

2023-24 President's Report by Bryce Eishold

In 2023/24, the Rural Press Club of Victoria (RPCV) committee developed a strategic plan, the first of its kind for the club in more than a decade.

The plan outlined seven key goals the club aims to achieve before the end of the 2024/25 financial year.

Committee member David Goodfellow led the strategic planning sessions in Melbourne in consultation with the RPCV committee.

Several targets were met within months of the committee's ratification of the strategic plan.

These included a rebrand of the RPCV, including a new logo featuring the magpie and kookaburra on the telegraph line, symbolising how rural and regional media connects local communities.

The club also adopted a new slogan; Promoting rural and regional journalism since 1966.

Another goal the club achieved was an overhaul of the RPCV website, in addition to several new web pages.

Notably, the newly-created [Member Hub](#) was developed to help emerging and seasoned journalists and photographers hone their skills.

The members-only page features several resources from an array of experienced reporters, including everything from how to film a vertical video, tips for court reporting, how to write better features and how to be a better regional journo.

Committee member Harrison Tippet oversaw the development of this page and should be acknowledged for his hard work.

Other goals in the strategic plan pipeline include growing the RPCV's membership to 300 members by June 2025.

Currently, the club has 170 members, including three life members.

As part of the strategic plan, the RPCV has committed to improving connections with newsrooms and universities and will continue to grow its presence on social media platforms, including Facebook, X, and LinkedIn.

The final, and arguably most significant goal, is to create a new substantial prize to the value of several thousand dollars.

This professional development opportunity, announced at the [2024 Rural and Regional Journalism and Photography Awards](#) in Bendigo in October, will be awarded to a Victorian-based journalist or photographer at the 2025 awards.

This incredible opportunity is one way the RPCV can reinvest in rural and regional media by supporting one candidate each year to undertake an international study experience.

More information about this prize will follow in the coming months.

Events

Several events were held in-person and online during the last financial year as part of the club's commitment to support rural and regional journalists and photographers.

These events included a [lunch with Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan](#) in her hometown of Bendigo.

The lunch was attended by more than 140 people and took place while a few thousand protesters gathered outside the venue to oppose several government policies.

The event included a Q&A session and was emceed by ABC Central Victoria editor Josie Taylor.

Committee members Seamus Haugh and Peter Somerville oversaw the event, ensuring it ran smoothly.

More than 150 people attended [a webinar in February 2024](#) that looked at the role artificial intelligence could play in rural and regional media.

Committee member Sonja Heydeman organised and emceed the webinar, alongside co-host Christina Arampatzi who together interviewed two acclaimed AI experts – US-based journalist, educator, and AI strategist, Aimee Rinehart and Rita Arrigo from the CSIRO National AI Centre.

Victorian Opposition leader John Pesutto joined the club for lunch in Melbourne which followed a Q&A facilitated by RPCV vice president Alex Sinnott, while other events included a breakfast in Melbourne with former Agriculture Minister Murray Watt, a breakfast and panel discussion looking at progress on the AG2030 Roadmap and the bi-annual Young Journalist Forum in August 2023.

The forum was attended by journalism students, cadets, and emerging reporters from across rural and regional Victoria.

The club launched bi-monthly networking events in July. The first featured a panel discussion with ABC true crime reporter Rachel Brown, The Australian's Melbourne associate editor John Ferguson, and The Age regional editor Benjamin Preiss. Committee member Kellie Lazzaro emceed the event.

Sponsorship

Another goal of the strategic plan was to look after current sponsors.

Not only has the club excelled in this, the RPCV reached a new sponsorship milestone in 2024 with the addition of Powercor as the club's inaugural platinum sponsor.

Long-term sponsors of the club, Agriculture Victoria and TAC remained gold partners, while Nutrien Ag Solutions was elevated to a gold sponsor as well as 89 Degrees East, which joined the club as a first-time sponsor in 2023-24.

Currie Communications, Marcus Oldham, Stock & Land, and The Weekly Times remained as silver sponsors, while the club welcomed Commonwealth Bank on board as a first-time silver supporter.



The strength of the club's sponsorship portfolio is largely due to the dedication of committee member and sponsorship coordinator Alannah Halloran, who worked tirelessly during the last financial year.

Rural and Regional Journalism and Photography Awards

The club saluted some of the state's best journalists and news photographers during its prestigious [annual awards](#) in Bendigo in October.

While the awards took place outside of the 2023-24 financial year, the awards recognised work published by journalists, photographers, and newsrooms in 2023-24.

South-west Victorian news publication the Warrnambool Standard won Media Outlet of the Year, while central Victorian photographer Lachlan Bence from the Ballarat Courier was crowned Photographer of the Year.

Allan Murphy from the Sunraysia Daily in Mildura was awarded Journalist of the Year, while ABC journalist Natasha Schapova, who previously worked for ABC Gippsland in Sale before moving to ABC Geelong, was named the Ray Frawley Young Journalist of the Year.

The club received 281 award entries from 109 journalists and 20 photographers across 68 media outlets in Victoria for the 2024 awards.

Three new categories were added to the 2024 awards line-up following an independent review in 2024, which set out to modernise the existing awards and ensure shifting newsroom trends were reflected across the 16 categories.

The independent review took place over five months and was carried out by five media leaders, including Elise Potter, transformation manager – News Corp Australia, Hugh Martin, at the time regional editor for Victoria - ABC, Saffron Howden, national editorial trainer - ACM, Alex Wake, program manager for journalism – RMIT University, and Yvette Brand, editor – Warragul & Drouin Gazette, who represented independent publishers.

Committee member and former vice president Greg Dundas oversaw the 10-page review.

More than 115 people attended the Bendigo Town Hall event emceed by ABC Statewide Drive radio host Prue Bentley.

I'd like to recognise committee members Alannah Halloran, who served as awards coordinator, as well as secretary Peter Somerville, Seamus Haugh, and Kellie Lazzaro for their tireless work in ensuring the success of the awards.

Committee changes

Several committee members have expressed their intention not to renominate at the AGM on Tuesday, November 26.

These include two long-term committee members, Rex Martinich and Nicole Cairns.

Rex joined the RPCV committee in 2013, making him the longest-serving executive member.

During this time, Rex oversaw the club as president in 2015-16 and 2016-17, and in more recent years played a pivotal role in the club's promotion of the annual awards on social media.



Nicole joined the committee in 2017 and after one year, was elevated to secretary, a position she held from 2018-2023.

At the 2023 AGM, Nicole moved into the treasurer's role and this year oversaw a change in the club's financial institution.

Nicole also assisted with the retirement of long-term volunteer bookkeeper Meemee Leong, and the appointment of new bookkeeper Rebecca Closter.

Committee member David Goodfellow has also indicated he will not recontest his position on the committee.

David joined the club two years ago and played a key role in developing the club's first strategic plan in more than a decade.

Committee member Greg Dundas, a former vice president of the club, has also indicated he will step down from the committee. Greg played a crucial role in coordinating the 2024 awards review mentioned earlier in this report.

Committee member Max O'Driscoll will also step aside after two years on the executive committee.

On behalf of the club, its members, sponsors, and the 2023-24 committee, I would like to thank Rex, Nicole, David, Greg, and Max for their contributions over the last several years and wish them all the best for their future endeavours.

This will also be my last annual report as president.

For the last three years, I have had the privilege to work alongside some of the most capable and committed people in Victoria's rural and regional media landscape.

The RPCV committee is the most effective and hard-working team of volunteers I have had the opportunity to work with, and I am constantly impressed by the commitment and dedication of our small but united team.

The opportunity to lead the club as president over the last three years, and 2.5 years as vice president before that, is a career highlight.

Thank you to those who have supported me during my tenure, and I thoroughly look forward to supporting the new president and executive committee in 2024-25.

Bryce Eishold

President

Rural Press Club of Victoria