

MEDIA RELEASE
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2026 AUSTRALIANS OF THE YEAR FOR TASMANIA ANNOUNCED

2026 Australian of the Year for Tasmania - Dr Jorian (Jo) Kippax (Ridgeway)
2026 Senior Australian of the Year for Tasmania - Julie Dunbabin (Taroona)
2026 Young Australian of the Year for Tasmania - Alyssia Kennedy (Heybridge)
2026 Local Hero for Tasmania - Emily Briffa (West Hobart)

Awards event livestreamed via australianoftheyear.org.au

The 2026 Australian of the Year Award recipients for Tasmania have been announced at a ceremony in Hobart this evening.

The Tasmanian recipients will join those from the other states and territories for the national awards to be announced on 25 January 2026.

The 2026 Australian of the Year for Tasmania is emergency doctor Dr Jorian (Jo) Kippax.

Dr Jo Kippax was part of a specialist team of rescuers tasked to free a whitewater rafter who was trapped in perilous rapids on the Franklin River in 2024.

Lithuanian whitewater rafter, Valdas Bieliauskas, was retrieved from freezing water by Jo and his team. The clinical team performed an operation to amputate Valdas's leg underwater, allowing him to be freed and ultimately saving his life. Throughout the rescue, Jo was instrumental in guiding the team with professionalism, courage and remarkable calmness under pressure.

For this life-saving act, the President of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda awarded the country's Life Saving Cross award to Jo, which he humbly accepted on behalf of his team.

The rescue of Valdas is just one chapter in Jo's long career in emergency medicine, disaster response, and search and rescue. Demonstrating outstanding skill, courage and team leadership in the aid of others, 55-year-old Jo displays selfless dedication to saving lives in often very challenging circumstances.

Nutritious eating visionary Julie Dunbabin is the 2026 Senior Australian of the Year for Tasmania.

Julie Dunbabin, 65, is a pioneer in school nutrition, who is changing the way education departments and schools prepare and deliver school lunches to children. Julie's vision is for all school children to receive a nutritious, sit-down meal every day, prepared from scratch in a school or central kitchen, using seasonal, local produce.

Today, the School Lunch Program prepares 14,332 school lunches for 6,656 students every week. The program, which started initially with three schools, is expected to expand to 60 schools in 2026.

The program has clear benefits for children, ensuring they receive a nutritious meal each day and contributing to better social and learning outcomes. The model of cook-from-scratch kitchens also supports local producers, creates jobs for kitchen and warehouse staff, builds community involvement and addresses food security for families.

Julie's determination to improve children's diets is transforming how school lunches are delivered in Tasmania, inspiring a healthier food culture and enhancing food literacy.

The 2026 Young Australian of the Year for Tasmania is life skills educator Alyssia Kennedy.

When Alyssia Kennedy left school, she realised she lacked many of the skills needed to manage day-to-day life, such as how to create a budget or do her taxes. Like many before her, she had to learn the hard way.

Realising how important these skills can be, Alyssia founded the Life After School program, an educational package to help bridge the gap between school education and life knowledge. She now works with schools and youth groups to deliver the program and give young people the tools they need to transition to adulthood.

Alyssia, 29, was chosen as a 2025 ABC Trailblazer for her Life After School Program, which recognises innovative solutions for young people in regional Australia, giving Alyssia the opportunity to present her ideas to policymakers in Canberra.

Alyssia's vision, energy and commitment are giving a generation of young people the tools they need not just to survive but thrive in adulthood.

Social entrepreneur Emily Briffa is the 2026 Local Hero for Tasmania.

Emily Briffa's social enterprise, Hamlet, has helped many disadvantaged and marginalised people in Hobart overcome employment barriers and transform their lives.

Hamlet is a community café that provides individualised training, work readiness and wrap-around support to Tasmanians with disability, neurodivergence, and mental health concerns who are experiencing barriers to employment.

Since its inception, Hamlet has helped more than 700 people gain experience to enter the job market and given them valuable skills and training. Emily has continued to expand Hamlet's operations, creating more job opportunities in a variety of catering and hospitality roles. Under her leadership, Hamlet boasts an impressive 75% employment placement rate for people who complete its training programs.

Hamlet's focus on social inclusion for marginalised groups is a model for what social enterprises can achieve. Driven by 36-year-old Emily's passion and vision, the café has become an integral part of Hobart's community and the lives of many people.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the award recipients for Tasmania.

"Jo's longtime dedication has saved many lives; Julie is creating healthier futures for our children; Alyssia is ensuring our young people are better equipped for life after school; and Emily has created a safe and welcoming space for marginalised people to find their feet," said Mark.

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

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PHOTOS: From the awards announcement event can be downloaded as available after approx. 6:45pm Hobart time from this link (credit NADC/Salty Dingo): [TAS Media Distribution photos - High res](#)

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