



MEDIA RELEASE

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Thirty Years, One Town, Countless Kelpies: Casterton Celebrates Milestone Muster

The 30th Australian Kelpie Muster has celebrated 30 years of community pride, working dog tradition and Kelpie spirit, bringing fine weather, strong crowds and competitors from across Australia to Casterton over the King's Birthday Long Weekend.

The 2026 event marked three decades of Casterton's proud connection with the Australian Kelpie and Australia's Premier Working Dog Auction. What began around the Casterton saleyards has grown into a nationally recognised celebration of the breed, the town and the volunteers who have carried the event forward.

Casterton Kelpie Association President Karen Stephens said the milestone weekend was a chance to honour the people, dogs and stories that have shaped the event.

"The 30th Australian Kelpie Muster has been everything we hoped it would be," Mrs Stephens said.

"To see fantastic crowd numbers, familiar faces returning, new entrants joining us and the whole town coming alive again was incredibly special. This event belongs to the community, the competitors, the vendors, the volunteers, the visitors and, of course, the Kelpies."

The milestone weekend was officially opened on Thursday evening in conjunction with the Kelpie Art Show, setting the tone for a weekend that celebrated the breed not only in the street and auction ring, but also through art, storytelling and community connection.

Saturday's Muster program once again brought Casterton to life, beginning with the Community Bank Coleraine Street Parade. The Combined Schools float took first place with its "Celebrating 30 Years" theme, followed by Casterton Sandford Football Netball Club in second and Casterton's Vice Regal and Portland Citizen Marching Band in third.

Crowds then lined the streets and competition areas to watch the speed, athleticism and character of the Australian Kelpie on show.

In the NSC Advisory Kelpie Dash, Shane Beaughlehall and Boof claimed first place in 5.05 seconds across the 50m course, narrowly ahead of Gordon Hicks and Finn on 5.06 seconds, with Nerissa Gee and Hunny third on 5.07 seconds.

The Vickery Brothers Kelpie High Jump saw Brooke Van der Meede and Dusty clear 2.52 metres for the win. 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, Ayden Ferrari and Nellie took top honours in 33.50 seconds, followed by Kathleen Smith and Walker on 35.00 seconds, and Rob Wekenborg and Jet on 35.80 seconds.

With strong performances across the Kelpie Dash, High Jump and Hill Climb, Matt Haines and Charlie were crowned winners of the 2026 ABP Australian Bluegum Plantations Kelpie Triathlon. Kathleen Smith and Walker placed second, with Rob Wekenborg and Jet third.

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 Elanco and Nutrien Ag Stockman's Challenge again honoured skilled stock work, with Sarah Lee named overall winner. Sharon Barry placed second and Damon Peacock third, with Peacock also taking out the Horse Section.

Junior competitors added to the weekend's energy, with The Geelong College Junior Competitor events showcasing the next generation. Joshua Bower-Smith won the Junior High Jump with 1.76 metres, followed by Noah Graham from Tasmania with 1.63 metres. In the Junior Dash, Joshua Bower-Smith and Blaze placed first in 8.72 seconds, ahead of Austin Price and Kip the Tripod in 12.13 seconds, and Noah Graham and RIP in 28.75 seconds.

Beyond the competition arena, the photography competition, art show, market stalls, entertainment and community activities showed the many ways the Kelpie continues to inspire creativity, connection and pride.

The anniversary program culminated on Saturday evening with the Kelpie Gala celebrating three decades, bringing life members, sponsors, supporters, competitors and community members together to celebrate 30 years of shared history.

Sunday's Australia's Premier Working Dog Auction reinforced Casterton's national reputation as a leading sale for working Kelpies. The 2026 auction saw 62 dogs catalogued, 59 offered, 52 sold, seven passed in and three withdrawn, achieving an 88.1 per cent clearance rate. Total auction turnover reached \$475,500, with an average sale price of \$9,144.

The highest priced dog was Lot 7, Beloka Stella II, sold by Beloka Kelpies, Paul MacPhail, Welshpool, for \$23,500. The highest priced pup was Felicity, also sold by Beloka Kelpies, for \$20,000.

"The Auction 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," Mrs Stephens said.

One of the weekend's memorable moments was the presence of lifelong Casterton resident Betty Sanders, aged 95, who has attended all 30 dog auctions and was pictured with Sunday's auctioneers James Tierney and Bernie Grant.

"Stories like Betty's remind us this event is about generations of people, families, volunteers and working dog lovers who have helped build something truly special for Casterton," Mrs Stephens said.

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 birthplace of the Kelpie and the heart of this much-loved national celebration.

END

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 Convenyor 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.
- **30 Years of Auctions for Betty:** Betty Sanders pictured with auctioneers, James Tierney and Bernie Grant ahead of the 30th auction.