

MEDIA RELEASE
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**2026 AUSTRALIANS OF THE YEAR
FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA ANNOUNCED**

2026 Australian of the Year for South Australia - Katherine Bennell-Pegg (West Beach)
2026 Senior Australian of the Year for South Australia - Malcolm Benoy (Mount Osmond)
2026 Young Australian of the Year for South Australia - Chloe Wyatt-Jasper (Gawler South)
2026 Local Hero for South Australia - Ayesha Fariha Safdar (Adelaide)

Awards event livestreamed via australianoftheyear.org.au

The 2026 Australian of the Year Award recipients for South Australia have been announced at a ceremony in Adelaide this evening.

The recipients for South Australia will join those from the other states and territories for the national awards to be announced on 25 January 2026.

The 2026 Australian of the Year for South Australia is astronaut Katherine Bennell-Pegg.

Katherine Bennell-Pegg is making history as the first Australian to qualify as an astronaut under Australia's space program, opening pathways for others to follow.

Katherine graduated from Basic Astronaut Training in 2024 as part of a class of six trained by the European Astronaut Centre in Germany – the first international candidate to do so. She was initially chosen for the program from a field of over 22,500 applicants.

Katherine has harboured ambitions of becoming an astronaut since she was a young child. As a space engineer, she has advanced multiple space missions and technologies.

Alongside her career achievements, Katherine is an energetic champion for Australia's space program, regularly presenting to audiences of schoolchildren and industry leaders to inspire the next generation and create new opportunities.

Katherine, 40, is a genuine trailblazer in Australia's emerging space industry. With her determination and drive to succeed, she is a powerful example for young Australians.

Meteorological researcher Malcolm Benoy is the 2026 Senior Australian of the Year for South Australia.

Malcolm 'Mac' Benoy has made a significant contribution to climate change research in his role as a volunteer citizen scientist, helping to preserve valuable records and data relating to South Australia's meteorological history.

Over the past two decades, 78-year-old Mac has volunteered with the Bureau of Meteorology in South Australia, where he set up a citizen science group to record and preserve valuable hand-written meteorological records from the 19th century. Under Mac's astute guidance, the group has digitised over 90,000 synoptic charts and related documents, providing an invaluable research tool for modern-day climatologists.

International climate change and meteorological researchers have used the group's records to reconstruct historical weather patterns in the southern hemisphere, helping to better understand how the global climate is changing.

Mac's professionalism, enthusiasm and insight continue to guide the team of citizen scientists in its work to document and preserve critical weather data.

The 2026 Young Australian of the Year for South Australia is mental health advocate Chloe Wyatt-Jasper.

Chloe Wyatt-Jasper has applied her lived experience of trauma and mental health challenges to help other people facing similar issues. Chloe experienced a domestic violence family tragedy at a very young age and has lived with profound mental health conditions as a result. In speaking out about these challenges, Chloe hopes to help other people overcome the stigma often associated with mental health.

Chloe, 16, has spoken openly about her own challenges and advocated for greater support for people experiencing mental health issues. Her advocacy led her to be selected to take part in the South Australian Teen Parliament, where she successfully lobbied Premier Peter Malinauskas for \$5 million in funding for improved mental health services for young people.

Chloe also supports Backpacks 4 SA Kids that helps survivors of domestic violence by donating backpacks with essential items such as clothes and toiletries.

Community leader Ayesha Fariha Safdar is the 2026 Local Hero for South Australia.

Ayesha Safdar has dedicated herself to helping newly-arrived migrant and refugee women find their place in Australian society.

In 2010, Ayesha founded the Adelaide Pakistani Women's Association (APWA) to create a safe, inclusive space for Pakistani women adjusting to life in Australia. Today, the association works with women from all backgrounds, helping them to navigate their way through a new culture and acquire language skills, education and employment. Ayesha is empowering women to build their confidence and develop the skills they need to create a new life in Australia.

Under her leadership, the APWA runs cultural events, promotes small businesses run by women and creates education pathways for women by connecting them to training in childcare, nursing and community services.

Ayesha's tireless work in empowering women and building bridges between communities has been hugely influential in promoting social inclusion in South Australia and beyond.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the award recipients for South Australia.

"Katherine is making history and inspiring the next generation to follow her lead in Australia's space program; as a volunteer, Mac has ensured the safety of valuable Australian scientific history; at just 16, Chloe is changing perceptions and helping kids just like her; and Ayesha is a guiding light for women shaping new lives in our country," said Mark.

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards, visit australianoftheyear.org.au.

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PHOTOS: From the awards announcement event can be downloaded from this link (credit NADC/Salty Dingo): [SA Media Distribution photos - High res](#)