



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2026

Fine Weather, Fantastic Crowds and 30 Years of Kelpie Spirit Shine in Casterton

The 30th Australian Kelpie Muster has delivered a milestone celebration worthy of three decades of community pride, working dog tradition and national recognition, with fine weather, fantastic crowd numbers and a strong mix of new and returning entrants across both the Australian Kelpie Muster and Australia's Premier Working Dog Auction.

Held in Casterton over the King's Birthday Long Weekend, the 30th anniversary event brought together locals, visitors, competitors, vendors, volunteers and working dog enthusiasts from across Australia to celebrate the birthplace of the Kelpie and the enduring importance of the breed to rural life.

After last year's rain-soaked display of resilience, the 2026 event was greeted with fine conditions, setting the stage for a vibrant weekend of competition, connection and celebration.

"The 30th year of the Australian Kelpie Muster has been everything we hoped it would be," said Casterton Kelpie Association President Karen Stephens.

"To see such fantastic crowd numbers, so many familiar faces return, and new entrants join us across both the Muster and the Auction is incredibly special. This event belongs to the community, the competitors, the volunteers, the vendors, the visitors and, of course, the Kelpies."

Saturday's Muster program once again brought Casterton to life, with the street parade with the Combined Schools float with their theme of 'Celebrating 30 years' auctioning the 30 years of dogs on the back.

crowds were treated to an outstanding showcase of skill, athleticism and the unmistakable character of the Australian Kelpie.

In the NSC Advisory Kelpie Dash, Shane Beaughlehall and Boof claimed first place with a time of 5.05 seconds, narrowly ahead of Gordon Hicks and Finn on 5.06 seconds, with Nerissa Gee and Hunny close behind in third on 5.07 seconds.

The Vickery Brothers Kelpie High Jump saw Brooke Van der Meede and Dusty soar to victory, clearing an impressive 2.52 metres. Kathleen Smith and Walker placed second with 2.44 metres, followed by Matt Haines and Charlie in third with 2.37 metres.

In the TDC Kelpie Hill Climb, with the top three succeeding through the gates for the five second time advantage - Ayden Ferrari and Nellie took top honours with a time of 33.50 seconds, followed by Kathleen Smith and Walker in second on 35.00 seconds, and Rob Wekenborg and Jet in third on 35.80 seconds.

With strong performances across the Dash, Hill Climb and High Jump, Matt Haines and Charlie were crowned winners of the 2026 Bendigo Bank Kelpie Triathlon, further cementing their place in Kelpie Muster history. Kathleen Smith and Walker placed second, with Rob Wekenborg and Jet rounding out the top three.

Returning to the history of Jack Gleeson, with Elanco, Nutrien Ag Stockman's Challenge with Sarah Lee taking out the overall win, following an outstanding dog run, seeing a win in the dog section, followed by Sharon Barry placing second and Damon Peacock in third, who also secured the Horse Section win.

The Casterton Kelpie Association is a volunteer-led organisation dedicated to celebrating and preserving the legacy of the Australian Kelpie, proudly hosting the annual Australian Kelpie Muster and Australia's Premier Working Dog Auction in the breed's birthplace.

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“The standard of competition was exceptional,” Stephens said. “Whether people were here for the first time or returning after many years, there was a real sense that everyone wanted to be part of this milestone weekend.”

The atmosphere continued into Saturday evening, with the Kelpie Gala celebrating 30 years of the Australian Kelpie Muster and bringing the pack back together for a special anniversary gathering of life members, supporters, sponsors, competitors and community members.

Sunday’s Australia’s Premier Working Dog Auction again reinforced Casterton’s national reputation as a leading sale for working Kelpies, with strong interest in the auction arena and online.

The 2026 Auction saw 62 lots offered, with 52 sold, seven passed in and three withdrawn, achieving an 88.1 per cent clearance rate. Total auction takings reached \$475,500, with an average of \$9,144 and a top price of \$23,500 for Lot 7, Stella, sold by Beloka Kelpies, Paul McPhail, Welshpool, highest priced pup Flea also by MacPhail sold for \$20,000.

“The Auction is such an important part of the weekend,” Stephens said. “It reflects the real working value of the Kelpie and the role these dogs continue to play on farms, in stock work and across rural Australia.”

Auction results highlighted the continued demand for well-bred, well-trained working Kelpies, with buyers and vendors taking part from across the country and strong engagement from both ringside and online bidders.

The 30th Australian Kelpie Muster was also a celebration of the many people who have helped shape the event over three decades — from founding members and long-serving volunteers to stall holders, sponsors, local businesses, competitors, vendors and visitors who continue to return year after year.

“This event does not happen because of one person or one committee,” Stephens said. “It happens because a whole community gets behind it. Our volunteers, sponsors, supporters, local businesses and visitors all play a part in keeping the Muster strong.”

As Casterton reflected on 30 years of Kelpie history, the weekend also looked firmly to the future, with strong participation, fantastic crowds and renewed energy across the event.

“The Australian Kelpie Muster has always been about more than competition,” Stephens said. “It is about recognising the working dog, supporting the town, sharing stories, welcoming visitors and celebrating something that is truly part of Casterton’s identity.”

With fine weather, full streets, strong entries and a proud 30-year milestone, the 2026 Australian Kelpie Muster once again proved why Casterton remains the home of the Kelpie and the heart of this much-loved national celebration.

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Photos and Captions next page

PHOTOS:

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Photo Captions:

- **Hill Climb Winners:** Rob Wekenborg and Jet, Joel and Kathleen Smith with Walker, Casterton Kelpie Association President - Karen Stephens, Emily Hicks and Ayden Ferrari with Nellie.
- **Dash Action:** Boof dashing down Henty Street.
- **Dash Winners:** Casterton Kelpie Association President - Karen Stephens, Gordon Hicks and Finn, Shane Beaglehall and Boof with NSC Advisory representative and Casterton Kelpie Association Treasurer Jodie Jolly.
- **High Jump Action:** Dusty reaches new heights to win the 2026 competition with a height of 2.52m with owner Brooke Van der Meede.
- **High Jump Winners:** back left – Committee member Jack Matthews, Vice President Giles Kent, Vickery Bros Lee, Joel Smith with Walker, Enduro Petfood representative Jenny, Casterton Kelpie Association President - Karen Stephens and from front left: Matt Haines and Charlie, Brooke Van der Meede and Dusty and Kathleen Smith.
- **Stockmans Challenge Action:** Horse Section Champion Damon Peacock under the watchful eyes of Darren Holmberg.
- **Stockmans Challenge Winners:** Nancy Withers, Casterton Kelpie Association President - Karen Stephens, Judge Paul MacPahil, Stockmans Challenge Convenor Jodie Jolly, Shannon Wallace, Damon Peacock, Sharron Barry and 2026 winner Sarah Lee with Horse Judge Darren Holmberg.
- **Street Parade Action:** 2026 guest, Rachel Treasurer travels in the Parade with Warrock the Kelpie.
- **Street Parade Winners:** Combined schools float bidding on the historic high figures of the Casterton Kelpie Association.
- **Highest Priced Dog Action:** Highest priced pup, Felicity breed by Paul MacPhail, Beloka Kelpies on Demo at Sunday's auction.
- **Highest Priced Pup & Dog Photo:** Casterton Kelpie Association President - Karen Stephens, Paul Macphail, Pup owner Teresa, Ellie McDonald (highest price dog purchaser), Beloka Kelpies - Anika Homan, Jack Matthews.