



28 November 2019

Drought report wins inaugural Excellence in Rural Journalism Award

Canberra-based ABC reporter Lucy Barbour has taken out the top prize at the [National Rural Press Club](#)'s inaugural Excellence in Rural Journalism Award for her report on the huge impact of drought within and beyond rural communities.

The prize of \$5000 is one of the richest rural media awards in the country and pays for attendance at the [International Federation of Agricultural Journalists](#) Congress being held in Denmark in June 2020.

This year's competition attracted a total of 47 stories covering print, television, online and radio, with a heavy focus on drought and water management. Prizes were awarded for Best News Coverage and Best Feature Sections (\$1000 for winners and \$250 for runners up), along with an award for Outstanding Contribution (\$500).

These awards encouraged journalists to enter who report on agricultural, rural and regional news and feature stories with a clear connection to the Canberra region as the subject matter and/or showed clear linkage to where the journalist was based.

NRPC President Pip Courtney thanked the all the entrants to the inaugural awards (listed below) and also the judges, Anna Vidot, Les White and Sue Neales.

"Attending the IFAJ Congress is an extraordinary opportunity for rural journalists and we are thrilled Lucy will be representing Australia in the international media awards recognising the best rural journalism in the world," Pip said.

For a full list of winning stories go to <https://nationalruralpressclub.org>

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| • Best news coverage: | Winner: Lucy Barbour, ABC
High Commended: Kath Sullivan, ABC
Highly Commended: Shannon Twomey and Chantelle Francis, The Weekly Times |
| • Best feature: | Winner: Brett Worthington, ABC
Highly Commended: Kath Sullivan, ABC
Highly Commended: Anna Henderson, ABC |
| • Outstanding contribution | Mike Foley, Australian Community Media |
| • Overall winner | Lucy Barbour, ABC |

The Excellence in Rural Journalism Awards have been made possible through the generous support of sponsors Westpac, Animal Medicines Australia, Case IH and CropLife Australia.



NRPC also thanks Stephanie Corsetti (ABC), Matt Coughlan (AAP), Lucy Knight (The Weekly Times), Kemii Maquire (ABC) and Sean Murphy (ABC Landline) for your quality entries

Winning stories

BEST NEWS COVERAGE – Sponsored by Westpac

WINNER: Lucy Barbour, ABC, for her report “Day Zero”

The judges commented that “Lucy Barbour’s “Day Zero” reporting was well told and had huge impact both within and beyond regional communities and media. Her story brought home the significance and reality of the drought to city audiences, and made significant mainstream news. The focus on regional towns and not just farmers was important, highlighting that people on mains water and not just tanks, were about to be left high and dry. It was a significant and impactful contribution on one of the biggest issues of the year”.

Lucy’s TV story ‘Day Zero’ is not online, but here are a series of stories she produced:

[National Party MPs call for more dams as states invest in other solutions to Australia's water crisis](#)
[Struggling towns still not drought-proofed](#)
[Running out of water](#)

Highly commended: Kath Sullivan, ABC, [Barnaby Joyce says he sent ‘an awful lot’ of special drought envoy reports to PM](#) \$250

This story broke the news that Barnaby Joyce had prepared no written reports in his time as drought envoy, but had communicated his thoughts via text messages to the Prime Minister. The story highlighted the ad hoc nature of the Federal Government drought response, and had impact on the mainstream news and political agenda.

Shannon Twomey and Chantelle Francis, The Weekly Times, “DFAT bureaucrat linked to controversial ‘Aussie Farms’ group” \$250

This story showcased the reporters’ tenacity in chasing down a story of clear interest to the farm sector, and to the Public Service community of Canberra itself. It raised interested questions about how the public behaviour and private business dealings of public servants interact with their government work, and where the lines are and should be drawn. (not online)

BEST FEATURE sponsored by CropLife Australia

WINNER: Brett Worthington, ABC, “[Popping Prosecco’s Bubble](#)”

This beautifully written and presented feature delivered a fresh perspective and the other side of a story of clear interest and significance to Australian producers, and consumers of Australian produce. It gave the reader a human and valuable insight into the cultural and historical significance of ‘geographical indicators’ like prosecco, which are typically rejected out of hand in Australian news coverage that understandably focuses on local views. With trade negotiations between Australia and the EU underway, this article provided timely and newsworthy information. But, it did that in a very engaging way, that kept the reader interested to the end.

Highly commended: Kath Sullivan, ABC, “[Water trading’s ‘unintended’ consequences across Australia’s Southern Murray Darling Basin](#)” \$250

This was a thoughtful and interesting read on an incredibly technically challenging subject. Water trading and the Basin Plan have been constantly in the news all year, and this feature put a human



face and a considered voice to local concerns about the operation of the water market. It helped put news in context.

Anna Henderson, ABC, “[The cotton grower, the water minister, the pumping ban, and the broken meter](#)” \$250

This was an engaging read that explained highly technical water industry details in an accessible way, while reporting on the outcome of a high profile and impactful case. Sitting through days of hearings, acquiring further information, and transforming that into very readable copy, was impressive.

OVERALL WINNER

Lucy Barbour, ABC \$5000

The quality of Lucy’s reporting on a subject of major national interest, looking at the drought from fresh and human angles, was a standout. This story, and the body of work submitted for these awards, is deserving of recognition.

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION

Mike Foley, Australian Farm Online – Australian Community Media - \$500

Michael has made an “outstanding contribution” almost every week on the biggest issues of the year; water, drought and the Murray Darling Basin plan. He consistently explains difficult and complex issues clearly and concisely, including breaking stories along the way. Neither farming or city audiences would be as well informed without his efforts.

Mike’s portfolio of stories on water reform in the Murray Darling Basin:

November 2019

[Something fishy hidden in the bush](#)

[Thirsty Darling gets a drink, but Toorale levees remain an issue](#)

September 2019

[Basin Plan risks borne by people trapped in reform firing line](#)

[Commonwealth water ownership rule rewrite sparking backlash](#)

[Indigenous reps for MDBA board](#)

[Here’s why root-and-branch water reform won’t flow easily](#)

[Top water cop wants 'single source of truth'](#)

August 2019

[Broken Hill pipeline leaves Darling River high and dry](#)

[Barilaro's Basin Plan bluster torpedoed by Berejiklian](#)

[Murray Darling's top water cop puts states on notice](#)

June-July 2019

[Nut crop boom could make water unaffordable](#)

[Can policy makers stop water market going down the gurgler?](#)

[Murray River flow down 40pc as climate change bites](#)

[Downside to upwater deal](#)

[Water reform slows to a trickle](#)

April-May 2019

[Murray Darling communities plea for drought help](#)

[Fish kills spur water licence buyout](#)

[Wet drought at Toorale despite Labor's \\$24m deal](#)

[Family farms sold down the river](#)

[Corporate watchdog probes water market](#)



January-February 2019

[Labor backs Basin Plan 2.0](#)

[Fish kill warnings ignored, but hope remains for Darling River](#)

[How to save Darling's fish without more water](#)

[Cotton ban bargaining chip for Rex Patrick](#)