

**MEDIA RELEASE
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New South Wales Finalists Announced For Australian of the Year Awards 2008

The New South Wales finalists for Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Australia's Local Hero were announced today.

New South Wales finalists include a motorcycle world champion, the creator of Bangarra Dance Theatre, a social researcher, a head/neck medical specialist and a speech pathologist bringing traditional language back to indigenous communities.

Ms Tam Johnston, National Manager of the Australian of the Year Awards, said nominations for this year's awards reflected the values Australians admired in others.

"We received more than 3,000 nominations for people who are contributing to the community, who are taking a leadership role in our society and whose achievements are an inspiration," said Ms Johnston.

Ralph Norris, Chief Executive Officer of major sponsor Commonwealth Bank of Australia, said the finalists demonstrated the diversity of Australian society and the importance of community.

"The finalists in this year's awards make a difference within local communities or to the Australian community as a whole and their contributions are a vital part of what makes this country great," said Mr Norris.

Recipients of each category will be announced at the New South Wales Australian of the Year Awards Ceremony on Tuesday 27 November at The Art Gallery of NSW at 7:00pm. Recipients in each category then become national finalists for the Australian of the Year Awards to be announced on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra on 25 January, 2008.

New South Wales finalists are:

NEW SOUTH WALES AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Professor Larissa Behrendt, Indigenous academic and writer
Professor Neville Hacker, Gynaecological cancer researcher (*Rose Bay*)
Professor Christopher O'Brien AM, head and neck medical pioneer (*Hunters Hill*)
Stephen Page, Indigenous arts (*Lewisham*)

NEW SOUTH WALES SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

David Bussau AM, Micro-enterprise pioneer (*Randwick*)
Sonia Gidley-King OAM, Humanitarian (*Roseberry*)
Hugh Mackay, Social researcher/commentator (*Cammeray*)
Don McDonald, Mental health advocate (*South Coogee*)

NEW SOUTH WALES YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Rachel Coxon, Biomedical Engineer (*Blaxland*)
Bianca Moon, Equality Campaigner (*Taren Point*)
Casey Stoner, World MotoGP Champion
Phoebe Williams, International aid leader (*Clovelly*)

NEW SOUTH WALES LOCAL HERO

Peter Andrews, Environmentalist (*Widden*)
Joyce Donovan, Human rights and health campaigner (*Gerringong*)
Dick Estens, Reconciliation advocate (*Moree*)
Mary-Ruth Mendel, Literacy and language pathologist (*Edgecliff*)

Ends.

Finalist bios attached with this media release.

For further information or to arrange an interview please contact:

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AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NSW

Professor Larissa Behrendt

Academic and writer

Professor Larissa Behrendt is Professor of Law and Indigenous Studies at the University of Technology Sydney and Director of the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning. Jumbunna provides a range of academic and cultural support to Indigenous students, whose number has grown in the past twelve years from two to 360. Larissa's academic credentials include a doctorate from Harvard Law School and she has worked as a practising lawyer in Aboriginal land claims and family law. She has also worked in Canada and at the UN with First Nation organisations. Larissa is very involved in the arts. She is a board member of the Museum of Contemporary Art and a director of the Sydney Writers Festival and the Bangarra Dance Theatre. Larissa has written three books. Her first novel, *Home*, won several awards, including the David Uniapon Award in 2002 and in 2004 she was awarded a prestigious "Deadly" for her outstanding achievements in literature.

Professor Neville Hacker

Medical specialist and researcher

Professor Neville Hacker has saved the lives of many women with his surgical skills and understanding of gynaecological cancers. He gives women hope and reassurance at a very difficult and frightening time in their lives. As Director of the Gynaecological Cancer Centre at the Royal Hospital for Women and noted international authority, Neville travels the world to share his knowledge and skills with other specialists in his field in the hope that they can give women with the disease a better outcome. He is a former president of the International Gynaecological Cancer Society and, as an expert in clinical research, he is the medical adviser to GO Fund, helping that organisation direct basic research towards clinically relevant issues. Neville's groundbreaking research on ovarian cancer with his team at the Garvan Institute for Medical Research and the Royal has developed genetic profiling which will lead to more specific diagnosis and life-saving early detection.

Professor Christopher O'Brien AM

Medical specialist

Professor O'Brien has an international reputation in the management of head and neck melanoma, salivary gland tumours, cancer of the oral cavity, and metastatic cancer in the neck. He is the founder of the Australian and New Zealand Head and Neck Society and was its president in 2004. Until he himself had to undergo treatment for a life-threatening tumour, Chris was Director of the Sydney Cancer Centre and Clinical Director of Cancer Services for the Sydney South West Area Health Service, covering more than a million people. He has been a mentor to innumerable medical trainees and an inspirational role model to his peers and those in the medical and allied health professions who have had the privilege of working with him. Chris has been the face of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital via the popular television show RPA and captured the nation's heart when news of his illness was broadcast.

Stephen Page

Pioneering choreographer

Stephen Page is an Indigenous dancer/choreographer who has achieved international recognition, bringing together the ancient and the modern with the Bangarra Dance Theatre. After graduating in 1983 he began a professional career as a dancer with the Sydney Dance Company. In 1988 he toured overseas with the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre and, after joining as principal choreographer, in 1991 was appointed artistic director of the Bangarra Dance Theatre. Under Stephen the company has developed a particular style of performance, drawing on both traditional and urban Aboriginal cultures. Stephen's prolific work includes choreographing the Sydney Olympics Games ceremonies, sell-out performances of *Bush* on Bangarra's Australian and US tours, a stint as Artistic Director of the Adelaide Arts Festival, and numerous film and theatre credits. Earlier this year he directed a spectacular traditional smoking ceremony marking the 75th anniversary of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and he is currently preparing Bangarra's 2008 full length work *Mathinna*, inspired by a young Aboriginal girl's journey between two cultures.

SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NSW

David Bussau AM

Micro-credit pioneer

Thirty years ago David Bussau went to Bali to help rebuild rural areas devastated by an earthquake and found that traditional development solutions still left poor families trapped in poverty. He realised that what poor people wanted was work and that with jobs they could start to solve many of their other problems. His solution was to offer small business loans – a hand up instead of a hand out. David established the non-profit Maranatha Trust to fulfil his dream of helping the poor help themselves. In 1979 he joined forces with a like-minded counterpart in the USA to form Opportunity International. The results have been outstanding, with over 800,000 clients, mostly women, and creating millions of jobs in twenty-nine developing countries. David continues his work in micro-enterprise development by building relationships and providing consultancy services to governments, multi-national companies, and other organisations that have caught his vision and joined the fight against poverty.

Sonia Gidley-King

Practical humanitarian

Horrified on realising the numbers of people world-wide who die of hypothermia, Sonia Gidley-King responded in the most practical way. She organised groups of volunteers to knit, crochet, or weave woollen squares, 25 centimetres each, to make warm wraps to keep out the cold. Since 1992 Sonia's determination and dedication has seen over 133,000 wraps sent to Africa, Afghanistan, India, South America, and anywhere else there is a need. All the work is done by volunteers – about 25,000 'Love Wrap' workers around Australia – and her Knit-In program is becoming legendary, with more than 7,000 participating recently. Sonia's Wrap With Love organisation is not a charity but a mission of mercy; it is non-denominational, non-political, and non-discriminatory and the wraps are not bought, sold, or traded. The rugs and quilts are a gift to people who have little, giving them hope because they know that someone, somewhere in Australia has made it with love.

Hugh Mackay

Social researcher and commentator

Hugh Mackay is a psychologist, social researcher, and writer who has made a lifelong study of the attitudes and behaviour of the Australian community and is one of our pioneers of qualitative research. In recognition of this work he has been awarded honorary doctorates by the University of New South Wales, Macquarie University, and Charles Sturt University. Hugh is a prolific writer – he has published widely in the field of social psychology and has written four novels. As a critic of the changing nature of Australian society, Hugh's insights encourage us to re-evaluate our lives, our relationships, and our communities; he has the knack of providing accessible common sense observations about who we are as a nation. Hugh is one of the founders of the St James Ethics Centre and is a regular contributor to national news and current affairs publications whose commentary provides thought-provoking guidance through an increasingly complex and ambiguous world.

Don McDonald

Mental health advocate

As one of the founding board members of the National Institute of Schizophrenia and Allied Disorders, Don McDonald has been responsible for raising more than \$2 million in sponsorships and donations, as well as lobbying for government support and improving public awareness of schizophrenia. When his son was diagnosed with schizophrenia at 15 years of age, Don committed himself to help families like his with a loved one struck down by this devastating illness. He developed a national alliance of parents, doctors, and union and business leaders that led to initial and then on-going government funding for research. As a measure of the high esteem in which he held by the psychiatric research community, Don was described, in a speech honouring his work, as the most effective, focussed, and results-oriented activist and advocate who has ever come to the aid of psychiatric research in Australia.

YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NSW

Rachel Coxon, 24
Biomedical engineer

Rachel Coxon is passionate about the positive contribution young people can make to the community and demonstrates this consistently through inspirational leadership. After graduating as a mechanical engineer with honours and a University Medal, Rachel is currently completing her PhD in Biomedical Engineering investigating sleep and breathing in heart failure. She still found time to be a mentor for the 2007 Western Sydney Young Women's Leadership Program, which aims to increase the number of women in leadership and decision making roles by strengthening the leadership capabilities of young women. She also holds numerous national professional body positions, which are her platform for influencing and contributing to engineering and the wider community. Rachel is an enthusiastic networker who is making a valuable and recognisable impact as a mentor, leader, and role model for young people and through her commitment to addressing humanitarian issues through medical technology.

Bianca Moon, 18
Equality campaigner

Bianca Moon has endured much – facial disfigurement, bullying, and a car accident – to become the positive role model she is today. Bianca was born with a rare craniofacial disfigurement leaving her with no eyelid muscles, very wide-set eyes, and a flat nose bridge. She has had four facial reconstructions and has benefitted immensely from donor muscles. It was the taunts she endured at school that spurred her on to establish, at the age of 16, a charity to help bring awareness for people born with craniofacial disfigurements, or as she puts it, facial differences. 'Truly Beauty's' philosophy is that we're all the same no matter what we look like on the outside. Among Bianca's aims is outlawing schoolyard bullying and hosting next year's Truly Beautiful Masked Ball.

Casey Stoner, 22
World MotoGP champion

Casey Stoner is Australia's world champion motorcycle racer, cementing his place in this year's MotoGP competition with a home win at Philip Island in October. Casey first competed when he was four years old, in a race for under-nine's, and he won his first national title at the ripe old age of six. By the time he was fourteen he had won 41 dirt and long track titles and 70 state titles. In a single weekend he won 32 of 35 races and all of the five titles up for grabs. Because the legal age for road racing in Australia is 16, his family took him to compete in Europe. After a string of successes since then, last year he finally accomplished his ambition of racing in the fastest and most prestigious of the cycle racing classes. With his highly competitive attitude Casey took on the best in the world and won.

Phoebe Williams, 24
International Aid Leader

Phoebe Williams witnessed devastating poverty during a visit to Uganda in 2004 while waiting to begin her post-graduate medical studies. Returning home determined to do something about it, she established Hands of Help, which now has a membership of over 250 – mostly medical students. Her group of volunteers headed off at their own expense to rebuild a primary school in one of Uganda's poorest regions and establish community-based health care facilities, now under way in partnership with the Sydney Peace Foundation. Medical students from six universities are raising funds to rebuild two more schools, renovate an AIDS orphanage in Nairobi, and conduct health checks in remote Indigenous communities in NSW. Her honours thesis, a study of the impact of malaria prevention programs in Sub-Saharan Africa, has attracted wide interest in the medical community. Phoebe matches her deep concern for others less fortunate than herself with a boundless enthusiasm for making a difference.

LOCAL HERO – NSW

Peter Andrews
Environmentalist

Peter Andrews has had extraordinary success converting degraded, salt-ravaged land into fertile, drought-resistant pastures. Instigator of the natural sequencing farming concept, he faced tremendous obstacles and personal setbacks getting his methods accepted by a wary scientific and farming community. But now eminent scientists agree that Peter potentially has the solution to alleviating the effects of drought on many parts of the Australian landscape. Natural sequence farming focuses on the way the natural landscape works to maintain its balance by restoring connections between rivers and flood plains and using secondary channels to connect creeks and ponds. This restores streams and wetlands to the way they were before European settlement interfered with them. Peter is a man who many believe is ahead of his time and who is almost without peer in his understanding of the natural functioning of the Australian landscape. All Australians will benefit from his research and his persistence.

Joyce Donovan
Human rights and health campaigner

Joyce Donovan, or Auntie Joyce as she is known in the Illawarra and more widely, is a leader who has earned the respect of the Aboriginal community that entitles her to be called an Elder. Joyce felt so strongly about unveiling the scourge of child abuse that she travelled all over NSW, sleeping on floors and living out of her car, gaining support for marches against child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. Following the success of the walks and the Purple Ribbon Project she was asked to coordinate an annual candle vigil to recognise that there will be no more silence over child abuse. She travelled thousands of miles conducting healing ceremonies for victims of domestic violence and bringing her message that it takes a whole community to raise a child. Joyce has worked tirelessly for more than thirty-five years and was the driving force behind the establishment of an Aboriginal Medical Service in Wollongong.

Dick Estens
Practical reconciliation advocate

Dick Estens wants to make Indigenous poverty history and breach the gap in education by 2015 and he works tirelessly to achieve these aims in his own community by promoting work opportunities for Indigenous people in the area. He believes strongly that having paid employment is the best way out of poverty and in 1997, with the backing of local cotton growers, he set up a program in Moree that every year finds work for hundreds of Indigenous people who otherwise might be left to languish on the edges of society. He was appointed to the board of Reconciliation Australia and was awarded a human rights medal for overhauling the situation in Moree and changing community attitudes in the process. Dick's work on reconciliation and his strategy of gainful employment has given Moree's Indigenous community hope, dignity, status, and pride in themselves.

Mary-Ruth Mendel
Speech and language pathologist

Mary-Ruth Mendel specialises in helping children and adults with literacy and learning difficulties. She is very skilled in distilling the mountains of information and research developed over the years into understandable knowledge and converting medical revelations into teaching techniques that lead to successful therapeutic practices. Responding to national media attention arising out of her successful methods, Mary-Ruth established the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation as a philanthropic vehicle to begin to address the huge numbers of people needing help. One of her first projects achieved a breakthrough that could save Aboriginal languages from extinction while at the same time boost literacy in Indigenous communities. With help from The Wiggles, the Warramiri language is now available on DVD for all to share. Not only has the Foundation achieved great things with Indigenous literacy, but is making its mark with refugees and is planning to improve literacy levels in prisons.