

HIGH ACHIEVERS RECOGNISED FOR THEIR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS IN TASMANIAN AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2014

Finalists in the Tasmanian Australian of the Year Awards 2014 include a humanitarian, medical researcher, inventor, conservationist and musician.

The Tasmanian award finalists for 2014 are:

TASMANIAN AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR 2014

Emily Conolan – Humanitarian (South Hobart)
Kristen Desmond - Advocate for Children with Disabilities (Prospect Vale)
Mark Holdsworth - Wildlife Biologist (Sandford)
Professor Thomas McMeekin AO - Food Microbiologist (Taroona)

TASMANIAN SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR 2014

Dr Christina Henri – Artist (Kingston)
Michael Mansell - Indigenous Lawyer and Advocate (Prospect)
Margaret Mead OAM – Nurse (Midway Point)
Eddie Rodgers - Community Caregiver (Longley)

TASMANIAN YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR 2014

Dewayne Everettsmith – Musician (Kingston)
Melanie Irons - Online Communicator (Mt Nelson)
Yaya Lu – Inventor (Dyynnyrne)
Dr Clare Smith - Medical Researcher (Hobart)

TASMANIAN LOCAL HERO 2014

Judy Huett - Disability Advocate (Burnie)
Mark Linfoot - Volunteer Fire Brigade Chief (Eaglehawk Neck)
Michael Swanton – Conservationist (Hobart)
Sandy Verrier – Teacher and Anti-Bullying Campaigner (Tranmere)

The Tasmanian Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Local Hero Award recipients will be announced on Tuesday 29 October 2013 at Frogmore Creek. The Tasmanian award recipients will then join award recipients from all other States and Territories as finalists for the national awards, which will be held on 25 January 2014 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO, Mr Jeremy Lasek, said the Tasmanian finalists were a group of a people whose achievements and contributions were inspiring.

"This year's Tasmanian finalists are fine examples of the diverse range of skill and passions of the people of Tasmania," said Mr Lasek.

"They represent a true cross section of outstanding work that Tasmanians are doing in their local and international communities and we are thrilled to be able to recognise and celebrate their outstanding work."

The Commonwealth Bank has been a Major Sponsor of the Australian of the Year Awards for more than 30 years. Chief Executive Officer Ian Narev congratulated the Tasmanian finalists.

"On behalf of the Commonwealth Bank, I congratulate the finalists in the 2014 Australian of the Year Awards across all States and Territories. To emerge as a finalist from the thousands of nominated Australians is a great accomplishment. I wish you all the best of luck in the next stage of the program," said Mr Narev.

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards visit www.australianoftheyear.org.au.

Ends.

Finalist bios attached with this media release or downloadable from www.australianoftheyear.org.au

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BIOGRAPHIES

TASMANIAN - FINALISTS - AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Emily Conolan- Humanitarian

In April 2011, Emily Conolan heard the news that an asylum seeker detention centre would be opening in Tasmania. As an English as a Second Language teacher for refugee youth, Emily understood the challenges faced by asylum seekers and wanted to express the warmth, generosity and open-mindedness of the Hobart community. And so, the *Tasmanian Asylum Seeker Support (TASS) Network* was born. Today, the Network that Emily founded has 240 registered volunteers who participate in friendship and recreational programs for asylum seekers as they settle into the community. Volunteers support a range of outreach programs, such as *Adopt a Tassie Family* which connects unaccompanied minors with local families. Another program brings refugees' stories into Australian classrooms to encourage empathy and understanding. A 'buddy program', regular workshops on art, gardening and maths, and a Bridging Visa Social Club also support asylum seekers. Through Emily's ongoing contribution, she has demonstrated the true Australian spirit – bringing people together to share and care for a common humanity.

Kristen Desmond - Advocate for Children with Disabilities

After all three of her children were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Kristen Desmond became a tireless and selfless advocate for children with disabilities. Kristen established the *Tasmanian Disability Education Reform Lobby* with the aim of ensuring that all Tasmanian students living with disability have access to a quality education. Through this forum, Kristen has conducted extensive surveys with parents to gauge the level of support their children are receiving in Tasmanian schools. She has organised public rallies, undertaken media campaigns, engaged with politicians and has become a vocal advocate for a review of the education system which would ensure Tasmanian students receive the same level of support as their mainland counterparts. Kristen has also spent countless hours working in voluntary roles with *Autism Tasmania*. Driven by an unswerving belief in equality, Kristen is determined to make her voice heard and to ensure that all children are given the support they need to reach their full potential.

Mark Holdsworth - Wildlife Biologist

For more than three decades, Mark Holdsworth has devoted his life to the conservation of threatened species. A professional wildlife biologist, Mark is passionate about the conservation and management of the critically endangered Orange-bellied Parrot. With a wild population of less than 50, this is one of the world's rarest parrots – and Mark is the leading world expert on their breeding ecology. In 2006, Mark completed his Masters of Science on the reproductive success and demography of the birds. A long term member and co-Chair of the *Orange-bellied Parrot National Recovery Team*, Mark has encouraged the establishment of regional groups for the conservation of the species. He provides advice, writes scientific papers and has contributed to a broad range of conservation material such as recovery plans. An inspirational mentor to many young biologists, Mark has encouraged many to embark on career paths in conservation, while playing a significant role in preventing the extinction of an entire species.

Professor Thomas McMeekin AO - Food Microbiologist

Acknowledged as one of the world's leading food microbiologists, Professor Thomas McMeekin's expertise has established new systems of improving food safety around the world. Tom pioneered the development of predictive microbiology and established the University of Tasmania as the world leader in predictive modelling of microbial behaviour in foods. The founding father of the world-renowned Food Safety Centre at the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture in Hobart, Tom was also involved in the development of a refrigeration index for the meat industry which is now mandated by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service. Tom has contributed to more than 200 publications, and was the author of the influential monograph *Predictive Microbiology: theory and application*. After coming to Australia from Northern Ireland in 1974, the McMeekins intended to stay for only three years. Their decision to make Australia their home has enriched our reputation as a global leader, not only in the field of microbiology, but also in science innovation, research and education.



TASMANIAN - FINALISTS - SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Dr Christina Henri – Artist

64 years old

Conceptual artist Dr Christina Henri is taking Australia's female convict story to the world. After visiting the Cascades Female Factory Historic Site in South Hobart in 2003, Christina was captivated by the plight of convict women and their children. Christina's *Roses from the Heart* project is the first memorial to the 25,566 women sentenced as convicts and transported to Australia from 1788 to 1853. Christina invites people from around the world to make and contribute a servant's bonnet to symbolise the life of each convict woman. So far, Christina has received more than 23,000 bonnets for what will eventually become a permanent memorial in Tasmania. Christina holds regular public events and performances world-wide such as '*Blessing of the Bonnets*' ceremonies and talks for community groups and students to highlight the female convict story. Christina completed her PhD in visual and performing arts in 2011, and has been the honorary artist in residence at the Cascades Female Factory Historic Site since 2003.

Michael Mansell - Indigenous Lawyer and Advocate

62 years old

While often controversial, Indigenous lawyer and advocate, Michael Mansell has dedicated his life to social, political and legal reform to improve the lives of Tasmanian Aborigines. Born in northern Tasmania, Michael Mansell's Indigenous heritage is Trawlwoolway on his mother's side and Pinterraier on his father's side. From the 1970's, Michael has been a vocal campaigner for Indigenous recognition and land rights. A qualified barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Tasmania and High Court of Australia, Michael established the *Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre* in 1972. Michael is Secretary of the Aboriginal Provisional Government, and has worked tirelessly for his people, defending their rights in the courts, and pushing to repeal discriminatory laws. His advocacy has struck a raw nerve with some, but his courage and tenacity are admired by many. He played an integral role in drafting legislation for the *Native Title Act 1993* that arose from the *Mabo v Queensland* case. In 1987 Michael was named *Aboriginal of the Year*.

Margaret Mead OAM - Nurse

68 years old

Margaret Mead's nursing career has taken her to some of the world's most dangerous places, including Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Margaret dedicated 15 years of her life to working with *The Leprosy Mission* in war-torn Congo, working towards the prevention, management and early detection of leprosy. During her time helping to restore dignity and hope to people suffering from leprosy, she witnessed the horrors of a civil war which devastated the Congo and destroyed the lives of more than five million people. Despite the deprivation, death and disease, Margaret also experienced great joy, and now travels around Australia promoting *The Leprosy Mission* and raising funds to support its work. Margaret also devoted many years to the burns unit at the Royal Hobart Hospital, and to the Red Cross as an emergency nurse. In 1992, Margaret was presented with an Order of Australia Medal, which acknowledged her great service to nursing and the care of people with burn injuries.

Eddie Rodgers - Community Caregiver

63 years old

Whether it's bagging up food parcels or helping someone in a crisis situation, Eddie Rodgers goes out of his way to assist people at their most vulnerable. An active volunteer with the *Maranoa Heights Community Centre*, and president of its management committee, Eddie is a fierce believer in social justice. Eddie has led the Centre from a period in which it risked closure, to a time when it is now a thriving, active social enterprise hub that helps individuals and families with a range of services from interest-free loans, occasional child care, exercise and craft programs, to community lunches and free computer lessons. A quiet achiever, Eddie is also a board member of the *Tasmanian Association of Community Houses*, and has volunteered his time for years without expectation of recognition or reward. Eddie is professional, caring and always looking for ways to improve service delivery. He refuses to slow down, despite undergoing a quadruple heart bypass, and is never too busy to help others.



TASMANIAN - FINALISTS - YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Dewayne Everettsmith - Musician

26 years old

Dewayne Everettsmith's voice has taken him around the world. When invited to write a song to celebrate Australia's natural wonders, he had no idea the track, *It's Like Love*, would make him the voice of Australia. Dewayne's song was chosen as the soundtrack to Tourism Australia's international advertising campaign, transporting him from his day job as an Aboriginal health worker into the whirlwind of a touring performer. Dewayne's roots are deeply connected to the Aboriginal communities of Tasmania and southeast Victoria, which explains the origins of his unique musical style. His debut album also features the first commercial recording of a Tasmanian Indigenous language song. In 2013, the federal government appointed Dewayne a *Live Music Ambassador* to revitalise Australia's live music scene. He is the national ambassador for the *Save the Tasmanian Devil Appeal* and was recently recognised with a *Human Rights Week award* for bringing Tasmanian Aboriginal culture and language to the broader community. A rising star and role model in his community, Dewayne is considered a future great by many in the Australian music industry.

Melanie Irons - Online Communicator

29 years old

As Tasmania's terrifying bushfires took hold in January 2013, psychology student Melanie Irons set up a Facebook page to connect people who wanted to help each other. In a matter of moments she was at the centre of a social media whirlwind as her page reached over two million people around the world in the first three weeks of operation. Mel became a 'port of call' for thousands of people – from farmers who needed feed and fencing supplies to tourists stranded on the Tasman Peninsula – simply through using a Facebook page. Operating on just a few hours' sleep each day, she used her psychology skills and critical thinking to moderate posts, harness the energy of volunteers and reassure people that help was on its way. Mel has since commenced research as part of her PhD into crisis communications and disaster resilience, and with the support of local businesses, has launched her own volunteer-run website in readiness for future emergencies.

Yaya Lu - Inventor

17 years old

Yaya Lu's simple idea that would allow quadriplegic people to control their wheelchairs by voice has earned her international recognition and a top science award for school students from the *Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)*. Yaya's wheelchair voice-command protocol was inspired by the Chinese telegraph code (China's equivalent to morse code), while her prototype glasses attached to sensors allow wearers to control a wheelchair by raising an eyebrow or wrinkling their nose. In 2012, Yaya was sponsored by Google to present her work at the *5th Biomedical Engineering International Conference* in Thailand; last May, she competed at the *Intel International Science and Engineering Fair* in Arizona, a meeting of the world's brightest young scientific minds. Seventeen year old Yaya has been working on this technology package for two and a half years as part of her bid to empower people. As she says "it makes me extremely happy when I've helped someone else. You are helping yourself by helping others."

Dr Clare Smith- Medical Researcher

28 years old

Dr Clare Smith is playing a critical role in the eradication of a disease which affects millions of people around the globe each year. Malaria, the mosquito-borne infectious disease, kills almost a million people every year – most of them children under the age of five. A PhD graduate and medical researcher from the Menzies Research Institute, Clare used genetic and pharmacological techniques to investigate the role of host enzymes in malarial infection. Clare's innovative thinking, willingness to take risks, enthusiasm and hard work has paid off – she has become an international leader in research into malaria, through her discovery of a new antimalarial compound. This novel approach may avoid the rapid development of resistance common to the current generation of antimalarial drugs. Clare's discovery will have an immense global impact, with clinical trials on the patented research now underway. If they are successful, the trials will cement Clare's critical role in saving the lives of millions of vulnerable people in third world countries.



TASMANIAN - FINALISTS - AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO

Judy Huett - Disability Advocate

Judy Huett has overcome many hurdles in life to make an enormous contribution to advancing the lives of people living with disability. Despite having an intellectual disability, epilepsy and diabetes, Judy has dedicated her life to helping others. Judy works with people with disability in both a paid and voluntary capacity, and speaks for people with disability at a national level in her role as a Tasmanian representative on the *Our Voice* Committee, a national self-advocacy committee. She is a member of the *Premier's Disability Advisory Council of Tasmania*, and volunteers for the *Epilepsy Association of Tasmania* and other charities. She is the immediate past president of the advocacy group, *Speak Out*. In 2013, Judy became the first person with an intellectual disability to represent Australia at a United Nations hearing in Switzerland into the rights of people with disabilities. Judy is a shining example of someone whose abilities far exceed her disabilities.

Mark Linfoot - Volunteer Fire Brigade Chief

Mark Linfoot lost his wife of 35 years after she suffered a heart attack in the early hours of Boxing Day 2012. Nine days later, the volunteer fire brigade chief from Eaglehawk Neck was fighting to save his community from the catastrophic bushfires that decimated parts of south-eastern Tasmania. Mark had stood down from his position while he tried to come to terms with his loss, but nature had other ideas. His brigade received its first call at Charmaine's wake on 3 January to attend a blaze at Stormlea; the following day the Forcett fire exploded only a few kilometres from Eaglehawk Neck. The crew of 11 fought fires 18 hours a day for the next 10 days. Mark is an exceptional example of a 'quiet achiever' who rolled up his sleeves and worked hard to help his community, despite his own grief. Mark believes his wife would have wanted him to battle the blaze.

Michael Swanton - Conservationist

Michael Swanton has lived on the New Town Rivulet all his life, and has worked tirelessly to support, maintain and improve its local habitat and water quality. The Rivulet, which flows from its headwaters through the Hobart suburbs of Lenah Valley and New Town and into the River Derwent, has been Michael's lifelong passion. Michael was a founding member of the *New Town Rivulet Catchment Care Group*, which monitors water quality, holds action days to clean up rubbish, plant native vegetation and remove weeds, and raises funds to save many threatened plant and animal species that live in the catchment. An important part of Michael's work is raising community awareness about how to care for catchments, and mentoring other Catchment Groups. Michael travels daily to the catchment to collect rubbish, and to notify authorities of dumped cars or dead animals in the rivulet. Michael is advocating for container deposit legislation to stem the tide of rubbish that flows through his backyard on a daily basis.

Sandy Verrier - Teacher and Anti-Bullying Campaigner

A teacher at Rosny College in Hobart, Sandy Verrier has saved many gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) students from being bullied, and from self-harm and suicide. A person of great conviction and sensitivity to the needs of all her students, Sandy established the *Outright Youth* program to provide strategies that enable young people in the Tasmanian regions to come out with pride and live in their community with dignity as respected and participating members. Sandy is committed to making Tasmania a safe place for young GLBTI people, and through *Outright Youth*, works with schools and youth organisations to stamp out bullying. Sandy was instrumental in the development of a special toolkit which helps all schools to identify teachers and social workers who can support GLBTI students in need of extra help. Sandy's long-term commitment to celebrating diversity and achieving fairness and equity is empowering GLBTI students to make positive decisions about their lives.

