

**2023 ICPA Federal Conference  
New South Wales State Council President's Report**

**Tanya Mitchell**

Madam President, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is with great pleasure that I present the President's report on behalf of ICPA NSW.

**State Conference 2023**

The much-anticipated ICPA NSW 51<sup>st</sup> State Conference was held in Moree on 22 and 23 March this year and it was wonderful to have over 120 registrations. We had to cancel the previous conference that was to be held in Moree in 2020 due to Covid so it was fantastic for the branch to finally be able to showcase their community.

It was pleasing to see so many members and stakeholders come together to meet in such a great rural community and to once again discuss and debate our concerns and issues surrounding access to education for our children. It was great to have fourteen branches represented and over forty-six members attend during the week. It was certainly a great opportunity to engage in robust, passionate debates over informed conversations, even off the floor and into the evening.

Our conference fell two days before the NSW State Election which saw a change in Government and a sense of uncertainty as to how the change would impact our issues and the motions that members brought to conference.

There were many departmental people attending who are crucial to the work that we do in advocating for members, along with organisations and schools with whom we often work closely, and are great friends of our association. Many boarding schools were in attendance and we thank them for all their support in educating rural and remote students.

We were also privileged to have our Federal ICPA representatives Julia Broad and Miffy Waugh in attendance. Their perspective on all matters, and particularly those of a federal nature, is very much appreciated. I also acknowledge the attendance of Mrs Lindy Kitto, one of our Trustees, Moree Life Member Mrs Jane Woods and CWA President Joy Beames.

The theme "Education – The Heart of Communities" is such an important concept for our rural and remote communities to be sustainable.

We all wonder what the future will hold for our children. What lives, what careers they will have, what people they will be. None of those things we can fully know, but we do know that they will have hopes and dreams, and face challenges and problems in differing aspects of their lives as they unfold. Our task as parents and as a community is to make them the best prepared to meet the future as we all go forward. We want our children, together with all other children, to have mountains of opportunity.

A very important part of that preparation is their schooling. Not just education in the narrow sense of NAPLAN testing and ATARs, but a full chance to participate in the opportunities of youth as preparation for life as an adult – academic, vocational, creative, cultural and physical. A full chance to develop potential in whatever sense their own particular nature suggests, and to take that potential and in turn set about creating the best future for the next generation. ICPA wants that opportunity for rural and remote children just as every parent wants that opportunity for their own children.

There were over 60 motions presented and debated on at conference which is 20 less than 2022 so hopefully we are rectifying some issues and ticking them off.

**Some updates from the year have been:**

- Continuation of the School Drive Subsidy Trial for Preschoolers.
- A \$250 fuel travel card for Apprentices and Tertiary students was implemented by the previous NSW Government (however this has since been removed by the new state government).
- Bus NSW have submitted a proposal to NSW Government to install safety devices to prevent students from being left on buses.
- Early Childhood Wage Review - 5.75% Increase to Children's Services Award and Educational Services Teachers Award From 01 July 2023.
- NBN roll out for nearly all NSW Distance Education families.
- We continue to have monthly meetings with Department of Education Regional, Rural & Remote Education Policy (RRREP) Unit.
- All 12 satellite schools in NSW have been transferred to Fibre Optic connections.

Some may recall the Balranald branch motion back in 2013 at Federal Conference which was lost but a year later carried, so please do not get disheartened if you lose a motion today, as this is what can be achieved if you stay focused and not take no for an answer. Sometimes it may be to look at the issue and present it in a different way. Many thanks to Federal ICPA for their advocacy for these small remote schools.

I would like to say a big welcome to our new State Councillors since last Federal Conference, Britt Anderson, Georgina Luckraft and Kirsty Wilson and a special farewell to Deborah Nielsen who has worked tirelessly on State Council in the Early Childhood Portfolio. Deborah and her family have given so much time to ICPA over the years since inception and continue to be involved moving forward. Also farewell to Amanda McClaren who has been a wealth of knowledge and support in her time as Lone Members Officer. Thank you so much to both of you for your passion and commitment to education for our rural and remote students.

Thank you to all the State Council team and particularly those who have stayed on to continue the work that we do. I certainly appreciate all the support and effort that you make.

**Deputation 2023**

To follow up from the Moree conference and keep the momentum going after the change of government, our State Council have just returned from our Sydney deputation. It has been a busy time for us since conference but a fairly quiet three months since the change of government as the new Ministers have been getting familiar with their portfolios. We were able to meet with the new NSW Deputy Premier and Education Minister Prue Car. Minister Car had been the Shadow Education Minister so was well aware of our issues and it will be interesting to see if she is able to make the needed changes. This also highlights the need to meet with Shadow Ministers so they can question those in power but then be held accountable when they find themselves in the hot seat. We arranged meetings with 39 Ministers, Shadow Ministers and other stakeholders, local members and partners.

There are a few key priorities that ICPA-NSW would like to see fixed as a matter of priority, issues that continually come to conference:

- A review into Distance Education as the last one was conducted in 2008 and there has been many changes since then but many recommendations have not yet occurred.
- Implementation of the School Drive Subsidy for Preschool & Tertiary Students.
- Increase in VTAS for Apprentices to reflect actual costs for travel to training
- Mental Health Support for Youth.

- Access to Early Childhood education and Allied Health services in remote areas.
- Pay Parity & Incentives for Early Childhood Educators.
- Housing – safe and quality housing for rural and remote teaching staff.
- Road maintenance on roads used by school buses and school student travel.
- Continuation of funding for Country University Centres.
- Continuation of Active & Creative Kids Vouchers which were not budgeted for and have been halved.

The solutions offered by ICPA-NSW are pragmatic and discussions have been positive, however it is a continued frustration for our members that things take years to be implemented and that means for many children, the gaps in their learning and development remains.

ICPA is of course an organisation seeking equity of access to education for all students living in a rural and remote area. But what is it that we are actually seeking? I suggest we can break down that goal putting our efforts into providing our rural and remote children with access to wide and interesting curriculums taught by a great teacher in a school which is led by an effective Principal. We want to start opportunities early making sure that any kids that are likely to fall through the cracks get the special support they need. Our goal, our mission should be to endeavour that no rural or remote child misses the opportunity to have an education that embraces all of these factors. This is the base level of education all our children deserve.

While advancements in education and technology are making the task of providing an appropriate education easier, there are other forces making it more difficult. The demographic story of remoteness is that populations in remote and regional NSW continue to decline, only the largest regional centres grow. The consequent reality is that many small schools will continue to lose populations and the pressure is on the Government and Department to provide resources to metropolitan areas when new schools are needed to cope with population growth. This should not be to the detriment of rural and remote students or cloud the fact that every child, no matter where they live, deserves an appropriate education.