



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

2026 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS FOR VICTORIA

Thursday 6 November 2025

Acknowledgments

The Honourable Ben Carroll MP, Deputy Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, *representing the Premier*

John Foreman AM, Chair, **Mark Fraser AO CVO**, Chief Executive Officer, and **Board Members**, National Australia Day Council

Australian of the Year Alumni

Selection Panel Representatives and Nominees, the 2026 Victorian Australian of the Year Awards

Distinguished guests

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this building stands – the Wurundjeri people – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

In 1960, the Chair of what was then known as the Victorian Australia Day Council first announced an honour bearing the name ‘Australian of the Year.’

This was a time well before our nation had established the Order of Australia, and so this new award spoke to a growing desire to recognise Australian achievements in a distinctly Australian way.

As the editors of *The Age* said of the Award upon its inception:

“We are beginning to count for something in the world and we should be intensely proud of this fact.”

In its formative years, the award was given to those who 'brought the greatest honour to Australia' – a criterion often interpreted as those who had achieved the greatest international acclaim.

Sporting heroes, Nobel Prize winners and cultural celebrities are common in the list of early recipients.

Yet we mustn't forget that, despite the tendency in that era to rely on international validation, the Awards themselves were Australian.

Still today, there are few examples of other countries with a central, public and annual award to honour the achievements of some of its citizens.

Even our closest neighbour has only awarded a New Zealander of the Year since 2010 – an award that was ironically founded by an Australian.

We can be proud to have pioneered such a system of celebrating achievement, and that it has been so enthusiastically embraced by the community across the decades.

Today, despite its Victorian origins, the Australian of the Year Awards is a national program.

Nominations are no longer chosen by a panel as they had been, but are drawn directly from the community.

And recipients are less dependent on global recognition but are instead recognised on the merits of what they have done for communities here.

All the nominees here tonight form part of this ever-changing story of national achievement and pride.

To be named an Australian of the Year for Victoria – in any category – is certainly an honour.

Owing to a healthy dose of humility, in this nation we are often quick to pass the credit elsewhere when we are offered praise.

No matter what kind of service you're being recognised for tonight – I know seeking awards and accolades is not the reason you are here.

In acknowledging your individual contributions, we celebrate something much greater.

We celebrate living in a State and a nation with an openly declared and shared sense of what we value and care about.

We celebrate the opportunity we all have to realise our potential and give back to our communities.

And we celebrate our collective work to build better futures together.

It's true that you don't need an award or title to do any of these things.

But to have a system of national recognition is to remind ourselves that all these things are worthwhile and possible.

Through them, we show our gratitude for those who achieve on behalf of us all.

All the nominees here tonight embody this.

Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition and best wishes to those who will be progressing to the national awards.

Regardless of whether you win, tonight's ceremony is a token of the deep appreciation of a grateful State.

Thank you.