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29th Quill Awards for Excellence in Victorian Journalism

A scoop about the tragic consequences of a mushroom lunch in regional Victoria has won the prestigious Gold Quill at the Melbourne Press Club's 29th Quill Awards for Excellence in Victorian Journalism.

John Ferguson's exclusive story about the Leongatha lunch was first published on *The Australian's* website on a Saturday, and he followed it up with other exclusives, including an interview with the now-charged woman who hosted the lunch.

The Gold Quill judges praised Ferguson's scoop that set the agenda for a story which engaged Australia and the world. "This was journalism which celebrates, and honours, everything the Gold Quill stands for," the judges said.

Ferguson's report of the lunch where three people died, won the Scoop of The Year Quill, which along with all other category winners, meant it qualified to be considered for the Gold Quill.

The Quill Awards is the annual celebration of excellence in Victorian journalism. This year featured a record number of entries across 31 categories, reflecting the breadth, depth and excellence of the state's journalism during 2023.

For general info about our awards, visit: <https://www.melbournepressclub.com/awards>

The Gold Quill – John Ferguson, The Australian

John Ferguson broke the most-talked about story of 2023. In journalism's modern era of social media, high tech, iPhone videos and analytics, Ferguson's story proves nothing counts more than a reporter's competitive edge.

This was a good old-fashioned scoop in one of the most competitive beats in this town, where nothing stays secret for long.

Ferguson stood the story up and broke it online on a Saturday, all the time conscious the clock was ticking. But this was no one-hit wonder – he stayed ahead of the pack with two more exclusives online and in print – an interview with the now-charged woman and a story uncovering key details of her past.

These set the agenda for a story which has captivated Australia and the world. This was journalism, which celebrates, and honours, everything the Gold Quill stands for.

OTHER AWARD WINNERS AND CITATIONS ON FOLLOWING PAGES:

Where possible, links to works have been included for convenience. Please note, however, that these links may not compromise the full entry. Additional info and materials on awards can be found on our [website](#) after the event concludes.

The MPC Lifetime Achievement Award

Jennifer Keyte, Network 10, for a career of accomplished journalism, presenting news across networks and for being a powerful role model for a generation of female journalists.

Artwork

Winner: Matthew Absalom-Wong, *The Age*, “Hong Bao diplomacy”

Judges' citation:

The judges were impressed by the quality of this year's entries into the “artwork” category. Ultimately they selected Matthew Absalom-Wong's “Hong Bao diplomacy” illustration as the 2023 winner. Matthew's illustration is a sumptuous, saturated colour reference to vintage Chinese communist poster art, cleverly portraying Xi Jinping in a familiar, Mao-like pose, distributing funds within the Asia-Pacific through the metaphor of “hong bao”; small red envelopes laden with cash as gifts. The image clearly references the article it accompanies,

but Matthew has drawn on his own Chinese heritage and personal experience to build a stronger, culturally relevant visual narrative.

Highly Commended:

Richard Giliberto, *The Sunday Age*, “Numbers Game”

Best Breaking News or Live Coverage, sponsored by The Lottery Corporation

Winner: ABC News Victoria, “Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews Resigns”

Judges’ citation:

When Dan Andrews surprised Victoria by quitting as Premier after nine years, Richard Willingham broke the news and the ABC quickly harnessed its considerable resources to cover this big story. The ABC News team delivered a comprehensive rolling package of reports. Their content had detail, authority and context and reached a large audience across the ABC's multi platforms.

Best Coverage of an Issue

Winner: Aneeka Simonis, *Herald Sun*, “Family violence: The victims, the survivors and a justice system review”

Judges’ citation:

Aneeka Simonis' investigation of violence against women was a fresh and well-researched look at an enduring issue our society faces. Her primary piece, "She had no chance" is a shocking but compassionately told story of a family's grief at losing a loved one and a plea for change. It exposed a clear, but little known flaw, in the justice system which meant domestic violence victims were not informed on the release of their abusers. It immediately sparked a government response and a promise of change and set the agenda for other media outlets to follow.

Highly Commended

Stephen Drill, Andrea Thiis-Evensen, Dan Box and Lil Saleh, Network News/*Herald Sun*, “Hillsong: Faith on Trial”

The Age Crime Team and Please Explain podcast, “Melbourne's new underworld war”

Business News/Feature, sponsored by McGrathNicol

Winner: Peter Ker and Brad Thompson, *The Australian Financial Review*, “Forrests and Fortescue”

Judges’ citation:

This story unravelled the power shift within the Forrest family empire and the journalists, Peter Ker and Brad Thompson, meticulously followed the money to put two and two together. This story has major implications for the future of one of Australia's biggest miners in its efforts for a greener transition.

Highly Commended

Nick McKenzie, *The Age*, “Offshore Bribery”

Cartoon

Winner: Matt Golding, *The Sunday Age*, “The nation said no.”

Judges’ citation:

Matt Golding's cartoon ‘The Nation Said No’, published in the aftermath of the Indigenous Voice to Parliament referendum, brilliantly captures a pivotal moment in Australian history. With no need for words, the simple two-panel drawing speaks volumes about the referendum’s outcome. In the first frame an Indigenous hand, representing the Yes campaign, reaches to connect across the backdrop of the Aboriginal flag. A second hand in the frame grips a light cord, signifying voting Australians. The magic of this cartoon is the subsequent panel delivering a powerful blow, despite being entirely black and containing no text. The No vote has extinguished the light from the Indigenous flag, shrouding it in darkness, forcing the viewer to reflect on Australia’s final vote. Using only symbolism, Golding has conveyed Australia’s biggest 2023 story at a glance.

Highly Commended

Jim Pavlidis, *The Age*, “Vote Know”

Coverage of Women in Sport, sponsored by the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation

Winner: Marnie Vinall and Greg Baum, *The Age*, “FIFA Women’s World Cup”

Judges’ citation:

The Age's coverage of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup was outstanding. The judges felt this entry went above just simply covering a global mega event because of its proximity, providing in-depth profiles, commentary and analysis that gave the athletes a voice and

brought readers into the broader landscape of women's football. *The Age's* reporting amplified the tournament, the athletes and the broader women's sport movement through excellent, high quality journalism and feature writing represented in the work in this entry of Marnie Vinall and Greg Baum that drives the women in sport narrative forward.

Highly Commended

Elias Clure, ABC News, "First woman athlete to be diagnosed with CTE"

Excellence in Indigenous Affairs Reporting, sponsored by the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations

Winner: Nino Bucci and Blake Sharp-Wiggins, *Guardian Australia*, "Aboriginal pedestrian deaths in the Northern Territory"

Judges' citation:

In their article Lethal Highways, Nino Bucci and Blake Sharp-Wiggins bring to the reader's attention the stark details of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in Northern Territory pedestrian deaths.

The balanced use of case studies, statistical evidence, research findings and interviews has resulted in a feature article that demonstrates clearly a commitment on the part of the pair to deliver a comprehensive narrative without injecting editorial bias.

Importantly for this particular category, Nino and Blake clearly seem to have addressed a sensitive and contentious topic with due respect to all parties involved.

Highly Commended

Joseph Dunstan and Lauren Day, ABC News, "'A life without Veronica' and 'Victoria's treaty journey'"

Excellence in Science, Medical and Health Reporting, sponsored by University of Melbourne

Winner: Sherryn Groch, *The Age*, "Journey into the deep sea"

Judges' citation:

Sherryn Groch takes a fascinating dive into the science of the deep and the potential threat to the world's oceans from mining in these fragile and hitherto barely explored depths. Sherryn brings us a great science explainer, with a hard news edge as she explores the challenges of developing a code around deep sea exploration and development. Her research is rigorous and compelling – she paints a vibrant picture of the richness of the deep sea and skilfully portrays the tensions between mining for metals to support renewables and protection of a

fragile and extraordinary environment. Her accompanying podcast brings infectious excitement to her journey into the science and politics of the ocean depths.

Highly Commended

Amy Bainbridge and Angus Whitley, *Bloomberg*, "[Black Summer's Toxic Legacy](#)"

Jackson Graham, *The Age*, "[Autopsies, strokes and sleep apnoea explained](#)"

Izabella Staskowski, *The Today Show*, "Battling endometriosis"

Feature Writing

Winner: Michael Bachelard, *Good Weekend* magazine, "[Talking trans](#)"

Judges' citation:

Michael Bachelard's *Good Weekend* feature 'Talking Trans' is a superbly written and well-researched piece about a highly-charged, complex and highly-contemporary subject, handled with sensitivity and skill. It's clear that Michael earned the trust of those in the feature who felt comfortable sharing their own often intimate and revealing stories from a range of different perspectives, a collection of perspectives not often seen in the mainstream media. The result is a compelling piece of journalism which allows readers to gain a deeper understanding of the topic through the power of storytelling and the bravery of those storytellers.

Highly Commended

Melissa Fyfe and Jacqueline Maley, *Good Weekend* magazine, "[Rethinking rape](#)"

Grant Hattam Quill for Investigative Journalism, sponsored by HWT

Winner: Nick McKenzie and Chris Masters, *The Age*, [Ben Roberts-Smith Investigations](#)

Judges' citation:

This entry is the culmination of six years of fearless reporting by Nick McKenzie and Chris Masters. They overcame a code of silence to uncover war crimes, they were resolute in the face of threats and intimidation, and they put their reputations on the line in a high-stakes defamation trial in which they were ultimately vindicated. This is investigative journalism at its finest.

Highly Commended

Stephen Drill and Jason Edwards, *Network News/Sunday Herald Sun*, "Narcos: On the frontline"

Charlotte Grieve and Amelia Adams, *The Age*, "[Sole Destroying](#)"

Innovation in Journalism, sponsored by Ryman Healthcare

Winner: Kai Feng, Jarrod Fankhauser, Olivia Ralph and Steven Viney, ABC News, “Instant credibility”

Judges’ citation:

In a year of strong entries, this is a story that stands out in showing courage to innovate through an investment of time and resources to tell a story that is off the beaten track in its subject matter and delivery. By disregarding the usual style and palette guides of their newsroom, the journalists and producers involved showed their understanding of the need to meet their audiences halfway when telling a story about a subculture. The use of the scrollytelling format and mixed media is polished and effective, and the publication of the story in three languages is a good addition since this is a story with local and global relevance.

Highly Commended

Visual Stories Team, *The Age*, “The offside trap”

Selling the Green Dream, ABC News, “Selling the Green Dream”

Keith Dunstan Quill for Commentary

Winner: Erik Jensen, *The Saturday Paper*, “The Voice editorials”

Judges’ citation:

In three editorials on the most covered issue of the year, Erik Jensen brings perspectives and arguments unseen elsewhere. With powerful, concise, and evocative analogies, he strips bare the political motivations behind the Voice defeat, unpicking the campaign’s language and players’ motivations to reveal uncomfortable truths for our nation.

Highly Commended

Peter Martin, *The Conversation*, “The most worrying thing about Robodebt was its attention to detail”

Jonathan Horn, *Guardian Australia*, “The Sporting Media Malaise”

Multicultural Affairs and Media, in partnership with Gandel Foundation

Winner: Kassahun Negewo and Ruchika Talwar, SBS, “Detention to determination”

Judges’ citation:

This striking piece probes Australia's punitive immigration detention policies. The subject matter is hard-hitting, yet through their vivid storytelling, journalists Kassahun Negewo and Ruchika Talwar also succeed in delivering a very human story. Notably, the central protagonist, an asylum seeker who arrived by boat, is never cast as helpless in a quite personalized narrative. The reader is drawn into a multi-layered story, which traces a challenging journey from detention in Nauru to a new life as a Metro train ticket inspector on a bridging visa. This is an elevated example of reporting in the multicultural domain that does not patronise or compromise.

Highly Commended

Suzan Delibasic, *Herald Sun*, "Lee Family Deportation Fight"

Casey Briggs and Ahmed Yussuf, ABC News, "African and Middle Eastern communities over-represented in COVID-19 fines in Victoria, data shows"

News Reporting in Writing

Winner: Aneeka Simonis, *Herald Sun*, "Extreme violence: justice system reform for family violence survivors"

Judges' citation:

Aneeka Simonis' domestic violence campaign sparked a government review after she uncovered staggering flaws in Victoria's Victims' Register, which contributed to the death of a mother at the hands of her violent ex-partner just hours after his release from custody. The judges were impressed with Simonis' commitment and tenacity to uncover this story, and the sensitive way in which she reported the harrowing details. The campaign's impact was significant, from sparking important conversations to pressuring the state to improve justice outcomes for victims. This type of front-page journalism couldn't be more important as women across Australia are regularly killed by current or former partners.

Highly Commended

Clay Lucas and Sophie Aubrey, *The Age*, "Flood fury: The Maribyrnong River disaster"

Podcasting

Winner: Stephen Drill, Andrea Thiis-Evensen and Dan Box, Network News/*Herald Sun*, "Hillsong: Faith on Trial"

Judges' citation:

Hillsong: Faith on Trial' is an immersive look into the world of the Hillsong megachurch. This captivating podcast navigates through riveting court cases to the intricate web of ownership disputes surrounding Melbourne's Festival Hall.

It seamlessly blends breaking news with an engaging narrative, enticing listeners with each episode, leaving them wanting more.

Its production quality shines through with its assured use of audio craft, providing a polished listening experience.

Its ability to swiftly turn around episodes ensures it remains relevant in the fast-paced news cycle.

Overall, the podcast effectively covers a timely and intriguing topic while maintaining high production standards keeping listeners engaged.

Highly Commended

Anthony Dowsley, Jonty Burton and Andrea Thiis-Evensen, *Herald Sun*, "The Devil's Apprentice"

7am, "Inside Robo-debt"

Radio Current Affairs

Winner: Shane McInnes, 3AW, "Victoria's Meningococcal Vaccine Failure"

Judges' citation:

Shane's masterful interview with a concerned father, and follow up with an infectious diseases expert exposed a serious gap in public health information around the availability of vaccines for different strains of meningococcal. After much debate over this fiercely contested shortlist, the judges found Shane's entry to be the most compelling, original material. It embodied the best qualities of a live radio interview that drew attention to a little known, but concerning issue.

Highly commended

Richard Willingham, ABC News, "Melbourne's second safe injecting room set for the Salvation Army"

Radio News

Winner: Danny Tran, ABC News Melbourne, "The Melbourne hospital where radiation leaked through the floor"

Judges' citation:

Danny's story exposing a radiation leak at a major Melbourne hospital just edged in front of a strong field of entries this year. While it wasn't under the pressure of breaking news, it took tenacity and persistence over several months for Danny to turn a tip into an exclusive that forced hospital management to act. Not only fronting their own staff for the first time, but publicly answering to the serious risk.

Highly Commended

Richard Willingham, ABC News, “Paul Denyer to die in jail: Labor backflips on special laws”

Regional and Rural Journalism, sponsored by TAC

Winner: Rachel Clayton, Charlotte King and Andy Burns, ABC News, “Suspected unlicensed dams multiplying across stressed Moorabool River”

Judges’ citation:

These ABC regional investigators clearly spent months developing a story that revealed the extent of water theft and its local and national implications. They were tenacious and meticulous. Their extensive research uncovered hundreds of new private dams operating in the Moorabool River catchment that were pulling water from the river and damaging its natural flow. Great use of footage, contacts and FOI requests added fresh aspects to the story. The journalists probed into all parties involved in the issue and ultimately prompted action from the relevant authority. The story was read by more than 100,000 people and also ran nationally across television and radio. An outstanding example of compelling local investigative journalism.

Highly Commended

Emma D'Agostino, Danielle Bonica and Josie Taylor, ABC Central Victoria, “A Fine Balance”

Tim Lee, Landline, “Satellite Stock Squad”

Reporting on Disability Issues, sponsored by the Victorian Government

Winner: Charlotte Grieve, *The Age*, “The disturbing treatment for mental health crises”

Judges’ citation:

Disability advocate Nicole Lee was met with applause when she gave a speech to the Northern Hospital. Three years later she was being restrained as an inpatient in that very same facility.

Charlotte Grieve's considered and respectful telling of Nicole Lee's experience exposed a public hospital's willingness to use shackles on a patient undergoing a mental health crisis. The piece not only highlighted the trauma associated with the use of restraints in mental health settings but also unpacked the complexities involved in delivering on the promise made by the Victorian government to eliminate restraints in mental health facilities within 10 years.

Highly commended

Stephanie Convery, *Guardian Australia*, "[“Holding cell’: Melbourne family with disabled son stuck in ‘transitional’ housing for a decade”](#)

Natassia Chrysanthos, *The Age*, "[“The NDIS has saved families. But in another world, they would not need it.”](#)

Scoop of the Year

Winner: John Ferguson, *The Australian*, "[“Police investigate mass poisoning in Leongatha”](#)

Judges' citation:

John Ferguson's reporting was the spark that lit the fuse on the story that gripped Melbourne in 2023 – the mushroom deaths. John's initial story was immediate, detailed, and intriguing. It blended old-fashioned journalism with the demands of a relentless news cycle.

Knowing it had secured a major scoop, *The Australian* rushed to publish John's story online on a Saturday morning, prompting newsrooms around the country and across the globe to follow what was to be the most talked-about story of the year.

This report forced Victoria Police to reveal more details about its investigation, such was the level of interest. John followed his initial report with a series of exclusives, including a one-on-one interview with the woman at the centre of the story.

Highly Commended

Dan Oakes, ABC News, "[“The mushroom deaths”](#)

Cameron Stewart, *The Australian*, "[“Red Sea Warship”](#)

Sports Feature

Winner: Jeremy Story Carter, *ABC News*, "[“Kick in hope”](#)

Judges' citation:

The quality of entries for the “sports feature” category was of the highest standard.

“Kick in Hope” set itself apart from the rest by giving the reader a unique insight into the remote community of King Island and the role local football plays in the complicated social and economic landscape.

The reporter immersed himself in the community which made the reader feel like they were there on game day. It was clear the reporter had gained the trust of the locals, to get an honest assessment of the challenges Island life presents.

It was a well written, well researched and entertaining piece, sports feature writing at its very best.

Highly Commended

Konrad Marshall, *Good Weekend* magazine, “Who cares?”

Michael Gleeson, *The Age*, “Peter Bol the damage done.”

Sports News, sponsored by Bupa

Winner: Ben Schneiders, *The Age*, “The tax haven, the PO box, the tropical island: Who owns Australian soccer”

Judges’ citation:

Ben Schneiders' extensive investigative reporting uncovered extraordinary details about the A-league’s secretive, convoluted ownership structure and tax status. It required extensive digging, financial detective work, and the cultivation of contacts both in Australia and overseas. All of this was done in the face of uncooperative officials in the A-League as well as Football Australia. The judging panel says this is an important piece of investigative journalism, raising questions about transparency and accountability in the world game.

Highly Commended

Scott Gullan, *Herald Sun*, “Peter Bol drugs scandal”

TV Camera Work (Creative)

Winner: Andrew Atree-Williams, 7.30, “Andy Jackson's poetry 'gives us a new way to see' disability”

Judges’ citation:

Andrew’s ability to draw the viewer into this story was a credit to him. He had a clear understanding of what pictures were required to tell this emotive story with perceptive attention to detail.

Subtle use of natural light and clever framing with multiple camera formats told a wonderful story, whilst maintaining the talent's dignity.

Highly Commended

Simon Winter, Australian Story, "Changing Minds"

TV Camera Work (Shot of the Year)

Winner: Tim Furness, Nine News, "Fitzroy garden murder"

Judges' citation:

The TV Camerawork (Shot of the year) Award recognises individuals who demonstrate exceptional skills in capturing critical moments that contribute to the understanding and awareness of breaking news events. The judges agreed Tim Furness's submission, a video capturing an incident involving a stabbing and subsequent arrest, stood out among the entries for its compelling and impactful nature.

Using his instincts and experience Tim was able to cleverly get his shots, whilst maintaining a respectable distance away, allowing police to carry out their duties.

Tim's shots showcased his ability to capture the intensity and urgency of the situation while maintaining a high level of professionalism.

Tim's pictures ran exclusively that night on 9 News and was the lead story.

TV/Video Feature

Winner: Christine Ahern and Lisa Brown, 60 Minutes, "VBA exposed"

Judges' statement:

"VBA exposed" shone a much needed light on the problems within Victoria's building industry, and the horrifying human toll.

Crucial to this, was gaining the trust of key insiders within the industry.

Through perseverance, Ahern was able to convince crucial players in the industry, including a building inspector, to speak publically to expose the entrenched problems within the sector.

Perhaps most compelling was the interview with the widow of an inspector. The unreasonable and shameful demands placed on him lead him to take his own life.

This element made for an impactful story.

The piece had lasting impact, with the Premier at the time agreeing there were problems within the VBA.

Not long after this story aired, the CEO of Vic Building Authority resigned.

Highly Commended

Louise Milligan, Mary Fallon and Jessica Longbottom, Four Corners, "Hiding Behind Tombstones"

TV/Video News

Winner: Sharnelle Vella, 7NEWS, "Porter Davis Crisis"

Judges' citation:

Sharnelle's story was a clear winner for its exclusivity and impact. A throwaway line in a Daniel Andrews press conference sparked an investigation that revealed hundreds of homebuyers had been left high and dry after collapsed builder Porter Davis failed to take out insurance on their projects. Sharnelle cultivated hundreds of contacts and alerted the Victorian government to their plight. As a rescue package was announced, she discovered a second group of victims, with uninsured 'tender contracts,' and her report prompted more funding, bringing the total commitment to \$27 million dollars. Through journalistic heft and compassionate story-telling, Sharnelle's reporting changed the lives of hundreds of Victorians.

Highly Commended

Neary Ty, Nine News, "Youth Justice"

Cassie Zervos, 7NEWS, "School Boy Abduction"

Young Journalist of the Year, sponsored by Wilnic Family Trust

Winner: Carla Jaeger, *The Age*, "Netball Australia"

Judges' statement:

Carla Jaeger's dogged reporting about the crisis crippling Netball Australia saw her uncover failures within the organisation which ultimately led to the resignation of the sport's chief executive. An impressive exclusive which had real impact.

Highly Commended

Carly Douglas, *Herald Sun*, body of work

Features Photograph

Winner: Eddie Jim, *The Age*, "Fighting, Not Sinking"

Judges' citation:

Beautifully lit by the early morning sun, Eddie Jim's "Fighting not Sinking" illustrates the real anxieties and dangers those who live in low lying coastal areas of the Pacific confront as a result of global warming.

Highly Commended

Eddie Jim, *The Age*, "Kidney Transplant"

Justin McManus, *The Sunday Age*, "Leaving the Land of Plenty"

David Caird, *Herald Sun*, "No Bull I've Got Wings"

News Photograph

Winner: Christopher Hopkins, *The Age*, "Nazis on Our Doorstep"

Judges' citation:

Chris Hopkins' strong evocative photo showing the Nazi salute on the steps of Victoria's Parliament House reminds us of Nazi imagery from Germany in the 1930's and 40's that we see in old documentary footage. Sadly, this was Melbourne 2023.

Highly Commended

Marta Pascual Juanola, *The Age*, "Portrait of alleged mushroom killer Erin Patterson"

Sports Photograph

Winner: Darrian Traynor, Getty Images, "It Takes One Day"

Judges' citation:

An excellent series capturing the action and atmosphere of the ODI World Cup in India. Who will ever forget Glenn Maxwell's performance?

Highly Commended

Penny Stephens, *The Age*, "Fatima and Adiba"

Victorian Student Journalist of the Year, sponsored by NewsGuard

Winner: Sasha Gattermayr, University of Melbourne, "Little club of horrors"

Judges' citation:

A charming feature, original and delightfully crafted - peeking into the world of carnivorous plant enthusiasts. A surprise piece, Sasha's distinctive style impressed the judges with a fascinating blend of ecology and community – telling the story of a dedicated suburban group, obsessed with their love of plants such as the Venus fly trap.