



MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, December 11th 2020

2020 SA & NT Rural Media Award Winners Announced

From a record number of outstanding entries, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's journalist Kristy O'Brien and News Corp photographer, Tricia Watkinson have taken out the major prizes at the 2020 Rural Media & Communicators South Australian and Northern Territory (RMC SA/NT) Rural Media Awards announced at today's Awards Presentation Dinner.

Showcasing the increasingly multi-skilled nature of rural journalists, not only was Kristy crowned the 2020 SA & NT Rural Journalist of the Year and worthy winner of both the Best Rural Broadcast Journalist for Video/Television and the Best Individual Rural Broadcast Video/Television Story, but she also received noteworthy commendations in several of the photography awards.

Born on Queensland's Darling Downs, Kristy started her journalism career as a 16 year-old and has worked across a myriad of roles in television, radio and digital journalism, including production of award winning documentaries. She moved to the Northern Territory's Darwin newsroom in 2009 and now works primarily as the Northern Territory and West Australian reporter for Landline and News, plus specialist Current Affairs programming with 'Australian Story' and 'Backroads'.

From an extremely strong field of 24 entrants, Tricia Watkinson was named the 2020 SA & NT Rural Photographer of the Year with an outstanding portfolio of story-telling and creative photographs. She was highly commended in all three open categories, plus winning the Best Individual Image in the Production category.

Commencing her career with The Advertiser in 1992, Tricia's roles have included Editorial Messenger, daily photographer and Sunday Mail Picture Editor, in addition to having worked for The Times newspaper in London. Tricia is currently working as a Senior Photographer with The Advertiser, Sunday Mail and The Advertiser online.

Now in its third year of incorporating the Northern Territory in these awards, RMC President Leigh Radford OAM said the quality of year's entries were of the highest order.

"RMC is delighted to see such strong entries from journalists and photographers across SA and the NT. It is particularly exciting to see exceptionally strong entries from the Northern Territory, following RMC changing its name and constitution to formally incorporate members from the NT.

Despite the challenges of a pandemic and an ever-diminishing commercial media sector, these awards reflect the skill, dedication and high standard of rural journalism and photography through SA and the NT. It's a clear sign that despite the challenges, our members are serving the public with high quality coverage of the issues which matter the most to them."

Representing the major sponsor for these awards, Rural Business Support's Chief Executive Officer, Brett Smith commended the major award winners Kristy O'Brien and Tricia Watkinson.

"Rural Business Support is proud to support our rural and regional media as they work to ensure that agriculture's important news stories are told with accuracy, impact and meaning," Brett said.

"Your work in keeping rural communities informed has been especially significant this year, with the 'triple whammy' of drought, bushfire and the pandemic all being felt heavily across the country."

"As we move towards a COVID-safe normal, we know that the success of agriculture and rural business will very much shape Australia's economic recovery."

"A little like years past when the country was 'riding on the sheep's back', we're likely to see a similar scenario now. As we do, it will be even more important for rural media to seek out and share those inspirational stories from our regions to give hope and buoy community spirits across the board."

"We thank you and congratulate all of this year's entrants on your outstanding efforts."

RMC President Leigh Radford thanked Rural Business Support for its major sponsorship for the last eight years, stating this has allowed the expanded recognition of high achievement across all forms of rural media and communications to continue.

In particular, he praised CEO Brett Smith for his strong personal support for these awards and encouragement of the media members who have chosen to work in the vital rural and regional areas as a career path.

He also paid recognition to Primary Industries and Regions SA, FULLER, SA Horticultural Services, the Royal Agricultural & Horticultural Society, AgCommunicators and Superior Selections for their highly valued ongoing support and sponsorship.

Mr Radford extended congratulations to all the journalists and photographers who entered, stating it presented them with a wonderful learning and rewarding experience.

An important flow on is the winning entries of the best individual story and best individual photograph in the main categories published during 2020 are eligible to go on to the 2021 national Australian Council of Agricultural Journalists (ACAJ) Star Awards.

If successful in the national awards, the SA & NT Award nominations proceed to the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) Star Awards at the next IFAJ Conference, where past RMC winners have regularly excelled, including this year.

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In recognition of the disadvantages smaller regional publications and their staff face when competing against the resources of bigger media corporations, where journalists are generally required to cover both aspects of story publication, awards were also presented for the Best Rural Journalist – Regional Print and the Best Rural/Regional Photojournalist.

This year the regional journalism award went to Stan Gorton from Kangaroo Island's The Islander, while Elisa Rose from the Mt Barker Courier won the Photojournalist award.

While regionally based journalists often work at a disadvantage, they do have a unique opportunity to develop a wide range of skills, with many past major award winners starting their careers in regional centres. Regional experience often sees Journalists' career path develop more rapidly than their city-based counterparts.

With an increasingly high-calibre of entries each year, all journalists and photographers covering rural and regional topics are strongly encouraged to take up the challenge and learning opportunities by entering in 2021.

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For more information please contact:

Leigh Radford OAM

RMC President

0409 678 323

Brett Smith

CEO Rural Business Support

0412 630 015

2020 SA & NT Rural Media Awards - Complete Listing of Results

RURAL JOURNALISM AWARDS

2020 Rural Journalist of the Year

Sponsored by Rural Media SA

Winner: Kristy O'Brien – ABC Landline, Darwin

2020 Best Rural Journalist – Print

Supported by FULLER

Winner: Michelle Etheridge – The Advertiser

Highly Commended: Claire Harris – Stock Journal

2020 Best Rural Journalist – Regional Print

Sponsored by Rural Media SA

Winner: Stan Gorton – The Islander

Highly Commended: Molly Taylor – Border Watch Today

Highly Commended: Eliza Berlage – Naracoorte Community News

2020 Best Rural Broadcast Journalist – Audio / Radio

Supported by SA Horticultural Services

Winner: Matthew Brann – ABC Rural, Darwin

Highly Commended: Bridget Herrmann – ABC Rural

2020 Best Rural Broadcast Journalist – Video / Television

Sponsored by Rural Business Support

Winner: Kristy O'Brien – ABC Landline, Darwin

Highly Commended: Isadora Bogle – ABC News

Highly Commended: Brittany Evins

2020 Best Rural Broadcast Journalist – Digital / Online

Sponsored by Rural Business Support

Winner: Jodie Hamilton – ABC Eyre Peninsula

Highly Commended: Brooke Neindorf – ABC Rural

2020 Best Individual Rural Print Story Award

Winner: Michelle Etheridge – The Advertiser

‘Long (and painful) road to recovery’

2020 Best Individual Rural Regional Print Story Award

Winner: Stan Gorton – The Islander

‘Fire devastation..... Island will rise from the ashes’

2020 Best Individual Rural Broadcast Audio/Radio Story

Winner: Matthew Brann – ABC Rural, Darwin

‘Colin Brett interview’

2020 Best Individual Rural Broadcast Video/Television Story

Winner: Kristy O’Brien – ABC Landline, Darwin

‘Camel chaos: Culling camels to protect water’

2020 Best Individual Rural Broadcast Digital/Online Story

Winner: Jodie Hamilton – ABC Eyre Peninsula

‘Minnipa couple opens leather shop to help save remote South Australian town’

RURAL PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS

2020 SA & NT Rural Photographer of the Year

Sponsored by Rural Business Support

Winner: Tricia Watkinson – News Corp

2020 Best Rural Photographer Award – Nature/Landscape/Rural Scenes

Supported by Primary Industries & Regions SA

Winner: Brad Fleet – News Corp/Freelance

Highly Commended: Tricia Watkinson – News Corp

2020 Best Individual Rural Photo – Nature/Landscape/Rural Scenes

Winner: Brad Fleet – News Corp/Freelance

‘Another Koala Survives - Vivonne Bay’

2020 Best Rural Photographer Award – Rural Production

Supported by Primary Industries & Regions SA

Winner: Tait Schmaal – News Corp

Highly Commended: Brad Fleet – News Corp

Highly Commended: Tricia Watkinson – News Corp

2020 Best Individual Rural Photo – Rural Production

Winner: Tricia Watkinson – News Corp
“Beehives in the Forest”

2020 Best Rural Photographer Award – People

Sponsored by Rural Business Support

Winner: Tait Schmaal – News Corp
Highly Commended: Tricia Watkinson – News Corp Australia
Highly Commended: Brad Fleet – News Corp/Freelance
Highly Commended: Jacqui Bateman

2020 Best Individual Rural Photo – People

Winner: Tait Schmaal
“Cup Hopes – Race Restores Island Spirits”

2020 Best Rural/Regional Photojournalist Award

Sponsored by Superior Selections & AgCommunicators

Winner: Elisa Rose – Mt Barker Courier
Highly Commended: Catherine Miller – ACM Stock Journal
Highly Commended: Tegan Buckley – Mallee Marketing

2020 Best Individual Rural Photo –Regional Photojournalism

Winner: Elisa Rose – Mt Barker Courier
“Glory in a glass”

Judging Panel’s Specific Comments on Winning Entries

RURAL JOURNALISM AWARDS

2020 SA & NT Rural Journalist of the Year

Winner: Kristy O’Brien – ABC Landline, Darwin

Kristy O’Brien excels as rural journalist, standing tall in professional ranks and being a previous winner of this award.

Kristy O’Brien is skilled at identifying key stories, telling them for broad audiences and deliver a high quality product.

There is a sense of tackling the harder-than-usual, in a manner that often involves exposing herself to extreme conditions.

This is the second occasion Kristy O’Brien has been named SA & NT Rural Journalist of the Year.

It’s an indication that despite being remote and sparsely populated, the Northern Territory has some of the very best rural journalists.

Best Rural Journalist – Print

Winner: Michelle Etheridge – The Advertiser

Michelle Etheridge's portfolio displayed a distinct talent for identifying the core issues at the heart of every story she reported on, then analysing these in minute detail from a variety of viewpoints.

Her stories were hard-hitting, emotive and balanced.

As regional affairs editor of the Advertiser, Michelle displayed an obvious strength in ensuring the personal issues affecting the daily lives of communities she served were represented in the paper for the benefit of metropolitan and non-regional readers alike.

There was a maturity in all her writing that lent itself to the type of well researched magazine-style stories submitted in her entry portfolio.

Best Rural Journalist – Regional Print

Winner: Stan Gorton – The Islander

Stan Gorton could easily be described as a media hero.

Stan Gorton's entry portfolio was a series of connected articles, focused on the inferno and aftermath of the Kangaroo Island bushfire disaster.

He was the sole journalist from Kangaroo Island's "The Islander" newspaper present when the 2019/2020 summer bushfire event devastated the region and its community.

Alone, he covered the diversity of traumatic issues week after week for more than a month, single-handedly producing the entire story content of his employer's weekly 20-page "Islander" newspaper.

His story portfolio comprehensively represented the physical disaster, the personal consequences and the aftermath.

Best Rural Broadcast Journalist – Audio/Radio

Winner: Matthew Brann – ABC Rural, Darwin

As presenter of the Northern Territory ABC Radio Country Hour, Matt Brann offered a portfolio of diverse stories which highlighted his professionalism and talent.

Matt's stories encompassed a highly produced exposé on the role of Gamba Grass across the political spectrum in the Northern Territory election; a second story involving a passionate interview with an elderly station owner severely affected by the ban on live cattle exports from the NT; and a fast moving, seat-of-the-pants interview, involving young ringers and jillaroos sharing memories of their first campdraft at Adelaide River.

Matt Brann's style is relaxed and perfectly suited to his NT audience.

He is a great broadcaster who mirrors and relates strongly to his audience.

Best Rural Broadcast Journalist – Video/Television

Winner: Kristy O’Brien – ABC Landline, Darwin

Kristy O’Brien’s portfolio of three television stories tackled the hard issues that many may prefer to remain undiscussed.

Her ability to translate challenging issues into a palatable form, suitable for broad audiences, placed her stories well ahead of others.

Although drought in the Northern Territory was one of the most serious issues on the agenda, its constant coverage by media was producing widespread attention fatigue and indifference amongst audiences.

Instead, Kristy decided to focus on a success story in dealing with drought. The story provided a fresh solution-based approach to drought coverage which was reflected in the engagement figures from the audience.

Another of her stories tackled the human toll of infertility amongst pastoral families, delivering a genuine human angle to a very difficult and little-discussed topic.

Kristy also tackled the confronting issue of camel culling.

Best Rural Journalist – Digital/Online

Winner: Jodie Hamilton – ABC Eyre Peninsula

Jodie Hamilton displayed skill with online media, merging text, images and video seamlessly into three individual stories.

Her three-story coverage of an innovative business merger in the tuna industry, wild bird problem in farming enterprises and the establishment of a new family business in a declining regional community, displayed a diversity of professional skill.

Each of the online stories were balanced, well researched, and put together in a manner appealing to a wide audience.

Jodie Hamilton’s grasp of online media to present rurally focused stories is impressive.

Best Individual Rural Print Story Award

Winner: Michelle Etheridge – The Advertiser
‘Long (and painful) road to recovery’

Forming part of her winning print entry portfolio, Michelle Etheridge’s story:

“Long (and painful) road to recovery” appearing in the 1st March 2020 “Insight” newspaper supplement has also been named the “Best Individual Print Story” of the 2020 SA & NT Rural Media Awards.

This insightful story aimed to lay bare the hidden toll of the New Year bushfires on the Kangaroo Island community after the blazes were extinguished. It is comprehensive, balanced, well written and draws upon a range of sources.

Best Individual Rural Regional Print Story Award

Winner: Stan Gorton – The Islander

“Fire devastation... Island will rise from the ashes”

Forming part of his winning regional print entry portfolio, Stan Gorton’s story:

“Fire devastation..... Island will rise from the ashes” appeared in the 9th January 2020 issue of “The Islander” newspaper has also been named the “Best Individual Regional Print Story” of the 2020 SA & NT Rural Media Awards.

Written by Stan Gorton on-site while the devastating Kangaroo Island fires were still burning, this article provided an essential information source for stunned locals who were trying to determine what was going on and how they could best survive.

The article is straight down the line, providing the raw truth to a readership still looking for answers.

The Judges admired Stan’s capacity write such strong articles while under enormous pressure, in the midst of the most dramatic circumstances.

Best Individual Rural Broadcast Audio/Radio Story

Winner: Matthew Brann – ABC Rural, Darwin

“Colin Brett interview”

Forming part of his winning audio/radio entry portfolio, Matthew Brann’s story:

“Colin Brett interview” broadcast as part of the 2nd June 2020 Northern Territory Country Hour.

Matt Brann’s live interview with Northern Territory cattle owner Colin Brett, immediately after the courts had reversed a Federal Government decision to ban live cattle exports, captured a thread of genuine emotion and relief.

The interview allowed Colin Brett to express his true feelings without interruption, punctuated by an occasional question, as a prompt in order to maintain the flow.

Matthew Brann’s skilful approach to this emotive subject produced a quality interview which helped the talent to express his own story, in his own way. It was powerful radio.

Best Individual Rural Broadcast Video/Television Story

Winner: Kristy O’Brien – ABC Landline, Darwin

‘Camel chaos: Culling camels to protect water’

Forming part of her winning broadcast video/television entry portfolio, Kristy O’Brien’s story:

“Camel chaos: Culling camels to protect water” was broadcast as part of Landline on February 1st 2020. It was further selected as the “Best Individual Rural Broadcast Video/Television Story” of the 2020 SA & NT Rural Media Awards.

With drought forcing large numbers of camels to come in from desert country and wreak havoc for pastoralists in the WA goldfields region, a major consideration was how to cull the feral pest, without causing a wave of emotive reaction from the general public.

Kristy's handling of the subject conveyed the serious economic and environmental impact of camels, while highlighting the ultimate solution in a matter-of-fact way.

Her story was pragmatic, but told with sensitivity.

Best Individual Rural Broadcast Digital/Online Story

Winner: Jodie Hamilton – ABC Eyre Peninsula

Forming part of her winning broadcast digital/online entry portfolio, Jodie Hamilton's story:

“Minnipa couple opens leather shop to help save remote South Australian town”

published by the ABC on 12th March 2020, has also been named the “Best Individual Rural Broadcast Digital/Online Story” of the 2020 SA & NT Rural Media Awards.

This story captured Tricia and Jim Pollock's lifelong dream of opening their own leather shop in Minnipa, in an effort to assist the revival of their tiny Eyre Peninsula town.

It was entertaining and conveyed the Pollock's personalities in an endearing way.

Jodie laced her story together with photographs of the Pollocks at work and an embedded short video piece.

Jodie Hamilton's online story is appealing to a wide audience and captured a unique story for posterity.

RURAL PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS

2020 SA & NT Rural Photographer of the Year

Photography is very subjective, which makes judging doubly hard.

The judges agonized over selecting the top three, and then in assessing their portfolios in fine detail. This process took nearly as long as all the other assessments combined.

Winner: Tricia Watkinson - News Corp

Tricia Watkinson achieved Highly Commended awards in all three categories with her entries missing the category winner's position very narrowly in each case. Her entry had two of the judges' top five images in the whole competition.

When consensus still could not be reached, it came to a voting countback before Tricia Watkinson was selected as the overall 2020 RMC SA/NT Rural Photographer of the Year.

While Tricia did not win one of the three individual categories, the judges did agree that there was not one weak image in her portfolio and it was that consistent quality, combined with the power of her two most striking images, that propelled her to the overall winning position.

2020 Best Rural Photographer Award – Nature/Landscape/Rural Scenes

There is no doubt the devastating bushfires from last Summer grabbed everyone's attention and increased editorial coverage and photographic opportunities within the scope of this category for those journalists and photographers on the fire grounds.

Winner: Brad Fleet - News Corp/Freelance

One of the criteria the judges look for in entries is whether any image is strong enough to tell its own story. This year's winning entry from Brad Fleet contained two extremely powerful images. From a nature perspective, nothing could display the utter devastation and loss of native animal life and habitat more powerfully than Brad's images.

The on-line response verifies their graphic quality and impact. They were well supported by a more distant koala shot, with the composition of this image also giving greater emphasis on the flora loss, which in turn creates a devastating outcome for the survivors. This was an outstanding set of three images that needed no words to support them.

2020 Best Individual Rural Photo – Nature/Landscape/Rural Scenes

Winner: Brad Fleet – News Corp/Freelance

“Another Koala Survives - Vivonne Bay”

Arguably the most powerful image is the truly graphic and confronting image of the kangaroo incinerated against a fence, as it tried to flee the fire front.

However, the judges felt Brad's third image in his entry set was the winner. This displayed three stories with the one image - the devastation of bushfires with the burnt out trees and bush with burnt fauna being an obvious casualty without being displayed; the miracles of nature in that a koala could survive in this inferno virtually unscathed, giving hope; but then the dilemma it faced with no obvious food supply.

The composition with the koala in its natural and devastated abode with an almost quizzical look on its face took this image to the top place.

2020 Best Rural Photographer Award – People

With record entries in this category, the judges had a huge job. There were good images from all entrants and the human effects of the bushfires again featured strongly

Winner: Tait Schmaal - News Corp

Tait presented three excellent images with bushfire story lines. His first image highlighted the KI Racing Club's determination to hold a "Race Meeting" of sorts in the aftermath of the fires, to lift the spirits in a community. The composition, colour and lighting is outstanding.

The second image tells of the fear and anxiety felt by one Hills resident as the fire front approaches, not knowing the fate of her home. The third image puts the storyline of a fire victim having to give away his beloved dog to a better home. The judges felt this was a very strong and consistently good entry.

2020 Best Individual Rural Photo – People

Winner: Tait Schmaal - News Corp

“Cup Hopes – Race Restores Island Spirits”

To comply with the ACAJ entry criteria of images published in 2020, the judges selected Tait Schmaal’s striking image of “Cup Hopes – Race Restores Island Spirits”.

This image supported the story of the KI Race Club’s determination to hold a race meeting at the KI Racecourse to try to get the residents’ minds away from the devastation of the fire.

Tait’s image of one of the racehorses and a Fashions of the Field entrant had all the elements for a great photo; colour contrasts against the burnt background, fantastic light and composition.

2020 Best Rural Photographer Award – Rural Production

This category created a lot of discussion amongst the judges.

Winner: Tait Schmaal - News Corp

Tait’s images in this entry all clearly told the story of rural production from a combination of a canola crop as a prop for fashion, wine and horticulture.

They displayed that creative composition we have come to associate with Tait’s work. The outstanding light use in the first image made it one of the top images in the whole competition.

2020 Best Individual Rural Photo – Rural Production

Winner: Tricia Watkinson – News Corp

“Beehives in the Forest”

The judges had three images within this category that they felt were above a field of many very good ones.

Tait Schmaal’s canola image and Ethan Allen’s night harvest shots were much admired, but the judges ultimately chose Tricia Watkinson’s “Beehives in the Forest”, fire recovery shot as the winner.

Considering the substantial losses of beehives during the fires in the Hills and on KI in particular, it was good to see apiarists featured in this competition.

The composition is spectacular ... with great framing, having exposure of all elements present and active, combined with the joy that comes from positive recovery, then topped off by spectacular lighting. It’s a standout image in every way.

2020 Best Rural/Regional Photojournalist Award

Winner: Elisa Rose - Mount Barker Courier

Elisa's entry displayed considerable effort and creative thinking to capture her three images. The top two demonstrated good light control and composition.

Overall, Elisa's portfolio was considered the standout entry in this strong category of entrants.

2020 Best Individual Rural Photo –Regional Photojournalism

Winner: Elisa Rose – Mt Barker Courier

“Glory in a glass”

The judges chose Elisa's first image of 'Glory in a glass' as the standout image in the category, although her second image, 'Healthy Harvest' was not far behind.

It strongly supports of her story on Murdoch Hill winemaker Michael Downer, who tasted success at last November's Adelaide Hills Wine Show, where his Rocket Chardonnay was crowned the region's best wine.

She put in a considerable effort to get this result that displays the product and the person behind it, while the composition and light control was spot on to display the contemplative mood one could expect in enhancing this story.