

COMMUNICATIONS PORTFOLIO CONFERENCE REPORT – June 2024

ICPA Qld's Communication Portfolio has been busily beavering away throughout the year.

We started the council year by addressing issues around prioritising services, infrastructure repairs and preventative maintenance in regional and remote areas prior to seasonal weather conditions. Telstra promptly reiterated their commitment to fulfilling its Universal Service Obligation, relating to the provision and functionality of fixed telephone services. More comprehensive information can be found in the motion feedback document.

Following on with Telstra, the 3G network will be shut down in August and members are encouraged to check all devices prior to the closure date.

Earlier this year Telstra brought to market their provision of Starlink packages however, we urge members to ensure routers are setup with appropriate security settings. NBN also continues to provide competitive packages available through their providers.

Regional Tech Hub launched their new and improved web page and ICPA Qld encourages members experiencing any connection concerns to contact the Regional Tech Hub. This independent and free service provides regional, rural, and remote Australians with the critical support needed to navigate the complex world of connectivity and technology option.

ICPA Qld provided a Submission to the Australian Government's *Review into the Better Delivery of Universal Services Obligations*. Along with a multitude of other recommendations, we conveyed the importance of mobile service access along bus runs, HCRC capabilities and backup power supply. For those compelled, there is a comprehensive and riveting read on the Communications tab of the ICPA Qld website.

QLearn is now well embedded in schools with features being activated at the school's individual discretion. Additionally, bandwidth upgrades in schools are nearing completion with only Six schools yet to receive an upgrade. Phase 1 has successfully increased the average school bandwidth speeds to 60 times faster than the previous standard and ongoing efforts are in progress at several schools to enhance and optimise the performance further.

Digital Education

"Children's internet" is a relatively new term referring to the wholistic experience children encounter while engaging within the digital technology space. In acknowledgement of the *Manifesto of Children's Better Internet*, ICPA Qld recognises our moral obligation to support, construct and invest in bettering children's digital education and experiences and respond appropriately at every opportunity when discussions are held on this vital subject.

ICPA Qld become partners with The Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child and together with the Department of Education, and help and input of our members, actively

contributes to surveys, meetings and activities that seek to shape digital futures for rural and remote children.

ICPA Qld thanks members who participated in the *ACODA Longitudinal Study into Australian children of a digital age*. This transdisciplinary study across areas of Health, Education and Connectedness aims to provide a holistic view of children's experiences and the impact of digital technologies for children under five and we look forward to learning of the key insights from the collated data.

Distance Education families are now being called to action to participate in Phase 2 of the study: "The Digital Day of Distance Education Children". This is a co-designed and specific study that aims to explore digital education and experiences of children studying in remote schoolrooms and shape the future of their digital education.

Last year at State Conference in the Julia Creek, we learned some very interesting data; however, I will leave you in suspense as Distinguished Professor Susan Danby herself is here to share some insightful and valuable information with us all.

As I am standing down this year from State Council, I would like to encourage anyone to give the Comms Portfolio a crack. For me it is one of the absolute linkage points to a fair go for Rural and Remote families. Children's internet could be viewed as the defining factor in one's education and we cannot assume accessible and affordable access is all that is required, nor can we assume educational programs and online delivery practices in their present form guarantee the successful meeting of educational objectives.

Through the Communications Portfolio, ICPA Qld strives to ensure that, above all, technology must be inclusive and enabling, proven and affective, affordable, safe, and ultimately enhance the education of every child, no matter where they live.

Megan Easton
Communication Portfolio Leader