

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**WEDNESDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2016**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 7:40PM BRISBANE TIME OR AS ANNOUNCED AT EVENT**

**2017 QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD  
RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED**

**2017 Queensland Australian of the Year – Emeritus Professor Alan Mackay-Sim**  
**2017 Queensland Senior Australian of the Year – Professor Perry F Bartlett FAA**  
**2017 Queensland Young Australian of the Year – Taj Pabari**  
**2017 Queensland Local Hero – Yasmin Khan**

The Honourable Annastacia Palaszczuk MP, Premier of Queensland and Minister for the Arts, has announced the Queensland recipients for the 2017 Australian of the Year Awards at a ceremony held at Customs House this evening.

The Queensland Award recipients will join recipients from the other States and Territories as finalists for the national Awards to be announced on 25 January 2017 in Canberra.

**The 2017 Queensland Australian of the Year is biomolecular scientist, Professor Alan Mackay-Sim.**

An inspirational scientist and international leader in stem cell research, Professor Alan Mackay-Sim has given hope to thousands of Australians with spinal cord injuries. A global authority on the human sense of smell and the biology of nasal cells, Alan led the world's first clinical trial using these cells in spinal cord injury. In 2014, Alan's research played a central role in the world's first successful restoration of mobility in a quadriplegic man. As the director of the National Centre for Adult Stem Cell Research for a decade, Alan's research has championed the use of stem cells to understand the biological bases of brain disorders and diseases such as schizophrenia, Parkinson's disease and Hereditary Spastic Paraplegia. Alan's pioneering work has led to collaborations with teams of health professionals who are translating his research into clinical practice. He has laid the foundation for the next generation of researchers and demonstrated the value of inquiry, persistence and empathy.

**The 2017 Queensland Senior Australian of the Year is 69 year old neuroscientist, Professor Perry F Bartlett FAA.** A pioneering neuroscientist, Professor Perry Bartlett has made ground-breaking progress in the discovery of how the human brain can be regenerated through stimulating the production of new nerve cells. Perry's work offers the potential to change the course of treatment and management of dementia and depression. Perry discovered the brain could produce new nerves in 1992, overturning traditional dogma and transforming the way we think of the brain. Once considered a static organ, the brain is now understood as an ever-evolving body part that can produce new nerve cells capable of altering learning, memory and mood. In 2003, Perry founded the Queensland Brain Institute at the University of Queensland, which has grown from 10 to almost 500 scientists. Perry and his team now have their sights set on slowing down dementia by activating stem cells to produce new nerves. With dementia currently affecting one in three adults over the age of 85, Perry's work has the potential to change the lives of many older Australians.

**The 2017 Queensland Young Australian of the Year is 17 year old social entrepreneur, Taj Pabari.**

The mastermind behind game-changing social enterprise Fiftysix Creations, Taj Pabari is a young inventor and social entrepreneur taking the world by storm. Describing his idea as the 'LEGO of the 21st century', Taj cleverly combines hardware, software and education, enabling children to not just consume the world we live in but to create it. The Fiftysix build-it-yourself tablet and coding kit is as easy as a puzzle and as engaging as a computer game, and is being used in schools around the world. Taj has partnered with the Foundation for Young Australians to build capacity in disadvantaged communities, and Taj and his team have educated more than 43,000 students in Australia and internationally. Balancing his education and entrepreneurial endeavours is not easy, and Taj wakes up at 4am every day before heading off to high school. Taj has big dreams to expand his social enterprise and has set a goal of educating one million kids by 2020.



**The 2017 Queensland Local Hero is diversity champion, Yasmin Khan of Kuraby.** With an Australian heritage stretching back 130 years, Yasmin Khan creates connections and breaks down barriers to show how Muslims have made a great contribution to our nation. In 2005, Yasmin founded Eidfest – the largest Muslim gathering in Queensland to celebrate the end of Ramadhan and to showcase Muslim diversity and cultures. A well-known speaker, Yasmin works with schools, the media and community groups to share insights into her religion and her life experiences. Yasmin represents her community on multiple reference groups, recently being elected as the Chair of the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland, and is a multicultural ambassador for the AFL and Asian Cup, and was one of the first female cricket umpires in Queensland. A vocal commentator on domestic violence in multicultural communities, Yasmin has established a support centre for Muslim women and women from the Indian sub- continent, regardless of their religion. At the helm of many highly-successful events and community activities, Yasmin continues to demonstrate why diversity makes Australia a stronger nation.

The Premier of Queensland, Ms Palaszczuk, said she was honoured to announce the 2017 Queensland recipients and was inspired by the great work they were doing.

“The contributions of our Queensland recipients have been impactful and innovative in helping to improve the lives our community and advance our great state.

“The remarkable stories of our Queensland recipients exemplify how one person can make a real difference, and these awards provide us the opportunity to celebrate the great work people are doing,” Ms Palaszczuk said.

“What our Queensland recipients have achieved is tremendous and it gives me great pride to acknowledge their achievements.

“Congratulations to all our finalists and recipients tonight. On behalf of Queensland, I thank you for your efforts and wish you the best of luck at the national announcement in Canberra,” Ms Palaszczuk said.

NADC CEO, Chris Kirby, said the Queensland recipients are an extraordinary group of people whose skills and experience are making a significant difference.

“From scientific and medical breakthroughs, through to innovative thinking and bringing people together, the Queensland recipients' impact on our future is truly worthy of recognition,” said Mr Kirby.

Commonwealth Bank has proudly sponsored the Australian of the Year Awards for 37 years. Chief Executive Officer, Ian Narev, said it was an honour to acknowledge the Queensland Award recipients.

“Commonwealth Bank congratulates Alan, Perry, Taj and Yasmin on becoming national finalists in the Australian of the Year Awards,” said Mr Narev.

“We are delighted to celebrate their achievements and we wish them all the best for the National Awards in January.”

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards visit [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au).

## ENDS.

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**EMBARGO NOTE:** Media attending the Awards event may of course report Award recipients as they are announced on stage OR follow Australian of the Year Awards on Twitter @ausoftheyear or Facebook for the Awards announcements as they happen - once each award is announced, it can be reported.

**Photos** from the Awards announcement event can be downloaded as available from <http://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/news-and-media/media-enquiries/>





**For more information** on the Australian of the Year Awards or members of the selection panel visit [www.australianoftheyear.org.au](http://www.australianoftheyear.org.au) and <http://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/news-and-media/selection-panel-members/>

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