

2023 ICPA Federal Conference Western Australia State Council President's Report

Madam President, Distinguished Guests, Federal Councillors, ICPA members. It is with great pleasure I present my first report as WA State President.

As I write this report, I am hoping Darwin is preparing to show us vastly different weather to what we managed to provide in Perth last year with gale force winds, power blackouts and delayed flights!

I began my role as State President at our 51st Annual State Conference hosted by the Midwest Branch in March. Like many states, COVID interruptions prevailed in 2022 resulting in our '50 Years A Long Way Down the Track' conference being postponed to 2023 and our 2022 conference being held online. It was a great feeling to once again be together in person with many past members and ICPA WA Councillors in the room. The stories shared showed us both how far we have come, and how far we still have to go as we work for equity in education for our rural and remote families. It was very moving to see a video message from Mrs Margaret Hoare, the first ICPA WA President wishing us well as we move forward.

The highlight of Conference for many was '*Conversations with ICPA*' hosted by Mr Richard Hudson. Raelene Hall, WA State Life Member, Roma Heath, Founding President Yalgoo Branch, Rossco Foulkes-Taylor, son and husband of WA State Presidents and Roxanne Morrissey, State and Federal Life Member formed a panel sharing the challenges and some very humorous stories about their connection to ICPA and the impact it has had on their lives.

At Conference we were lucky enough to retain all of our current councillors and welcomed Arlene Sutherland, Lakes District Branch, and Jareth Forrester, Meekatharra Air Branch to the team, giving us a full council. As the new president, I am most grateful to have Immediate Past President Sally Brindal continuing on council as well as Kym Ross and Michelle Abbott who have stepped down from Secretary and Treasurer. This year has also seen a changing of the editor baton for our Bits and Pieces magazine. Olivia Ford has taken on the role and it is lovely to see her here today.

A continuing area of concern for our members is the management and services provided by Fairbridge operated Camp Schools. As part of the 2018 Education cuts, the Western Australian State Government leased six camp schools to Fairbridge with the assurance from David Russell, the then CEO of Fairbridge, and the Minister at the time that current services would be maintained and prices remain reasonable. This has not been the case. Kalgoorlie Camp School is a vital facility for the Kal SOTA (School of the Air). Kal Sota uses this facility up to four times a year and have done so for decades. Meetings have been held with current Fairbridge CEO Mirina Muir which highlighted the lack of knowledge by Fairbridge of the purpose and needs of SOTA camps, which are markedly different from urban schools who utilise the facilities. In June we met with the newly appointed Minister for Education, Dr Tony Buti who indicated he was aware of the issues and that reviews were being undertaken to hold Fairbridge accountable.

One of the challenges when working with government and other groups is the changing of positions. On December 13, 2022, we had, after much planning and many changes, secured an online meeting with then Minister for Education Sue Ellery to discuss the Fairbridge Run Camp Schools. As you may be aware, that is the peak of harvest in the Great Southern Region and the last week of primary school, so quite busy, but we knew we could make it work. I had myself all organised: air pods, iPad and ready to log on at 11.30am from the Tambellup Primary School end of year pool fun day at Gnowangerup

Pool, when at about 10.00am a cabinet reshuffle was announced, we had a new minister, back to square one!

The WA State Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) remains high on the agenda. As part of the 2018 Education cuts there was a reduction in the Royalties for Regions component of the BAHA which reduced it from \$2135 to \$1320 over a five-year period. Consistent advocacy from ICPA has resulted in it now being increased with CPI so for 2023 families will benefit from an extra \$30 per child, although welcomed, just a mere \$35 000 added to the State Budget. State Council are still seeking a substantial increase as boarding fees continue to rise. Discussions were recently held with Minister for Education Dr Buti and seemed well received. It is very pleasing to see that Queensland has received a maximum \$4000 increase to their Remote Area Tuition Allowance.

Throughout the last year we have held many successful meetings with representatives from the Western Australian Department of Education. Lisa Rodgers, Director General of Education continues to work closely with ICPA WA and we maintain a positive, open and respectful working relationship. Throughout the year we have met with Lisa and many other representatives from the department including Jim Bell, Deputy Director General Student Achievement, Neil Darby, Assistant Executive Director, Steve Beaton, Principal, School of Special Education Needs (SSEN) Behaviour and Engagement, Paul Mathews, Principal, School of Isolated Distance Education (SIDE) and Rob Thomson, Executive Director Infrastructure.

WA State Council continue to be a part of the Education Department's System Alliance Group in 2023 which consists of stakeholders across the whole education sector.

The Rural Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC) is made up of 16 representatives from community, consumer groups and provider groups including ICPA WA and reports directly to the Minister for Education. RREAC had been very quiet with the arrival of COVID, but I am pleased to report that there has been a reinvigoration of RREAC and meetings are being held monthly and regional visits are planned. ICPA WA is very pleased to have Federal Councillor Naomi Obst as our representative.

In 2021 WA State Council made a submission to the Parliamentary Public Accounts committees' review of the Public Transport Authority's (PTA) Student Transport Assistance Policy Framework. It was the first review of School Bus Services in nearly 25 years. On December 22, the State Government tabled its response to the report; of the 40 recommendations 29 were accepted in principle and 11 noted. The recommendation to review the conveyance allowance was noted; an increase has been sought by ICPA for a very long time. The last review was 2002 and linked to CPI to allow for inflation. The current rate is 25.24c/km. The ATO rate for use of a private vehicle for business purposes is 78c/km! State Council has met with John Bailly, School Bus Services and Andrew Catti, Operations Manager and discussed the implementation of recommendations from the Bus Fair Report.

Throughout 2022/2023, ICPA WA has continued to make submissions where appropriate. A submission was made to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Child Developmental Services highlighting the tyranny of distance and the effect of COVID enforcing more isolation and unreasonable wait times for services. On April 4 Kym Ross and myself gave evidence in person to the hearing.

Membership remains a concern for WA. Making member connections must remain a priority and I welcome any advice on how to do this. We hold such a responsibility to those who came before us as ICPA Members, but more so to those who are yet to come as we continue in our advocacy for our rural and remote children and their families.

In closing I would like to thank my fellow councillors and ICPA WA members, without your support and passion, giving your time to others, WA would not be where it is today. To the NT Council, thank you for a great conference, and weather! To Alana and your team, your ongoing support has made me feel very welcome in this role and I believe that the warmth that comes with hearing 'ICPA' is what makes us such a cracking group!