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Submission to the Drought Program Review

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association Qld Inc. (ICPA Qld) advocates for equitable access to quality educational opportunities for children in rural and remote areas. ICPA Qld represents 46 branches, comprising over 1200 families throughout rural Queensland.

ICPA Qld is a voluntary apolitical parent organisation and is the only community based parent group with interests in all sectors and levels of education – state schools, independent, church or boarding schools, early childhood and care through to tertiary education and all methods used to facilitate access to that education.

ICPA Qld welcomes the opportunity to provide a Submission to the Drought Program Review.

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE FOR EDUCATIONAL EXPENSES

With 57% of Queensland currently drought declared, and some areas in the 7th year of drought, the education of many rural and remote students continues to be compromised. Drought places significant pressure on all sectors of rural and remote Queensland. Whilst current drought subsidies ease the burden for graziers by way of assistance with livestock and primary production related expenses, there is presently no help available for families living in these areas who are unable to pay boarding school expenses due to the financial impost of drought.

Boarding School expenses result in large sums of money leaving the district in which it was generated. This capital is then unavailable for investing back into small business and community, which can place the viability of businesses in jeopardy during years of poor income, especially in times of drought. A drought subsidy payment assisting with educational costs would serve to alleviate this issue and allow money to remain in the district to continue to support local communities.

Figures show a very worrying population decline in rural and remote areas. This can be attributed to families moving out of the area once their eldest child has to access secondary schooling. The family often leaves the community, which results in primary school siblings being taken out of the local school system also, which places these schools at significant risk of closure due to declining enrolments.

In the last 33 years, recipients of the Qld Department of Education's tuition allowance - Living Away from Home Allowance Scheme (LAFHAS) - have reduced from approx. 2697 recipients in 1985 to just over 1476 in 2017. The subsidy is paid to geographically isolated students to assist with tuition fees at boarding school. The steady decline of 1221 students claiming this allowance is a clear indication of just how many families are vacating small communities to access more affordable educational options.

An equally worrying alternative for many rural and remote families is that the mother and children will move to a larger centre to access schooling and the father will be left on the property, essentially splitting the family unit for extended periods of time. This obviously puts untenable strain on all members of the families. Mental health issues are an increasing concern in rural and remote locations. Financial burdens

can be debilitating and all consuming, especially in times of severe and long term drought. When one's children's education is at stake and a cause of constant worry and angst, the pressure can be monumental. Financial assistance during these times of extreme difficulty would provide salvation for many struggling families.

SUGGESTED SOLUTION

As part of the 2016-17 State Budget, the Department of Agriculture announced an allocation of \$3.656m to LAFHAS recipients residing in drought declared shires or an Individually Droughted Property (IDP). Payments were administered by the Department of Education and equated to \$1250 per student per year in 2016 and 2017 with the remaining surplus of \$279 per student paid in 2018.

These additional payments made a tremendous difference to drought affected families. Regrettably, this funding has been exhausted and, as far as ICPA Qld is aware, no further allocation was included in subsequent State Budgets. The re-establishment of this supplement would be a healthy investment in the sustainability of communities during this, and subsequent droughts. The structure for distribution has been established, demonstrating cross-collaboration between Departments and ensuring funds went to where they were needed.

ICPA QLD SEEKS: A permanent drought assistance subsidy, triggered by drought declarations, which is available for geographically isolated students who live away from home to access their education, during and in the recovery period of drought

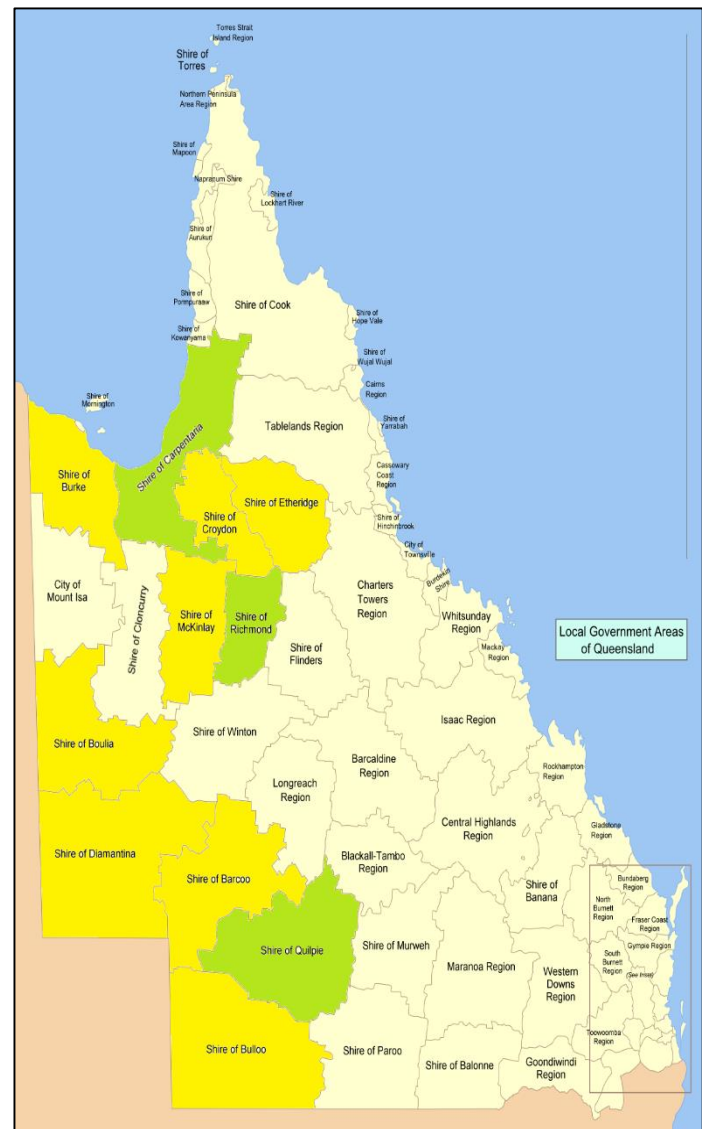
BACKGROUND - AVAILABLE SECONDARY EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND

There are currently eight Queensland Shires which do not have a high school, and a further three Shires have no schooling beyond Year 10 (refer to Table 1). All but 4 of these shires are currently drought declared, and have been since at least 2014, with many in their 7th year of being drought declared. Students residing in these shires have a choice between attending boarding school to access secondary schooling or studying at home via distance education. For many parents and students, a lack of social interaction and extra-curricular opportunities make Distance Education undesirable.

Table 1:
Availability of Secondary Schooling in Queensland Shires

Shire	Size (km2)	Communities	P-10 School	P-12, 7-12 Schools
Diamantina	94823	2	0	0
Croydon	29578	2	0	0
Barcoo	62001	3	0	0
Bulloo	73807	3	0	0
Burke	40126	2	0	0
Boulia	61102	2	0	0
McKinlay	40880	5	0	0
Etheridge	39332	7	0	0
Quilpie	67633	3	1	0
Richmond	26602	1	1	0
Carpentaria	64373	2	1	0
Winton	53935	3	0	1
Flinders	41538	4	0	1
Paroo	47714	4	0	1
Cook	106188	13	0	2
Barcaldine	53677	5	2	1
Cloncurry	48113	4	0	1
Longreach	40638	4	0	1
Murweh	40742	3	0	1
Charters Towers	68388	4	0	4 (3 private)
Isaac	58862	10		4
Emerald	59884	19	1	5
Maranoa	58830	9	3	2
Mt Isa	43348	2	0	2

Table 2:
Map of Shires with no High Schools



- 8 Shires in Queensland do not have a secondary school.
- An additional 3 Shires do not have schooling beyond Year 10.

Parents who have no other choice than to send their children to boarding school and other education facilities must be able to do so without being financially crippled during times of drought. Otherwise, we will continue to see services like local schools, businesses and bus runs cease to operate. As families depart to find more affordable options in larger centres, they take vibrancy and potential with them, leaving an emptiness that is very hard to replace and a potential future generation that will never return. A lack of young people in rural and remote communities leave an aging population, which severely hinders the ability to access innovation, skilled workforces and general development and prosperity. This has become evident in many parts of rural Queensland over the last few decades. Without targeted strategies to address this issue in times of drought, this degradation will almost certainly continue.

Drought decimates communities. One of the biggest long term priorities in ongoing drought is the retention of population. Nothing has community members leave more than a threat to their children's education. Providing extra assistance in times of drought for boarding school fees is a proactive approach which will ensure retention of families, and the long term survival of rural and remote communities and the agricultural industry they support.

ICPA Qld appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the Drought Review.