travel and politics.

AIEF chief executive Andrew Penfold said Mr Lowah was a great example of what young people could achieve once they were given the opportunity.

For more information on the AIEF, go to [www.aief.com.au](http://www.aief.com.au)