

RURAL PRESS CLUB OF VICTORIA

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: ALEX SINNOTT

On the cusp of our sixtieth anniversary, the Rural Press Club of Victoria (RPCV) committee has notched up a successful 2025 through a series of news-worthy forums capped off with our annual awards.

A key objective of our strategic review, a journalism scholarship/bursary, was achieved with ABC Gippsland journalist/presenter Bec Symons named as the inaugural recipient.

For the first time in its almost 60-year-history, the Rural Press Club of Victoria is proud to be in a financial position to offer the scholarship to a journalist or photographer who lives and works in regional and rural Victoria. This member-focussed initiative allows the recipient to undertake a study tour that will elevate regional journalism by covering an interstate or international issue or event, or attending a conference for professional development.

In its first year, the scholarship attracted a competitive field of entries. A shortlist of applicants was interviewed by the judging panel which included external independent judge, former Rural Press Club president Ed Gannon.

Special recognition should be extended to vice president Kellie Lazzaro, who was the driving force behind co-ordinating the scholarship.

Events and forums

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

These events included a morning tea with Federal Agriculture Minister Julie Collins at the Melbourne Showgrounds.

The morning tea was attended by more than 70 people and was emceed by ABC Country Hour presenter Warwick Long.

An election campaign forum was held in May in Geelong with then shadow treasurer Angus Taylor. The RPCV committee extended invitations to both Labor and the Coalition campaigns and Mr Taylor was the first to respond. Labor later also accepted the invitation, which meant we were able to host Julie Collins at the Melbourne Royal Show. The function space for Geelong forum was kindly provided by CBRE with coordination from committee member Alannah Halloran.

The RPCV extended invitations to both Premier Jacinta Allan and Opposition Leader Brad Battin to take part in a public forum, one year out from the 2026 state election. Both expressed interest with Mr Battin accepting the offer. A function was held in November at Melbourne's Imperial Hotel with both Mr Battin and National Party leader Danny O'Brien. Mr Battin was replaced as opposition leader exactly one week later. It is the club's intention to again extend the invitation to Premier Allan and new Opposition Leader Jess Wilson to address the club during the 2026 election year.

Sponsorship

A 2024-25 goal of the strategic plan was to strengthen connections with benefactors/strategic partners and we have succeeded in securing two platinum sponsors in Powercor and Worksafe Victoria. Long-term sponsors of the club, Agriculture Victoria, TAC and Nutrien Ag Solutions remain in our gold sponsor category. AusPica, Commonwealth Bank, Currie Communications, Melbourne Royal, Marcus Oldham as well as Stock & Land all make a valuable contribution as either silver or award sponsors. Committee member and sponsorship coordinator Alannah Halloran has again proven her dedication to maintaining sponsorship relations. Two events this year - the Julie Collins and Angus Taylor forums - were aided by the venue use from Melbourne Royal and CBRE respectively.

RPCV Journalism and Photography Awards

The club saluted some of the state's best journalists and news photographers during its prestigious annual awards in Warragul in October.

While the awards took place outside of the 2024-25 financial year, the awards recognised work published by journalists, photographers, and newsrooms in 2024-25.

ABC Gippsland won Media Outlet of the Year, auspiciously on the very day it celebrated its 90th anniversary of broadcasting. Chris Earl from the Loddon Herald was awarded Journalist of the Year, Darren Howe at the Bendigo Advertiser was named Photographer of the Year, while ABC Ballarat journalist Charlotte Wilkes was named the Ray Frawley Young Journalist of the Year. The club received more than 250 award entries from journalists and photographers working for newspapers, television, radio and online in Victoria and Tasmania for the 2025 awards. The winning entries covered everything from primary production to regional health care, natural disasters to fatal accidents.

More than 100 people attended the West Gippsland Arts Centre event emceed by ABC journalist Jonathon Kendall. I would like to recognise treasurer Peter Somerville, communications co-ordinator Maddie Stuchbery and vice president Kellie Lazzaro for their tireless work in ensuring the success of the awards. Special recognition should also go to the contribution of Baw Baw Shire, ably co-ordinated by Bryce Eishold.

Committee changes

Several committee members have expressed their intention not to renominate at the AGM on Thursday, November 27.

Treasurer Peter Somerville has announced he will step down from the committee after more than three years of service.

Pete has made an invaluable contribution managing the club's finances, helping to organise our annual awards night and notably, reconnecting the club with Melbourne Royal and the Melbourne Showgrounds management.

Committee member Harrison Tippet will also step aside after two years on the executive committee and has secured several new sponsorship connections, most notably with Powercor.

On behalf of the club, its members, sponsors, and the 2022-25 committee, I would like to thank Pete and Harrison for their contributions over the last several years and wish them all the best for their future endeavours.

For the past calendar year, I have had the privilege to lead the club as president and, prior to that as vice president under Bryce Eishold's presidency. As I have shifted from a journalism role to a position in government communications, I will vacate the presidency but intend to serve on the board in 2026.

The RPCV has for six decades provided a collaborative space for journalists, photographers and communications professionals to engage, celebrate journalistic endeavours and provide a platform for leaders and community figures to engage with Victorians more broadly.

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 2025-26 as we celebrate the club's diamond anniversary.

- Alex Sinnott. November 26, 2025