

2009 PEN KENEALLY AWARD

As the incoming president of Sydney PEN, I am honoured not only to be able to present the 2009 PEN Keneally Award; but to present it to such a significant writer as David Marr.

The Award was established in 2004 with the generous support of Tom Keneally AO and Random House Australia. It is named in honour of Keneally, life member of PEN and part of its Writers Advisory Panel. Every two years, the Award is given in reflection of Keneally's own contribution to freedom of expression in Australia, and of International PEN's charter of access to literature and fellowship between writers.

Sydney PEN's membership is now at a record high. This shows that more Australians than ever are informed about, and proactively committed to human rights, and particularly freedom of speech. Prompted by the efforts of the Writers In Prison committee chaired by Gaby Naher, 10% of the audience in each session of the Sydney Writers' Festival in May came forward to sign letters protesting the detention of international writers.

The Australian public has become increasingly aware of its own voice, and confident to stand up and be counted. Its escalating interest in the potential of the written word and language as vehicles of democracy, community and power is due in no small part to the work of David Marr.

The PEN Keneally Award has previously recognised Joesoeffsack and Frank Moorehouse AM. In 2009, Marr stood out from a diverse shortlist of writers as one whose contribution to the values of PEN has crossed biography, journalism, broadcasting, and community activism; and whose work has not only responded urgently to topical issues but has burned steadily over more than twenty years of writing.

Sydney PEN would like to thank Tom Keneally, Random House and Middletons for each making tonight's award possible, and to congratulate David Marr on his vigilant attention to this country's free enjoyment of creating and receiving information, insight, beauty and truth.

I'd like to welcome Tom Keneally to speak a little more about David's work and its impact.