

27th January 2020

Dear Heads of School/Principals/Headmasters & Headmistresses,

After numerous discussions with our members who are preparing to return their precious children to your care both in boarding and day school, ICPA QLD State Councillors would like to take a little of your time as we move into a new year. We acknowledge what a wonderful job Heads of Boarding and their amazing staff do in supporting our children at their term 'home away from home', however concern has been raised about the depth of understanding and knowledge of teaching staff in regard to the experiences the children will have had over the summer holidays.

The media has aired snippets of the drought but the reality of what is happening in family homes often goes untold. We would appreciate the opportunity to share with you some of the stories our members are living which may provide perspective for those unfamiliar with life on the land as well as understanding that the greatest thing that can be given to these children is compassion and understanding.

Families on the land, parents and children of all ages, have been living this drought now for months and in some cases years. Families with livestock have been facing -

In the paddock...

- feeding - a hot, dusty, long process which can take hours on a daily basis;
- carting water in tankers to fill water troughs, or doing water runs to ensure water is available for stock;
- lifting cattle that don't eat and then seeing them pass away, or having to put them down when there is no hope;
- laying poly pipe to try and extend water supplies into other paddocks; and
- catching and taking home calves whose mothers are too weak to feed them

In the family home...

- feeding poddy calves;
- enduring numerous dust storms and the constant dust and endless cleaning up;
- making choices about the need to turn a tap on to have a wash;
- using "wipes" to clean benches as there isn't enough water to dampen cloths;
- recycling every drop of water possible;
- not having their clothes or sheets washed on a regular basis;
- having quick showers and not washing their hair;
- living with continual dust and flies;
- listening to and feeling the conversations about how the budget has to be stretched to pay the feed bill to keep the stock alive; and
- looking daily at a dead, brown landscape with not even a green garden to offer a glimmer of hope

Whilst families who rely on cropping may not have the animal welfare situation to cope with each day, they have their very own unique challenges.

- massive dust storms blowing away precious top soil;
- no prospect of income for at least another 9-10 months;
- ongoing budget discussions as the family try to work with managing machinery repayments;
- for some the angst of watching commodity prices and the uncertainty of whether contracts will be filled; and
- idleness on the property which can have a detrimental flow on effect for mental health and wellbeing

As families are making preparations to return their children to school, parents are also having to support and reassure the children that Mum and Dad will be okay at home and that the work will get done without the extra helpful hands that have made life a little easier over the past couple of months. Time has been taken to reassure them that, as parents, education is a choice that has been made so that the children can be just that, children. For many there is also the promises that wherever possible they will be visited during the term and if not there is still the telephone.

For some children going back to boarding and school will in fact be a relief as they can return to some form of normality, with routines, friends, showers, water and conversation about something other than the daily work load. It is at school that parents want them to see that they have opportunities and hope.

There are a lot of children who did not have a “holiday” as such with Christmas Day proving no exception - looking after stock was a daily chore no matter the date. It is concern for the mental health and wellbeing of these children that we ask you to please pass this letter onto your teaching staff. Please encourage these staff to have conversations with their boarding students should they wish to, in the classrooms, with their peers, so that our school communities have the opportunity to fully understand what life looks like for them at this moment in time. These children need to know that despite other recent devastations across the country, they have not been forgotten and that they are fully supported by their teachers and peers.

ICPA Qld State Council is always grateful for the amazing support that each and every one of our Queensland boarding schools provides to our organisation, as well as to our families. We know that our children are in very good hands and that their mental health and wellbeing is at the forefront of many conversations at the current time. Please feel free to get in touch with me if you have any queries in regard to the content of this letter. We appreciate your time.

We look forward to seeing many of you at our State Conference in Roma in June, hopefully after some widespread rainfall has changed the current climate.

Kindest Regards,

Tammie Irons

ICPA Qld President

