

PNG stories win six Walkleys

THE MAINSTREAM Australian media has often ignored the Pacific Islands region. But in December 1998, when the Walkley Award winners were announced, no fewer than six categories were won by media people for work done in the region — most for items dealing with Papua New Guinea's tragic Aitape *tsunami* disaster in July.

Sean Dorney, the long time Australian Broadcasting Corporation correspondent in PNG, won the Radio News Reporting Walkley for his entries "PNG Tidal Wave 1-2-3-4"; Mark Davis and Peter McEvoy, who work for ABC TV's *Four Corners*, won two Walkleys — Best Current Affairs Feature and Best International report — for their documentary, "The Survivors' Story" dealing with how the Warapu people were readjusting to life; the Agence France-Presse duo, Sarah Stewart and Jack Taylor, won the Electronic Journalism Walkley for their coverage of the tsunami; and a photographer with *The Australian*; Patrick Hamilton, won the Best Feature Photograph Walkley for his shot of four children with amputated limbs playing in the rehabilitation ward at Wewak hospital.

The sixth 1998 Walkley awarded for a PNG story went to ABC TV News for "The Skate Tapes — showing secretly shot footage of PNG's Prime Minister, Bill Skate, allegedly authorising the payment of bribes and boasting of being the "Godfather" of Port Moresby's rascal gangs.

The previous year, 1997, *The Australian's* South Pacific correspondent, Mary-Louise O'Callaghan, won the Australian media industry's top journalism award, the Gold Walkley, for breaking the story of the Chan Government's hiring of the Sandline International mercenary group to try to crush the Bougainville rebels and reopen the Panguna copper mine. □

every two-and-a-half years since 1980.

This does not mean that those in charge in PNG have not tried to introduce repressive media laws. In 1987, the Government, then led by Paias Wingti, wanted to set up a Media Tribunal with powers to license the media, the licences to be reviewed every 12 months. Wingti's Communications Minister, Gabriel Ramoi, hired an Australian lawyer, Stuart Littlemore, to draft the necessary legislation. But the proposals met considerable resistance. The Catholic Church threatened to mobilise its one million followers in opposition. Ramoi