



PRESIDENT'S REPORT SA ICPA

Kirsty Williams

Madam President, Federal Life Members, State Life Members, Branch Life Members, distinguished guests, fellow ICPA members from far and wide, ladies and gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure to present my first South Australian President's Report.

2026 began with temperatures exceeding 47 degrees for three weeks straight, with nighttime temps only dropping to 38 on the back of what was already a dry season. If only we had known as we endured the relentless heat, that the following month would bring one of the wettest on record.

February brought rain, a lot of rain, and then more rain. Rain is always welcome, but the logistical challenges it created brought a different kind of pressure. Our roads remained closed for around eight weeks, making it incredibly difficult to receive supplies or travel anywhere. My two children at boarding school were unable to return home at all during first term because of the road closures. It was a stark reminder of the realities of remote living and the flexibility required to navigate them.

As I step into this role, I would like to sincerely thank Belinda Hatcher for her four years as President. Her dedication, knowledge and passion for rural education have been invaluable to ICPA. Having experienced rural education as a School of the Air student, boarder and parent, she has always brought a unique perspective to the role.

Thank you to Queensland for hosting this year's Federal Conference in your beautiful state. It is fair to say that those of us from the south will be enjoying the warmer weather, and enjoying the experience of conference from the audience after hosting last year's conference in Adelaide.

Although I may be somewhat biased, our convening team for the 2025 Federal Conference, spread across thousands of kilometres, delivered an event we could not have been prouder of. Every member took ownership of their area of responsibility, from sponsorship and raffles to registrations, decorations and dinners. A sincere thank you goes to our co-convenors, Edwina Bowie and Mija Pardoe, for leading us with clarity and purpose under the theme *Education for the Heart and the Mind*. Throughout the planning process, our committee members navigated floods, a divorce, children starting boarding school, a new grandchild, seriously ill family members, a stroke, one of the worst droughts in history, and children relocating for university and gap years, but do not let this put you off.

For anyone considering joining a convening committee, whether for a State or Federal Conference, I encourage you to do it. Let's be honest, none of us have spare time, but the friendships, the learning and the sense of achievement make it an experience well worth embracing. As we all drove out of Adelaide, heading back to our 'real jobs' after conference, someone sent a message in our convening group chat saying, "*I feel like I've just broken up with a boyfriend!*" After months of phone calls, Zoom meetings and messages, it reflected the deeper friendships we had forged. What began as a committee had grown into a group of genuine friends and shared sense of achievement.

At the beginning of this year, Michelle Hilder and Belinda Hatcher attended the Joint State Council Meeting in Tasmania. These meetings provide a valuable opportunity for each state to share ideas, learn from one another and bring their own unique perspectives to the table. Thank you to Tassie for organising.

To help with fundraising and enable event payments to be easier and more efficient, this year SA ICPA State Council provided Square terminals to all SA branches. Several branches have already put their square

readers to good use, and we look forward to seeing the positive impact they will bring to branches and their fundraising efforts in the months and years ahead.

We are currently transitioning to Microsoft Teams to streamline document management and communication. Having all documents stored in one central location will reduce confusion and ensure everyone is working from the latest version, rather than navigating endless email chains. Teams will also enhance our online meetings while providing improved security for council documents and discussions.

Our State Conference in Burra on 30 April, *Breaking Barriers*, was a highlight of the year. The later date and location being closer to Adelaide encouraged greater attendance, including improved government representation. Opening speaker, SA ICPA Life Member Glennis Crawford, set the scene with her honest reflections on life in the bush, highlighting the resilience, determination and advocacy that continue to underpin ICPA's work. The number of motions submitted was the highest we have seen in many years, with many being around allowances, highlighting that South Australia is falling behind in these areas.

It was particularly positive to conclude our AGM with a full State Council for the year ahead, bringing together an excellent balance of experienced councillors and new members with fresh ideas and perspectives. Often, I feel that it is not that people are unwilling to help, but rather that they are unsure how. None of us were born knowing how to chair meetings, write minutes, prepare submissions or speak to motions, but confidence grows when people feel supported and safe to have a go, and I hope our State Council continues to foster that environment.

Following State Conference, 45 motion letters were completed and distributed within a month thanks to an exceptional team effort, with many responses already being received. Delegation meetings across Adelaide and Port Augusta, along with a number of online meetings were held in late June, helping maintain momentum. Again, it was great to see some first timers attend delegation and enjoy the experience. Changes in Ministers rarely help our advocacy efforts, as relationships built over time are disrupted overnight, but we remain committed to progressing our members' issues and were pleased to meet with the new Minister for Education, Lucy Hood MP.

Our 2025 submissions relating to the State Education Allowance, Early Childhood Allowance and the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS) received limited response, so these matters were again raised during our delegation meetings.

A two-day face-to-face meeting in Adelaide was sandwiched between the delegation days and included media communications and Copilot training. This was generously supported by Beach Energy through their team, the use of their boardroom and catering as well as additional funding to help State Council achieve its outcomes for the months ahead.

The year ahead brings a clear set of priorities for SA ICPA as we continue advocating for practical improvements that make a genuine difference to families living in rural and remote communities.

Increasing allowances remains a central focus, particularly the State Education Allowance and the various travel allowances supporting boarding students, distance education families and school travel. These payments have not kept pace with rising costs, and families are feeling the strain. We also remain committed to improving access to childcare and securing an Early Years Allowance, recognising that support must begin well before formal schooling if children living remotely are to have equitable access to learning and development. The roll-out of three-year-old preschool has resulted in many discussions around how this looks for geographically isolated families and Remote and Isolated Children's Exercise (RICE) who

facilitate the preschool program. While this expansion presents valuable opportunities, sustainable funding will be essential to meet the unique needs of remote communities.

Housing shortages in small towns continue to impact the recruitment and retention of teachers and support staff. Without suitable accommodation, schools struggle to attract employees and communities feel the consequences. Road conditions also remain a significant concern, particularly the timely reopening of roads following rain events and the need for a more coordinated response after emergencies. Reliable roads are not a luxury in the bush; they are essential for education, healthcare, freight and community connection.

Lastly, a huge congratulations to Helen Williams on receiving SA ICPA Life Membership this year. Helen's calm nature, wisdom and willingness to contribute have made her an invaluable asset to ICPA over many years, and we are fortunate to continue benefiting from her experience and guidance. Congratulations must also go to North West Branch Life Member Lorraine Greenfield OAM, on receiving a Medal of the Order of Australia for her service to remote communities. Both women exemplify the true meaning of dedication and selfless service.

As we look ahead, we must keep sight of the bigger picture. Families need to be able to live, work and raise their children in the bush, and without adequate support that becomes increasingly difficult. Australia's economy was built on the strength of regional communities, yet too often our communities are treated as an afterthought by those far removed from country life. Instead of being empowered, rural families are frequently constrained by limited services and increasing centralisation. This is why the work that ICPA has done, and continues to do is so incredibly important. Thank you to everyone involved with ICPA who ensure our voices are heard.