

9/10/2026

KAREN STEPHENS WINNER 2026 GALLERY AND MUSEUM ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Museums & Galleries Queensland (M&G QLD) was delighted to announce **Karen Stephens**, Exhibition Supervisor, Waltzing Matilda Centre, Winton, as the Winner in the **Individuals: Paid** category at the **2026 Gallery and Museum Achievement Awards (GAMAA)**, proudly hosted by **Ipswich Art Gallery** on Thursday 8 October.

Now in their twenty-second year, the GAMAA are Queensland's premier awards program for the museum and gallery sector, recognising excellence, innovation and leadership across the State. Special guest, **Ipswich City Council Mayor Teresa Harding**, congratulated this year's recipients and presented winners with individually crafted trophies by acclaimed Queensland glass artist **Jarred Wright**.

A passionate cultural leader, mentor and advocate, Karen Stephens was recognised for her sustained leadership, innovation, and commitment to strengthening arts and cultural participation across regional and remote Queensland.

As the Exhibition Supervisor at the Waltzing Matilda Centre, Winton, Karen has built strategic partnerships with arts organisations, schools, community groups and industry leaders, expanding creative opportunities across regional and remote Queensland. She has transformed the *John Villiers Outback Art Prize* into a nationally respected platform for artistic excellence and community connection, and is deeply committed to nurturing emerging talent, particularly young people, through initiatives such as the Emerging Youth Category and Children's Art Project.

By creating pathways, fostering confidence and championing creative aspirations, she has empowered countless artists and strengthened the cultural voice of outback Australia. As Karen reflects, children are beginning to realise they can "play football and be an artist" — a powerful shift in aspirations for young people living in remote communities.

Karen's impact extends well beyond exhibition programs, strengthening the cultural life of her community and amplifying the creative voice of regional and remote Queenslanders. Her work has empowered countless artists, encouraged participation in the arts and demonstrated the transformative role cultural leaders can play in shaping communities.

Museums & Galleries Queensland Executive Director, Rebekah Butler, said "Karen Stephens is an inspiring cultural leader whose passion, vision and commitment have had a

profound impact on the arts in regional and remote Queensland. Through her leadership of the *John Villiers Outback Art Prize* and her dedication to supporting emerging artists, particularly young people, she has created opportunities that have nurtured creativity, built confidence and strengthened communities.”

This year's awards attracted nominations from across the state, recognising excellence in exhibitions, public programs, collections management, First Nations and community engagement, leadership, innovation and volunteer contribution.

M&G QLD congratulates each of this year's winners, highly commended recipients and finalists. Their achievements exemplify the passion, creativity and commitment that continue to enrich Queensland's cultural landscape and inspire excellence across the sector.

ABOUT MUSEUMS & GALLERIES QUEENSLAND

Museums & Galleries Queensland (M&G QLD) is the peak professional industry body for the public museum and gallery sector in Queensland.

Our purpose is to inspire and support excellence in Queensland museums, galleries and keeping places, fostering innovation, connection and cultural leadership.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR 2026 GAMAA SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS

The 2026 GAMAA are proudly supported by the **Ipswich Art Gallery** and sponsored by **Public Galleries Queensland** and **Australian Museums and Galleries Association Queensland**.

The 2026 GAMAA trophies are generously supported by **Brian Tucker**.

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