Despite DEATH THREATS, condemnation and LEGAL ACTION, AVN's Meryl Dorey just won't QUIT. Find out why on page 39.
Two mothers with opposite views but the same quest for information

TRACY HORDERN meets Meryl Dorey, the driven activist behind the controversial Australian Vaccination Network

Meeting Meryl Dorey, the anti-vaccine campaigner, was a stark reminder of the Australian Vaccination Network (AVN) coming under attack. I call her a reporter, not a son of merlin. But she is also the head of the AVN, a website, and a vocal activist for vaccination choice. It is through her program that she came to the Northern Rivers.

According to Dorey, she was an average conservative housewife - 'I was mainstream, I’m a farmer’s wife.' Then, the event that was set to change her life occurred. According to Dorey, her eldest son had an adverse reaction to his first routine vaccination.

"When he was two months old, I took him to a doctor for his DTp (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis) and oral polio vaccinations. I never questioned it - it was just something that parents did if they cared about their children," she says.

The events that followed set in motion a consultation to which Dorey’s health, her marriage, and her life, were connected. She started screaming within an hour or two after his vaccinations - and continued screaming, for about five or six hours straight.

Dorey describes her son developing deep spaces in reaction to the vaccines and asserts that he continues to be affected by his reaction to the drugs. "He’s a fantastic kid, but he’s not as well as she should be," she says.

For Dorey, it was the lack of available information that prompted her to establish the Australian Vaccination Network - "What I found was that I had to really search for information. It wasn’t available and that’s not fine," she says.

Dorey has championed her campaign for the past 15 years, often in the face of enormous opposition. There have been well-documented situations where children have died from whooping cough, the death was not only tragic, but was a watershed event for the voices of all sides of the vaccination debate.

According to Dorey, "Our greatest heartbreak is that we did not get any warning and yet this area has the highest rate of whooping cough in the state. We don’t know how many deaths occurred, but it was a watershed event for the voices of all sides of the vaccination debate."

Newly arrived on the Northern Rivers, Dorey and her partner, David McCaffrey, are only four weeks old when they died in March 2009 from whooping cough.

"It was not only tragic, but was a watershed event for the voices of all sides of the vaccination debate."

Dr Ingall responded with, "It's adults who are infected with pertussis who give it to children and infants. An infected adult can cough on a bench at a supermarket and the child sitting next to them can be infected."