



Australian Council of Agricultural Journalists

News Release

February 18, 2009

Wodonga journalist wins national award again

The writing skills of young Victorian journalist John Conroy have won him the ACAJ Star Prize for Rural Journalism for the second year in a row.

An international panel of judges has named *The Border Mail* journalist as the best rural writer of the year for his feature 'Out west, where the rain don't fall'.

The award was announced at the Rural Press Club of Victoria's monthly breakfast today.

The presentation included awarding state finalists Peter Hunt, from *The Weekly Times* and Graeme O'Neill, from *The Sunraysia Daily*. David Hillman from John Deere presented the writing prizes.

Also this morning, Rabobank's Mark Bennett presented the Victorian finalists for the inaugural ACAJ Star Prize for Rural Broadcasting. ABC Mildura Rural Reporter Nikolai Beilharz and Win Television's Gippsland reporter Brooke Van Nooten took the honours.

Mr Conroy will now represent Australia in the world's most prestigious professional competition for rural reporters – the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) Star Prize for Agricultural Journalism.

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

Mr Conroy represented Victoria against finalists from Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales. He will receive a cash prize of \$1000 from John Deere, who also sponsors the international award.

Second place was jointly awarded to South Australian journalist Alisha Fogden and New South Wales writer Matthew Cawood.

John Conroy's story, published in *The Border Mail* in September 2009, looked at alternative ways of farming being investigated by Riverina farmers coping with long term drought.

The win comes after John Conroy was ACAJ Star Prize for Writing winner in 2009 and the runner up at international level. It was the first time an Australian was a finalist at the IFAJ level since the award was started six years ago.

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

Ireland-based judge James Campbell noted the dark humour and short sentences in the article as well as references to the bank at the beginning and the end, bringing the article full circle.

"I also like the reference to horticulture, giving positive hope for the future. This adds balance, showing it isn't all doom and gloom," Mr Campbell said.

USA-based judge Jim Evans said the article was readable, informative, specific and well organised, while Australian judge David East noted that although the topic was local, it would be relevant to many other areas.

ACAJ President Liz Harfull said the judges' comments reflected the quality of rural journalism in this country.

"The prize is showcases 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.

"Congratulations again to John Conroy on his winning entry. He is evidently a strong and impressive writer with a bright future," Mr Pretorius said.

The international judging panel included:

- Dr Jim Evans, one of the world's most respected leaders in agricultural communications. After working as a journalist in radio and television and in a leading public relations business, Dr Evans headed teaching and research in agricultural communications at the University of Illinois for more than 30 years.

- James Campbell, a highly respected farm commentator in Europe, who has been Northern Editor with the Irish Farmers Journal for more than 20 years. James is the Treasurer with the IFAJ executive and 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, editor of the Stock Journal and was involved in establishing the Australian Farm Journal.

The international Star Prize winner will be announced during the annual IFAJ congress, to be held in Belgium from April 17 to 21, 2010.

For more information contact ACAJ President Liz Harfull on 0409 674 941 or ACAJ Secretary Emily Bogue 0429 416 778.