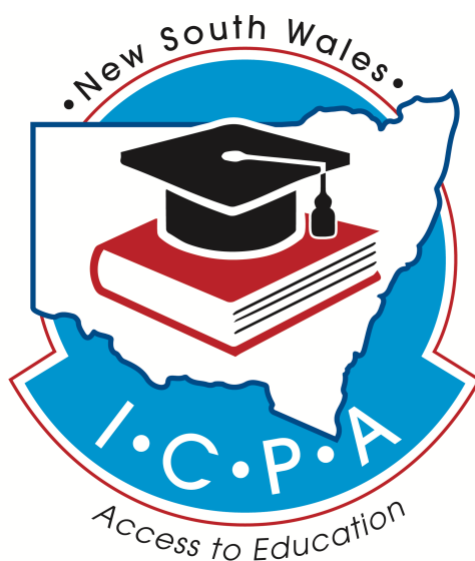


# **The Isolated Children's Parents' Association New South Wales Inc.**



## **Communications Issues Paper OCTOBER 2020**

**Mrs Claire Butler  
ICPA-NSW President  
The Vale  
Balranald NSW 2715**

**Ph 03 5020 6871**

[NSWPresident@icpa.com.au](mailto:NSWPresident@icpa.com.au)

**Mrs Deborah Castle  
ICPA-NSW Secretary  
Knockalong  
Rankins Springs NSW 2669**

**Ph 02 6966 1267**

[NSWSecretary@icpa.com.au](mailto:NSWSecretary@icpa.com.au)

## INTRODUCTION

ICPA-NSW is a voluntary non-profit organisation that has its roots firmly embedded in rural, remote and regional areas across the state. ICPA-NSW believes that all students, irrespective of where they live, are entitled to equity of access to education that they require to participate, to their full potential in the social, economic, political and cultural life of a community.

WHATEVER the Educational/Learning Institute is, ICPA-NSW will advocate for:

- Mobile and rural preschools
- Regional primary and secondary schools
- Small rural and remote schools
- Schools of Distance Education
- Non-government schools
- Government schools
- Agricultural Colleges
- University
- TAFE

ICPA-NSW State Council will provide information, advice and support through a variety of portfolios:

- Early Childhood
- Rural Schools
- Distance Education and VISE
- Boarding Schools
- Agricultural High Schools and Hostels
- Tertiary Education
- Special Education
- Communications
- Allowances
- Travel

The following pages highlight current issues with some recommendations that ICPA-NSW State Council are advocating for on behalf of its members across the state.

COVID-19 has caused considerable challenges to State Council and our members, the border closures have had a significant impact of the movement of students who travel interstate to access an education and the 2020 year of advocacy has definitely looked different to 'normal' years!

## Communications

### *Mobile Blackspot Program*

**RECOMMENDATION: That the NSW Government and all telecommunication companies continue to expand mobile service coverage in rural and remote blackspot areas and that rural and remote schools remain a priority.**

Round Four of the Mobile Blackspot Program acknowledged areas with specific priority. Of particular interest to ICPA-NSW was the announcement of small cell towers at Clare and Naradhan Public Schools under this program. ICPA-NSW would like to thank our stakeholders, in particular, CWA of NSW and NSW Farmers, for working collaboratively with Telstra and with the NSW Government to ensure that Schools are acknowledged as areas of priority. ICPA-NSW is encouraged by the NSW Government's announcement of its own Mobile blackspot program under the Connecting Country Communities fund.

It is important that schools are successful in future rounds of the mobile blackspot program as some remote schools are finding it difficult to connect to the internet for learning resources and undertaking administration work in the office.

These schools are often evacuation points in times of emergency, and therefore it is paramount that they have mobile coverage.

It is of continued concern that remote families remain disadvantaged. Isolated families often do not have the choice of landline or mobile. Rural businesses are continuing to use the mobile phone and internet for communication and business transactions and monitoring, and many do not have internet access in order to do this. It is very important that the black spot program reaches these remote areas because of the lack of communication for remote families. Often the only form of telecommunication is the landline at the homestead. Having only this one form of communication can be life threatening and certainly disadvantaging for businesses.

The current services are often expensive with a poor and limiting connection.

ICPA-NSW sees value in the implementation of small cell towers in communities that do not have the commercial viability of a larger tower, however there needs to be adequate community consultation.

## *Satellite schools transferring to NBN SkyMuster Satellite*

**RECOMMENDATION: That the NSW Department of Education give a timeframe as to when TP1 and TP2 satellite schools will be transferred onto the NBN Sky Muster Satellite to ensure secure and consistent connection.**

Currently Satellite Schools are experiencing very slow internet on the satellite provided by the department. Some days download speeds are only 1mb/sec which makes any form of online learning ineffective. At the remaining Satellite Schools the satellite internet connection is unsatisfactory. The internet connection is slow and at times unstable, which inhibits the students and staff accessing essential resources and data.

In the classroom, a number of programs requiring an internet connection are unable to be accessed due to slow internet speeds. The Connected Classroom equipment is vital technology for a small, isolated school and requires an efficient internet connection. Students and staff regularly participate in video conferences to access a variety of learning experiences, competitions, professional development and meetings. There is a significant delay from the school's end, making it difficult to converse with other participants. A warning symbol is often displayed on the screen indicating a poor connection, requiring the school to attempt to dial back in. Programs are often played first to stop buffering and it is difficult to participate in music lessons due to the 'beat' being delayed.

Schools have been unable to participate in the NAPLAN Online trials. The Connecting Country Schools project has improved wireless connectivity at the school, but this will not improve internet speeds.

Royal Far West is delivering Telehealth services to remote schools and for the schools on the satellite, the connection is unable to cope. Teachers are working around this issue by connecting children using broadband via mobile phone connections, but this is unachievable for schools without mobile connectivity who rely solely on internet.

ICPA-NSW requests that the Department of Education provide a date as to when remote schools will be transferring to better satellite internet such as the NBN. It is to be noted that many families in these areas have become connected to NBN and have noticed significantly improved internet speeds and improved reliability.

## *SkyMuster Plus*

**RECOMMENDATION: That stakeholders assist ICPA-NSW to promote Skymuster Plus.**

ICPA-NSW is pleased that the introduction of Skymuster Plus has resulted in the unmetering of data for many of the applications used by rural and remote children. The timing of Skymuster Plus greatly assisted rural and remote students who had to return home to learn earlier this year because of the pandemic. Rural and remote businesses and remote education have benefitted from the unlimited data allowances for essential activities. NBN has assisted with the unmetering of important sites and activity for students and have considered the cost to rural and remote families.

There are still many families who rely on outdated mobile broadband for internet and inform ICPA-NSW that “they can’t get NBN.” ICPA-NSW seeks the assistance of telecommunications providers to steer families in the direction of NBNCO if they cannot provide an NBN service as there are other providers who can assist with NBN Skymuster Plus.

---

## *Telstra call centres*

**RECOMMENDATION: That rural and remote customers have access to Australian based call centres, which gives these customers a direct line as a point of contact.**

Telstra Call Centres are the only access points for rural and remote customers as there are no accessible physical agencies. Every time a rural caller rings it is to a call centre. The overseas call centre is not acceptable for customers in rural areas of Australia because of the geographic and environmental issues. The overseas centres are not able to help the customer. ICPA-NSW would be pleased if Telstra could expedite the receiving of all calls to the call centres in Australia, as a priority.

---

## *Small Cell Tower*

**RECOMMENDATION: ICPA-NSW would like Telstra to provide a timeframe for when the small cell tower at the Clare Public School will be installed.**

ICPA-NSW is aware that there are land possession issues relating to the land where the Telstra small cell tower is to put at the Clare Public School. Members in that community are keen to see the establishment of this tower. Thank you for providing a timeline on when work will commence and finish.

---

oOo

---