



MEDIA RELEASE

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THE YEAR OF THE KELPIE: Casterton Claims Australia's Event of the Year

From the streets of Casterton to the national stage, the Australian Kelpie Muster has been crowned Australia's Event of the Year at the 2026 Australian Event Awards, capping off an extraordinary evening that saw the Casterton Kelpie Association claim four prestigious awards.

There were cheers, celebrations and even a few enthusiastic woofs from the crowd as the Association's achievements were announced, with the evening fittingly declared *"the Year of the Kelpie"*.

Recognised for the 30th Australian Kelpie Muster and Australia's Premier Working Dog Auction, the Casterton Kelpie Association took home:

- **Australia's Best Association Hosted Event**
- **Australia's Best Community Event**
- **Victoria's Best Tourism Event** — State Winner and National Nominee
- **Victoria's Best Small Regional event** — State Winner and National Nominee
- **Australia's Event of the Year** — Overall Winner

The remarkable achievement places the small regional Victorian town of Casterton firmly on the national stage, recognising three decades of dedication to celebrating the Australian Kelpie, strengthening community connections and showcasing the very best of regional Australia.

Casterton Kelpie Association President Karen Stephens said the evening was an unforgettable moment for the Association and the entire community.

"To hear Casterton called out once was extraordinary, but to hear our name announced four times, including for Australia's Event of the Year, was something none of us could have imagined," Mrs Stephens said.

"There were cheers, there were tears, and even a few woofs from the crowd. It was a night we will never forget. To have someone declare it the Year of the Kelpie was the perfect way to describe what we had just experienced."

The national recognition follows the Muster's milestone 30th anniversary celebrations in June 2026, which welcomed thousands of visitors to Casterton for a weekend of working dog competitions, community celebrations and the renowned Australian Premier Working Dog Auction.

With visitors travelling from six Australian states, the event continues to deliver significant tourism and economic benefits to Casterton and the wider Glenelg Shire, supporting local businesses, accommodation providers and community organisations.

But beyond the economic contribution, the Muster represents something far more meaningful — a celebration of community, tradition and the remarkable working dog that has become synonymous with Casterton.

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.

Media Contact:

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"Thirty years ago, a group of passionate people had a vision to celebrate the Australian Kelpie in the town where the breed originated," Mrs Stephens said.

"Today, that vision has grown into an event recognised as the best in Australia. It is an extraordinary achievement for a volunteer-run association in a small regional community."

Mrs Stephens said the four awards recognised the collective efforts of generations of committee members, volunteers, sponsors, supporters and community organisations who have helped shape the Muster throughout its history.

"These awards don't belong to just one person or one committee. They belong to every volunteer who has turned up before sunrise, every sponsor who has backed our vision, every business that has embraced the weekend and every person who has contributed to the Muster over the past 30 years.

"Our committee works tirelessly throughout the year, and our volunteers are the backbone of everything we do. We are incredibly fortunate to have such passionate people who believe in the event and what it means to our community."

And while the Association was recognised on the national stage, Mrs Stephens was quick to acknowledge the true stars of the show.

"Most importantly, we must thank every Kelpie that has ever put its paws on the starting line, raced down Henty Street, leapt to incredible heights, worked livestock or proudly walked beside its handler throughout the weekend.

"Without these remarkable dogs, there simply wouldn't be a Muster. They are the reason we gather, the reason people travel from across Australia and the reason Casterton holds such a special place in the hearts of so many.

"They might not understand what an Australian Event Award is, but we certainly know who deserves the credit!"

The Association said the awards were particularly meaningful because they recognised the Muster across community engagement, tourism and association-led event delivery, before receiving the evening's highest honour — Australia's Event of the Year.

"This recognition is not just about the success of an event. It acknowledges the importance of the Muster to our Association, to Casterton and to the entire Glenelg Shire," Mrs Stephens said.

"It demonstrates what can be achieved when a regional community comes together with a shared purpose, a great deal of determination and a genuine love for something special.

"We have always been proud of our Muster, but to have it recognised as Australia's Event of the Year in our 30th anniversary year is something truly remarkable."

As the Association reflects on an unforgettable evening, the focus now turns to building on the legacy of the past three decades and ensuring the Australian Kelpie Muster continues to thrive for generations to come.

"These awards are a wonderful recognition of where we have come from, but they also inspire us to look towards the future," Mrs Stephens said.

"Thirty years of Kelpies, thirty years of community spirit and now four national and state honours to bring home to Casterton.

“2026 really is the Year of the Kelpie — and what a year it has been!”

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About the Australian Event Awards

The Australian Event Awards recognise achievement and innovation across Australia’s events industry. National Nominees represent the top-ranked eligible entries in their respective categories, with National and State/Territory Winners announced at the annual Awards Ceremony.

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Photo Captions:

- **2026 Australian Event Awards from left:** Auction Secretary Sarah Bruce-Smith, Founding Member Jack Matthews, President Karen Stephens, Marketing and Comms, Ashley Quinsey and Committee Member, Beryl Camerliri.