

## **FEDERAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

**Alana Moller**

Distinguished guests, Federal Life Members, fellow ICPA members and friends it is with great pleasure and pride that I have the opportunity to present the Federal President's report, for the second year in a row under unique circumstances not before seen at an ICPA Federal Conference. It has been a year plagued with ups and downs and challenges. Even as I stand here today I do not know if we have done anything right, however I take solace in the support we have and the fact that right now, we are all doing our best in an uncertain world. To all of you listening today, may I thank you for your support and encouragement along the way. I assure you that none of you have gone unnoticed and we have endeavoured to do our best to include you all in our conference.

I began writing this report months ago, indeed before the postponed conference in July, so it has been quite long in the composing. I put it aside and just picked it up again while at minischool a couple of weeks ago. For those who don't know, minischool is where we take our distance education children to their school where they get to do lessons with their teachers and peers, play and enjoy some time being a normal school kid. The Mums attend meetings, training, school drop offs and pick ups and get to do a little bit of socialising and shopping.

It is these weeks that I garner my inspiration from. These are the weeks I don't need a motivational quote because inspiration and motivation surround me. And it is also these weeks that reiterate to me why, 50 years ago, Mrs Patricia Edgley made a decision to give geographically isolated children and their families a voice. A voice to ensure their educational needs were met and maintained. And to do this she knew we had to unite, because as the theme of this conference reflects, we are indeed "Stronger Together". How indebted we are to Mrs Edgley and all of our ICPA forebearers for their foresight and wisdom, for bringing our great organisation to fruition and promoting such an important message which still rings true today.

Of course, it is impossible to report on the activities of Federal Council this last twelve months without beginning with the online conference in August last year and culminating with our first ever hybrid event commencing today, all as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. As pandemic conditions continue to be so fluid, it is difficult to predict what is ahead; however, ICPA Australia has been and will continue to ensure our geographically isolated students are remembered and supported. While Federal Council have addressed the ongoing impacts which have arisen as a result of the pandemic over the past twelve months, we have also been focused on the ongoing barriers for geographically isolated students accessing and obtaining equitable educational opportunities and outcomes, continuing to emphasise that these students are a unique disadvantage group who need specialised and targeted assistance and support across all portfolio areas.

The 35 motions carried at the online Federal Conference in August 2020 were actioned early on in our council year. The Portfolio Motion Update outlining the progress of these motions was sent to all members in March and is available on our website. Despite the 2020 Motions being limited to only those issues not already in policy due to constraints with the online format, a variety of other actions and developments have occurred across portfolios. You will hear from some of our portfolio leaders over this conference, however in the interest of time we are unable to include all portfolio presentations in this year's program. There is a full report for each portfolio in the conference booklet and in the documents tab on the website.

The key activity for the Boarding/Hostels/Second Home portfolio, along with continued efforts in regard to the Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance has been to advocate on behalf of families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for geographically isolated boarding students who

board interstate. We welcomed the outcome from efforts made by the Minister for Regional Education Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie of the National Cabinet agreeing to a National Code for Boarding Students. Activity in this space is ongoing, at Federal and State level and may I take this opportunity to commend all of ICPA state Councils for their dedication and collaboration on this issue. Mrs Nikki Macqueen will update conference further before our Boarding/Hostels/Second Home motions.

Communications continues to be an area where developments and changes can occur almost daily. The Regional Tech Hub was a welcome development and Federal Council have worked closely with Hub staff and are part of the Regional Tech Hub Stakeholder Reference Group. We also wish to remind members of other new initiatives in communications, including enhancements to Sky Muster Plus satellite services. We recently contributed to the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review, both through a consultation and submission and look forward to the outcomes of this review. Federal Council continues to maintain close relationships with key Communications groups, including Telstra and nbn who we will hear from tomorrow.

The Curriculum Portfolio has continued to work closely as a key stakeholder of Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and took part in the consultation on the Australian Curriculum Review on behalf of our members as we know it is essential that we ensure rural and remote contexts are considered and represented in the curriculum. We will keep members abreast of further developments in this space. We are also ensuring that rural and remote students are remembered as changes to NAPLAN are considered by Education Ministers across the country.

Early Childhood Education and Care continues to be occupied with highlighting that a blanket approach to educational and child care issues, when applied to rural and remote situations, is often inappropriate and unworkable and that specialised models and programs are needed to address the unique disadvantages and needs associated with caring for and educating children in geographically isolated locations. We have been concentrating on the request for an expansion of the Assistance for Isolated Children for 3-4 year olds studying an approved distance education program and the need for surety of funding for mobile playgroups and have been appealing to the government to implement recommendations made in the Report from the Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments. While we cannot report there has been any movement in this regard, we were ecstatic to receive news recently that the transitional provisions for remote and very remote In Home Care educators would be extended for another two years until December 2023, a welcome recognition by the Federal Minister for Education and Youth Alan Tudge MP of the unique circumstances faced in these locations. We thank the Department for their representation on this matter and also for their willingness to understand the experiences of our families.

In the Distance Education Portfolio, the key focus this past year has been to raise the profile of geographically isolated distance education families and to reinforce our Distance Education Teaching Allowance advocacy. ICPA (Aust) embarked on an awareness campaign, declaring 1 December 2020 as our inaugural Geographically Isolated Distance Education (GIDE) Day, to honour the ongoing plight of geographically isolated families who must educate their children at home at all times and particularly the essential role of the tutor in geographically isolated distance education. We received positive responses and support from a range of individuals and other organisations and thank members for their involvement in the initiative. We look forward to continuing to hold GIDE Day annually and hope that many of you will join us in raising the profile of our GIDE families.

In the area of Rural Schools and School Travel, our focus areas have been on the topics of the National Schools Chaplaincy Program (NSCP), the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) and of course issues surrounding geographically isolated student travel, with continued calls for a student's

fares allowance to be incorporated in the Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance. We welcomed positive developments in regard to the School Chaplaincy with confirmation that the program would be continuing and the news in February 2021 that there would be an increase by 50% to the current Parliament and Civics Education Rebates.

Medicare rebates for telehealth continue to be a key Specific Education Needs focus, especially in light of pandemic developments in this space. We have also continued our association with the National Rural Health Alliance. A key issue for our members has been the need for mental health support and resources for our young people. With this in mind, Federal Council has collated a number of resources on our website for members to access, including information regarding services available to rural and remote families. The web address for these resources is shown on this slide.

We continue to ensure members are represented in the Tertiary and Training space and take every opportunity to ensure members stories are heard, areas of concern are addressed and members are made aware of any developments in this area. A number of positives have transpired in this area this past year and we will continue to seek measures that help rural & remote students attain the level of tertiary or training education they wish. Portfolio leaders, Mrs Kate Thompson and Mrs Kim Hughes will be providing updates prior to their respective portfolio motions.

We have also continued to raise the need for a Rural Hardship Education Fund where possible and welcome the development of the National Recovery and Resiliency Agency, with hopes that a focus nationally on the need for drought and other disaster support will filter through into education. Federal Council has invested much time this past year in updating and creating resources and documents both for our members and to assist with our advocacy. We continued to make updates to the policy documents which had not been reviewed since 2014 and have given our Briefing Papers a thorough and eye-catching makeover.

I especially wish to draw our member's attention to the recently released Federal Allowances document, where we have collated a thorough list of the federal allowances available to assist members. We are hoping this evolving document will serve as a valuable resource for families requiring assistance.

Perhaps the most enormous undertaking involving hundreds of volunteer hours, immense commitment and amazing collaboration by representatives from all ICPA Councils this past year has been the development an ongoing refinement of the new website. The result is an engaging and dynamic online presence for our organisation, providing ICPA history, contacts, news and updated documents and other information, which I am confident all members will be proud of. My absolute gratitude and admiration goes to the group of wonderful weavers who worked on this project together. If you haven't already, I urge you to take a look!

I also must acknowledge the financial assistance provided by the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) through a grant to assist in completing this project. ICPA receives financial and other support from so many sources, including other organisations, members, branches and individuals. To all ICPA volunteers, your contributions are recognised and valued and again thank you to our many generous sponsors who have contributed to Federal Conference this year. I would also like to once again acknowledge the generosity of the McDonald family and the Four Seasons Company, in naming ICPA as a beneficiary of a percentage of the sales from ZM nutrition blocks for cattle, released in honour of beef industry leader, the late Zanda McDonald. It is with a great sense of pride that we are a part of this initiative.

As I mentioned in my welcome, the conference also would not have been possible without the team at the Australian Boarding Schools Association, we could not have done this without them and their continued support of ICPA across Australia is remarkable.

To the State Councils across Australia, your amazing efforts do not go unnoticed and whether it is the website, or key advocacies on behalf of our members, namely this year the no borders for boarders campaign, it continues to be an absolute delight and privilege to work with you all. While there have been seldom opportunities to come together in person this past year, we do amazingly have representatives from every state council on the conference floor and Federal Councillors were able to attend all state conferences this year. All Councils are made of a dynamic and inspiring group of people whose dedication to achieving the aims of our organisation and I can assure members that the work never wanes.

All ICPA Members, it has been a privilege to be entrusted to represent you in the role of Federal President and work alongside my fellow Federal Councillors this year. How blessed I feel to have the opportunity to work with such an inspirational team and I thank them for their hard work and commitment. The COVID-19 pandemic hampered our ability to come together in person, however it did not hinder our capacity to continue our work, with Federal Councillors participating virtually in meetings, consultations, forums, delegations and other activities. In fact this was an opportunity to give a glimpse into our worlds, with Councillors participating from their home schoolrooms, sitting on the windowsill of their house to get internet connection, rushing into meetings after loading cattle, shearing sheep, feeding poddies or harvesting crops and generally dedicating themselves to ICPA in amongst the hustle and bustle of their daily lives.

Fortunately, there have been some opportunities to come together in 2021, with a two day hybrid Federal Council meeting in February, with 7 councillors together in Hobart, and 6 others participating via Zoom and in May for the first time since October 2019, we held face to face meetings and delegations in Canberra, a welcome opportunity to work together as well as attend 23 meetings with Ministers, Members of Parliament and Senators along with departmental meetings to reiterate the needs of our geographically isolated students.

With submissions continuing to be the key method from which the federal government seeks feedback, Federal Council have also completed a number of submissions across portfolios since August 2020 including:

- 2021 -2022 Pre-Budget Submission
- Consumer Safeguards Review Part C – Choice and Fairness
- National Framework for Interstate Boarding Students
- NDIS Community Consultation on Supporting young children and their families 2021
- Review of Disability Standards for Education
- Inquiry into adult literacy and its importance April 2021
- NQF Review April 2021
- Review of the Regional Schooling Resource Standard Loadings
- Australian Curriculum Review Consultation
- Quality Initial Teacher Education Review
- 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review

Sadly we farewell several Federal Councillors this year, Nikki Macqueen, Kristen Coggan and Jo Camilleri, who have all contributed immensely to the achievements of ICPA during their time on Council. It has been such a joy not only working with you but also becoming their friend and I wish them all well as they move on, please don't be strangers. Suzanne, Sally and Lisa, after 4 years of

utmost dedication and diligence in their respective executive roles will be taking on other roles within Federal Council. I remind everyone listening that new faces are always welcome to join the team, so please consider nominating for Federal Council today. Nomination forms are available on your table here at conference or on the website and can be handed to the minutes table or emailed to the Federal Conference email address by the beginning of afternoon tea today.

Although at the beginning I said I didn't need one, I do love a good quote, so I am going to end with one. Not from a famous politician or a celebrity or motivational speaker, but from one of my daughters, for ultimately it is my daughters who are the reason I am on this journey. Zarah, taught by me for primary school, headed off to boarding school at the start of 2020, only to return shortly later to do school with me again due to the pandemic, made it clear she was not happy "Mum, it's not that you're a bad teacher it is just that the teachers at school are so much better". If that is not enough motivation for me to keep on with the ICPA legacy, then what is?

As I draw to a close, may I once again wish for you all a momentous and memorable Conference experience, I certainly find that like minischools, Conferences are an opportunity to garner inspiration and motivation from those who surround me. Though it has not panned out as we had originally planned and we are so disappointed to not have everyone together in person to celebrate 50 years of our great organisation, I hope that everyone remembers that being geographically isolated does not mean you are alone.