

William “Bill” Rourke 1928-2012

The first chief executive of Engineers Australia, William “Bill” Rourke, passed away last month. He had a 43-year long career in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), reaching the rank of Rear Admiral. He spent six years from 1985 to 1991 as the chief executive of EA, and after retiring from that position, served a variety of roles at the World Federation of Engineering Organisations (WFEO).

He was a fellow of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering and an Officer of the Order of Australia. He completed Bachelor and Master degrees in economics and studied to become an engineering officer at the Royal Navy Engineering College in Plymouth in the UK. He also completed postgraduate study in nuclear engineering at the Royal College of Technology and the Atomic Energy Research Establishment (AERE) in the UK.

Rourke was born in Pemberton, Western Australia in 1928 and in 1942 he joined the RAN as a Cadet Midshipman. In August 1945 he graduated, proceeding to the United Kingdom to continue his training. In 1946 he was posted to the Royal Navy Engineering College in Plymouth, UK. He served on the Colossus Class aircraft carrier HMS *Ocean*, and on destroyers undertaking the Haifa Patrol which intercepted Jewish immigrants heading to Palestine and took them to Cyprus.

He graduated in 1949, returning to Australia in 1950 as a Lieutenant. He served as a flight deck engineer on the Majestic Class light fleet aircraft carrier HMAS *Sydney* during the Korean War.

In 1953 he worked as part of the Coronation Contingent, part of a traditional procession of Commonwealth armed forces that takes place after the death of the ruling monarch and the coronation of the new monarch. The day after the procession, the contingent were awarded Coronation Medals at Buckingham Palace.

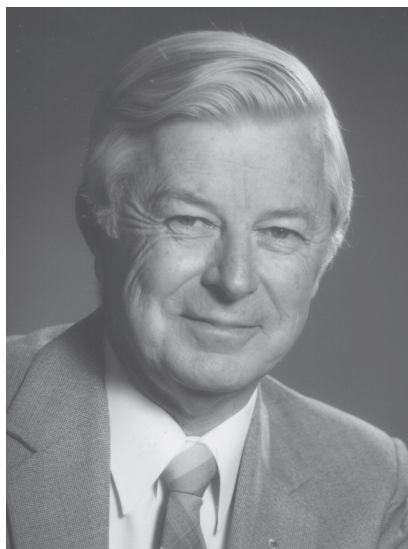
He married Jennifer in 1956.

In 1960 he was selected to complete postgraduate nuclear engineering courses at the Royal College of Technology and the AERE in the UK.

In 1964 he was promoted to Commander and appointed deputy general overseer for the east Australia area in the RAN.

He was promoted to Captain in 1969 and was selected as the inaugural military adviser to the chief defence scientist in Australia. He served in the Vietnam War.

In 1974 he completed studies at the Royal College of Defence Studies, promoted to Commodore and appointed as the defence scientific and technical representative,



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London. In 1981 he was promoted to Rear Admiral and appointed as the chief of naval materiel.

He retired from the RAN in 1985 and became chief executive of EA.

Rourke became known for his commitment to engineering education, doubling student membership within his first year. He promoted closer links between EA and Australian higher educational institutes. His belief was that young engineers with the right values and education could make the world a better place. He expanded programs and initiatives aimed at young people and the establishment of university scholarships.

Rourke was committed to broadening EA's community involvement and its relationship

with governments. He was passionate about promoting engineering policies and firmly believed that the engineering profession had to keep abreast of change.

He initiated the formation of EA's engineering societies and special interest groups. Further, he expanded national office activities to include conferences in management, course accreditation and assessing foreign qualifications.

In 1988 he and the council of EA accepted the proposal of the Sydney Division to have National Excellence Awards in addition to the divisional awards.

In that year Rourke also endorsed a recommendation put to the council for the establishment of “a database on a network ... that would be accessible to members via computer facilities in the workplace or in the home”. During this time he represented EA at WFEO.

Rourke was vice-president of WFEO from 1991 to 1999. At the 1999 General Assembly he was appointed as a special adviser to the president of WFEO. From 1990 to 1992 he was secretary general of the Federation of Engineering Institutions of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (FEISEAP). His report *Creating Our Common Future* helped form the FEISEAP Network for Sustainable Development in South-East Asia and the Pacific.

Dato Lee Yee Cheong AO of Malaysia and a HonFIEAust has said: “Bill encouraged me to stand for chairman of Commonwealth Engineers Council with full EA support. Then FEISEAP that subsequently led to WFEO presidency.”

Barry Grear AO said that when he was appointed as president of WFEO: “Bill met me on a number of occasions to share his advice and give me encouragement that I found very valuable.”

Rourke represented Australia at WFEO until 2000. He passed away on 15 November.