



Australian Council of Agricultural Journalists



**News Release**

**June 5, 2009**

## **Victorian journalist wins national rural award**

An international panel of judges has selected Victorian journalist John Conroy as Australia's best rural writer of the year.

*The Border Mail* journalist has won the Australian Star Prize for Rural Journalism for his story 'The Drover's Lament'.

The Wodonga-based journalist will now represent Australia in the world's most prestigious professional competition for rural journalists working in the print sector – the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) Star Prize for Agricultural Journalism.

The Australian prize was coordinated by the Australian Council of Agricultural Journalists (ACAJ), the national umbrella organisation for the country's five state-based rural press clubs.

John represented Victoria and competed against finalists nominated by the clubs in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales. He will receive a cash prize of \$1000 and a certificate from sponsor, John Deere, who also sponsor the international award.

Second place was awarded to Queensland finalist Brad Cooper, from *Good Fruit and Vegetables* magazine, who won the award last year; and third place went to two journalists from Western Australia's *Farm Weekly*, Colin Bettles and Beth Johnston.

John Conroy's story was published in *The Border Mail* in October 2008. It looks at the uncertain future of drovers and stock routes from Queensland to Victoria.

The international judging panel who selected the finalists included:

- Dr Jim Evans, one of the world's most respected leaders in agricultural communications. After working as a journalist, Dr Evans became head of teaching and research in the Agricultural Communications Department at the University of Illinois, in the United States. Now retired, he has inspired many of America's leading farm journalists and communicators and continues to serve as a professor emeritus in agricultural communications at the university.
- James Campbell, a highly respected farm commentator in Europe, who has been Northern Editor with the *Irish Farm Journal* for more than 20 years. James is a past winner of the Star Prize.
- David East, a former Rural Press senior group editor and national award winner, with more than 35 years' experience in rural journalism. He was a leading farm machinery writer, served as editor of the *Stock Journal* and was involved in establishing the *Australian Farm Journal*.

The judges all commended John Conroy's article 'The Drover's Lament' for its strong content, style and balance.

"It showed excellent rigour in gathering information, with five sources," Dr Evans said. "The topic holds broad interest for rural and urban readers with elements of nostalgia, environmental quality, natural resource management and the timeliness of public decision making."

Dr Evans noted the strong coverage of breaking news in Brad Cooper's entry, 'Body Blow'.

"The reporter did an unusually thorough job of gathering perspectives about what was happening. The writing seemed balanced and concise," he said.

It was the "gee whiz" factor of the WA entry, 'Grain is gold again', that stirred the judges' interest.

"I gave the reporters credit for finding what strikes me as an unusual news story that carries broad interest. They drew on varied sources to add perspective," Dr Evans said.

ACAJ President Gordon Collie said the judges' comments were a positive reflection on the quality of rural journalism in this country.

"The prize is a great showcase for our best rural writing talent and it gives the Australian rural sector international recognition," he said.

John Deere Australia's Craig Pretorius said the company was pleased to support the award both internationally and in Australia.

"The calibre of work of the Australian finalists this year was impressive. Congratulations to John Conroy on his winning entry," Mr Pretorius said.

The international Star Prize winner will be announced on July 15 and honoured during the annual IFAJ congress, to be held in the USA from July 31 – August 4, 2009.

Australia will be well represented at the event, with six people attending including the ACAJ's official delegate to the IFAJ, freelance journalist and author, Liz Harfull, from South Australia, and ACAJ president and freelance journalist, Gordon Collie from Queensland.

**For more information on the awards contact ACAJ president Gordon Collie on 07 3856 3614 or Australian delegate to the IFAJ, Liz Harfull on 0409 674 941.**