

## **FEDERAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2022**

**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, as I complete my third year as ICPA Federal President, yet my first fully face to face conference. To all of you here, I know how challenging these past few years have been for all of us, from the pandemic to the weather and everything in between and I thank you all for joining us over the coming days to ensure the voices of our geographically isolated children are heard, because as we all know, they should not be condemned to an inferior education because their families live and work in rural and remote Australia.

Theodore Roosevelt once said "Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing" and once again I feel humbly grateful to have been afforded the opportunity to have continued to work hard as part of the ICPA Federal Council team, work which is most certainly worth doing.

As we commenced the second half century of this great organisation, despite distance and geographical isolation, the 2021-2022 Federal Council has once again proven that passion and dedication to achieving ICPA's goal of educational equity for our children remains strong. While the days have been short, the task list has been long for Federal Council since our postponed 2021 Federal Conference held in November last year. Following the Conference we hit the ground running, with all motions actioned before the end of the year. This was no mean feat, the stats show just how much was achieved in such a short timeframe!

The pandemic has continued to have impacts upon our members and their children, with boarding being at the coalface of this, as demonstrated by the 4 motions we have this year in regard to boarding and COVID. We know 2021 saw a myriad of issues arise for interstate boarders, which continued right through until the end of the year and 2022 commenced with further heartbreaking and confronting stories of unfair and inequitable directives imposed on already disadvantaged geographically isolated boarding children, as the country continued to negotiate the ongoing pandemic. There was a concerted effort towards alleviating these challenges with ICPA (Aust) working in conjunction with then Minister for Regional Education Senator the Honourable Bridget McKenzie, State Councils and the Australian Boarding Schools Association.

Come what may, Federal Council maintains our commitment to addressing impacts of COVID on the education of our geographically isolated children, however we have also spent this council term focused on the ongoing barriers for geographically isolated students, emphasising that they are a unique disadvantage group who need specialised and targeted assistance and support across all portfolio areas.

The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance continues to be a core focus, sitting across the Boarding/Hostels/Second Home, Distance Education and Early Childhood Education and Care portfolios, including the need for the Allowance to be increased to reflect the exponential growth in educational expenses, along with requests for a separate category for geographically isolated students within the AIC to ensure their unique needs are recognised and met. We also continue to call for an expansion of criteria, with particular

emphasis on including 3-4 year olds undertaking approved distance education early childhood education programs.

Communications as always has been an eventful portfolio, with the key focus on sourcing affordable internet connection solutions for transient families working in remote areas, as well as maintenance and enhancement of existing internet and telephone services. In the Curriculum portfolio focus has been on the Australian Curriculum Review and changes to NAPLAN. Federal Council has also continued in earnest its Geographically Isolated Distance Education (GIDE) awareness campaign and the request for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA). As well we have continued to seek improvements in the space of early childhood education and care, particularly in relation to In Home Care and Mobile Playgroups. At the forefront for the Specific Education Needs portfolio, access to telehealth, early intervention services and mental health resources and support have been our priority topics. For the Tertiary and Training portfolios the Tertiary Access Payment, Youth Allowance and Living Away From Home Allowance (LAFHA) topics have been on the agenda.

This is just a snippet of the work of our Federal Portfolio teams and throughout the Conference you will hear an update from all Portfolios. The full reports of portfolio activities, developments and other information are in the Conference booklet.

The Federal Election Campaign and caretaker mode earlier this year, while meaning we were unable to actively work with the federal government and departments, enabled us an opportunity to reiterate some of our key long-term advocacies, as well as other topics across media and other platforms. We used the six-week campaign to specifically focus on the six topics which had also been included in our pre-budget submission. These included:

1. An increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance.
2. AIC for 3–4-year-old geographically isolated children accessing an approved distance education early learning program.
3. A Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA).
4. Assured funding for rural and remote Mobile Early Childhood Services.
5. An increase to the Commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) for apprentices/trainees.
6. The establishment of a Rural Hardship Education Fund (RHEF).

All of our portfolios and advocacy are important and picking out a small few is almost like choosing a favourite child and so of course we also ensured that where possible other topics were raised. Immediately following the election and appointment of the new cabinet we have made contact with MPs and Senators, including Education Minister, Hon Jason Clare MP, Assistant Minister for Education, Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm, Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services and Anne Aly MP, Minister for Early Childhood Education and Minister for Youth to familiarise them with ICPA and share with them our full suite of briefing papers. We have welcomed a number of responses to our correspondence and ICPA looks forward to working with the new government and engaging with as many representatives as soon as possible. It was especially pleasing to receive the recorded address to our Conference from Assistant Minister for Education Senator the Honourable Anthony Chisholm which we heard earlier.

In December 2021, the appointment of the Hon Fiona Nash to the role of Regional Education Commissioner was a valuable development for ICPA. We are thrilled and tremendously

grateful that the Commissioner has been able to participate in our Conference, and Federal Council looks forward to working closely with her in the future. I once again thank the Commissioner for addressing our Conference today.

Across all portfolios, ICPA Federal Council has continued to participate in a variety of consultations, meetings and submission opportunities this council year. We have also endeavoured to maintain and strengthen links with Services Australia, the former Department of Education, Skills and Employment, now the Department of Education and Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and the Department of Social Services in addition to other key departments, with regular meetings scheduled and direct lines of contact to ensure members messages can be relayed to those who are at the frontline to address them. May I take this opportunity to acknowledge those representing these Departments who are joining us throughout Conference.

Federal Council also maintains relationships with many organisations, stakeholders and groups who support us and I acknowledge and thank them for their ongoing support and collaboration and a particular mention to all of those who have assisted with this conference.

While much of this collaboration over the past three years has been virtual, in 2022, Federal Council has finally had the opportunity to meet with some of these groups face to face again, including the National Farmers Federation, the National Rural Women's Coalition and the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network. We have also had members of Federal Council attend all state conferences this year and have been thrilled to be a part of celebratory anniversary events held in New South Wales, South Australia, the Northern Territory and online with Western Australia. My personal highlight though, was to be in Bourke, the birthplace of ICPA, celebrating 50 years with the founding President, Mr Wally Mitchell, such a momentous and historic occasion that I felt so very privileged and humbled to be a part of.

In May, Kim Hughes and myself attended the first full joint councils face to face meeting since February 2020 in Canberra, an enjoyable, inspiring and motivating get together which reiterated how important it is for us all to not only work together, but to learn from each other and encourage each other. It is an absolute pleasure to work with each State Council and I truly admire their continued endeavours and dedication.

Following the joint councils meeting, Federal Council took the opportunity to meet as a team in Canberra for the first time since the 2021 Conference, to get to know each other and work together in person, as well as finally pinning Anna, Ali, Naomi and Laura! Over three days Federal Council covered a substantial amount of ICPA business, but in particular focussing on strategies for ensuring our advocacy is heard to achieve our goal of educational equity for our geographically isolated children. May also once again acknowledge 4 Seasons Company for their continued support through the ZM cattle lick blocks initiatives. This has helped Federal Council to assist Branches to come to Conference.

What I would like to add though is that despite only having one chance to get together in our Federal Council term, may I pay tribute to the 14 Federal Councillors for all they have managed to accomplish in the 9 months since conference – not only actioning the motions from last year, but also continued efforts to represent our members and raise the topics that matter most. I want them to know that I am very proud to count myself amongst them and I look forward to what the next twelve months will bring for Team Federal Council. If I can add an extra small personal comment, it is difficult to find the words to describe my deep

indebtedness to these illustrious ladies, who have supported me, in ICPA business and personally, given me strength, optimism and friendship, this past 9 months, and I only hope that I have provided for them support and strength in equal measure. We will be farewelling the tremendous trio of Jane O'Brien, Lisa Slade and Sally Sullivan from Federal Council at the end of the Conference. ICPA will always be far better off for having these ladies on our side. Of course it will not be goodbye, but instead "see you later".

It is with regret that we have two farewells to make this year from our extended ICPA team as well. After many years in the role of Pedals Editor and Publisher, the time has come for Raelene Hall to move on, leaving behind her a legacy that will not be forgotten. Raelene, my heartfelt gratitude and admiration to you for your extraordinary commitment to ICPA. Another incredibly dedicated ICPA stalwart, Mrs Julia Materne is also stepping down from her Archivist role this year after decades in the position, a remarkable effort! Federal Council feels immensely grateful and fortunate to have outstanding individuals ready to take on these roles, along with a new Membership Officer following conference, when these off-Council positions are appointed. ICPA (Aust) could not continue to function without the support and hard work of our behind the scenes extras and I thank all of those who help us in any way to keep all parts of our machine working.

While I am acknowledging the people behind the scenes, I digress from ICPA business for a moment, to make a special mention of Federal Council's beloved families, "the ICPA widows and orphans" who are often very forgiving of the time spent on ICPA. I am sure there is one on a table to my left nodding his head in agreeance. However they let us do all this, because they know we love it and I am pretty sure they do too.

Well, this brings me to the end of the 2022 Federal President's Report and I wish to reiterate the message from the Conference theme "Outback to Ocean – Building Member Connections" because as Japanese writer (and I won't get this right despite my middle daughter trying to help me!) - Ryunosuke Satoro said "Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean." And so here we are having come together from Outback Australia, to continue the legacy of ICPA to bring waves of change, indeed an ocean, to achieve equitable education for our geographically isolated children and to be reminded that being isolated does not mean we are alone.