



A Country Town SURROUNDED BY WATER

As I travelled to attend my first State Conference as a member of ICPA-NSW State Council, I had already spent two hours flying over nothing but blue. Then, crossing the mainland on the way to Broken Hill, I realised I wasn't prepared for the vastness — the never-ending horizon, the muted earth tones, flashes of green, the sheer scale of it all. I hesitate to call it culture shock, but it was certainly a sensory one. It was a reminder that remoteness isn't defined by water alone.

When people hear you live on Lord Howe Island, the response is usually a mix of curiosity and intrigue and comments like — "It must be paradise." And in many ways, it is. But beyond the turquoise water and dramatic peaks lies something much more familiar: a small, close-knit country town. The difference is, our paddocks are replaced by ocean, our roads don't lead to neighbouring towns, and every trip to the "mainland" requires a plane ticket. Life here carries all the hallmarks of rural living — connection, resilience, and community — just with a horizon that stretches a little further.

Like all country towns, Lord Howe runs on people. The community checks in, lends a hand, and steps up when it matters. The school sits at the heart of the community, and families juggle the same priorities of work, home, and education — just with added layers of logistics. Freight delays, weather disruptions, and the cost and complexity of travel are part of everyday life, often unseen and not understood by those in the cities.

For families, particularly those with school-aged children, that distance is felt more deeply. Access to specialist services, assessments, and ongoing support often means leaving the island — sometimes at short notice, and always at significant expense. What might be a simple appointment elsewhere becomes a carefully planned trip involving flights, accommodation, and time away from work and school. These are familiar challenges for many ICPA families, but on Lord Howe, the ocean adds another layer.

And yet, like rural communities across Australia, there is a quiet determination to make things work. Parents become

advocates and problem-solvers. Schools adapt and innovate. Community connections strengthen because they have to. There is a shared understanding that while we may be physically isolated, we are not alone and that our collective voice matters.

Living on Lord Howe Island is often described as unique, and it is. But at its heart, it reflects the same values found in country towns across Australia. It is a place where community matters, resilience is part of daily life, and families work hard to ensure their children have every opportunity to thrive, even when the pathway looks a little different.

Because no matter how far from the mainland we may be, through ICPA our voices carry, advocating for equity, access, and opportunity for every child, no matter where they live.

by Bronwyn Tofaeono

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