

Vice Presidents Report WA ICPA

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Federal President, Federal Councillors, fellow State Presidents, distinguished guests, life members, delegates and friends.

On behalf of Western Australia, it is my pleasure to bring greetings from the largest state in the nation—where distance is not simply measured in kilometres, but in opportunity and determination. We are a small but mighty State Council with 9 members. We are delighted to have a secretary this year after running without one in 2025, at our state conference this year our wonderful past president stepped down, we give thanks to Jane on her 5 years on State Council and her wisdom to us all along the way.

Our recent succession changes led to one of the more unexpected moments of the year. As part of updating our bank signatories, we noticed ICPA WA was still being charged an annual fee for a Safe Custody Facility. None of our current State Councillors knew exactly what it contained, or even whether it was still relevant.

Curiosity got the better of us.

Once the paperwork was complete, our new Treasurer, Ruth, and I made our way to the bank branch where the safe custody box had quietly remained for decades. After signing what felt like endless paperwork, we were handed a well-worn yellow envelope that looked as though it hadn't seen daylight for many years. Inside was a remarkable piece of ICPA WA history. We discovered our original 1973 Certificate of Incorporation, correspondence from the Crown Law Department, newspaper clippings announcing the formation of ICPA WA and documents signed by our founding leaders, including Joan Cameron and Mrs Margaret Lacy, now remembered as Margaret Hoare. Margaret was a founding member of the Meekatharra Air Branch in 1971, a founding member of WA State Council in 1973 and served on Federal Council from 1972 to 1974. Sadly, Margaret passed away earlier this year at the age of 92.

Holding those original documents was a powerful reminder that every generation of ICPA volunteers builds upon the work of those who came before them. The issues may evolve, but the purpose remains unchanged: ensuring rural and remote children have equitable access to education, regardless of where they live. As the next custodians of this organisation, we are privileged to continue that legacy.

Western Australians know that geography should never determine the quality of a child's education. Our children deserve every opportunity available to those living in metropolitan Australia. That simple principle continues to guide every conversation, every meeting and every motion brought forward by our State Council.

The past twelve months have again demonstrated the strength of our organisation. Across Western Australia, our branches have worked to identify local issues, support families and advocate for practical solutions. Our volunteers continue to give countless hours because they understand that every improvement achieved today creates opportunities for the next generation of rural and remote children.

This year our advocacy has focused on the issues that matter most to WA families.

Access to quality education remains our highest priority. Whether a child learns through a School of the Air classroom, a local school, a boarding college or via distance education, every student deserves equitable support, regardless of where they live.

Boarding continues to be a significant issue for many Western Australian families. For hundreds of students, boarding is not a lifestyle choice—it is the only pathway to secondary education. Families continue to face increasing costs, after sitting on a mixed table of delegates from across Australia last year at federal conference we were amazed to realise that every other state had a higher state based boarding allowance than our WA BAHA. We have now set our target at \$5000 per year, per student which is a considerable raise on our current WA offering of \$1461. We will continue advocating for policies that recognise these realities. We are hearing from more and more families that are experiencing loss of educational opportunities for their children and striving for a better educational opportunity, we now hear from a considerable amount of families from small rural towns that offer high school to year 10 only, these families are desperate to start their boarding journey ahead of year 11 and 12, but are unable to access any allowances to assist. In WA we have a offering of public run boarding houses across WA and Ag colleges, they still have a cost of around \$15,000 per year to attend – what ever happened to education is free? For our fifo families, shift workers like police, teachers and nurses boarding is what enables them to keep working in remote communities and educate their children otherwise we lose these essential workers from our communities.

Reliable telecommunications remain essential, not optional. Education, healthcare, business and family life all rely on dependable digital connectivity. While improvements have been made, many families continue to experience unreliable services that place rural and remote students at a disadvantage. Digital equity is educational equity. We had examples of our School of the Air supplied internet not keeping up with the demands of multiple student school of the air classrooms and needing to be fully connected from scratch at the start of each day – it has been noted the number of families who have needed to switch to star link at their own personal cost to attend lessons online.

Teacher attraction and retention continue to affect many remote communities. Every child deserves access to experienced teachers, specialist programs and consistent educational support. We acknowledge the educators who choose to live and work in some of Australia's most isolated communities, and we continue to advocate for strategies that encourage teachers to remain in these important roles.

Workforce shortages extend beyond schools. Across regional Western Australia, the lack of accessible childcare is affecting families, businesses and communities. Without childcare, parents are unable to participate fully in the workforce, communities struggle to attract essential workers, and young families face difficult decisions about where they can live. Childcare is not simply a family issue—it is an education issue, an economic issue and a community sustainability issue.

Student wellbeing also remains at the forefront of our advocacy. Rural and remote students often face unique challenges associated with isolation, transitions to boarding, access to support services and maintaining connections with family and community. Supporting wellbeing is fundamental to educational success.

Throughout the year, WA State Councillors have continued to build positive relationships with government departments, education providers, industry representatives and elected officials. Meaningful advocacy is built on respectful relationships, informed discussion and evidence gathered directly from our members.

As always, our strength comes from our grassroots membership. Every motion debated at Branch, State and Federal level begins with a family identifying an issue and believing it can be improved. That democratic process remains one of ICPA's greatest strengths and ensures that our advocacy is genuinely member-led. On the recent communication around constitutional changes we heard from a number of our WA members, who felt they didn't understand the changes well enough for their branch to cast a vote – we were able to listen to our members and act with communication around this process, we give thanks to federal council for listening to our collective members.

This year has also reminded us of the importance of transparency, consultation and member engagement. Our members are the heart of this Association. Their voices deserve to be heard, their perspectives respected and their confidence maintained as our organisation continues to evolve. The willingness shown across the Federation to engage openly with members on important governance matters reflects the values that have made ICPA a respected and enduring organisation.

Western Australia extends sincere thanks to our dedicated Branch executives, State Councillors, portfolio holders, government representatives, education stakeholders and the many volunteers who generously contribute their time throughout the year. Your commitment enables ICPA to continue making a genuine difference for rural and remote families.

Finally, to our fellow States and the Federal Council, thank you for your collaboration and shared commitment to ensuring every Australian child has access to quality education, regardless of postcode. While our challenges may differ from state to state, our purpose remains united.

Western Australia looks forward to continuing to work alongside you all as we advocate for practical, equitable and sustainable outcomes for rural and remote families.

Because no matter how far from the coast, how remote the station, or how small the community, every child deserves the opportunity to learn, to thrive and to realise their full potential.

Thank you.