

COMMUNICATION PORTFOLIO CONFERENCE REPORT – June 2022

(When ICPA meets in another 50 years, for its 100th birthday just imagine where our communications aspirations will lay.)

As the curtains came down on the Cunnamulla State Conference, I, like a heroic sheep, bordered the Qld State Council “train to change” and took on the Communications Portfolio.

This year State Council continued to lobby across all portfolios and has seen some successes in the communications area. The communications Portfolio has been privileged to sit on round tables, both at state and federal levelled events where we have had direct input into shaping telecommunications across rural and remote areas. We attended the Advancing digital inclusion for low-income families and participated in the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) for No Queenslander Left offline with the nbn roundtable, where we encouraged the considerations of rural and remote families.

During delegations in Brisbane, we met with, Telstra, nbn and the Information and Technology branch of the Department of Education where we spoke of the needs for continuations of programs like “The Blackspot Program”, data increases, alternatives to HCRC, Qlearn developments, school bandwidths and Mobile network developments. We have also made headway in improving online learning outcomes and understandings of screentime with a significant development with the Digital Child Centre of Excellence.

Telstra

Mobile Coverage and Connection.

Firstly, I hope our members have enjoyed the information clip on Telstra and Tech which was on our socials, where we spoke of the June 2024 closure of the 3G network and covered off on some of the vital equipment and infrastructure requirements. The 4G service may currently have a reduced footprint however where achievable will provide better voice and data exchange and is expected to improve once the 3G has been switched off. Customers of Telstra are also encouraged to make sure their equipment is up to specifications for the 4G network

Telstra informed us for areas to gain further expansion of mobile networks there is an essential need for a collective approach whereby State, Federal and local Councils work together to gain funding across all 3 areas to achieve the desired outcome.

Local councils would need to identify the areas of priority and Telstra will assess existing infrastructure and consult their development team to determine the best towers and placement to solve problems while remaining in line with the national development plan.

As with any Telstra issues please report directly to the webpage or your Regional Telstra team. In the cases where the logged number is more than 100Km from a store, they will be directed to Townsville. If the Townsville call centre is at capacity, customers would be directed to an international centre, although by the end of 2022 all calls will be routed within Australia.

Regional Telecommunications Review

Alongside Federal and other States Qld State Council put forward a submission to the Regional Telecommunications Review, which was well received. 12 recommendations were highlighted in the results of this Review which are listed below.

Regional Telecommunication Review Recommendations

- Adopt a longer-term strategic approach to regional digital infrastructure and skills
- Increase Government investment in regional connectivity
- Implement a regional telecommunications resilience fund
- Trial emerging connectivity technologies
- Build connectivity literacy and digital capability among regional users
- Enhance NBN Co's regional fixed wireless and Sky Muster services
- Implement and enforce new performance and reliability standards for wholesale and retail services
- Continue but reform existing universal services for the future
- Improve consumer information about mobile services including coverage and performance
- Encourage shared network access and innovative funding for mobile in regional areas
- Focus on the digital needs of Indigenous communities
- Improve affordability for vulnerable groups in regional areas

One Web & Telstra's M.o.U

In March 2022: Telstra and One Web, the low earth orbit satellite communications company, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for improved digital connectivity across Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

Unlike Starlink, this low orbit Satellite, (LE will deliver both voice and data together with high-speed and low latency. It is most likely to take a few years to have fully deliverable packages into homes however this innovative initiative will most likely be one of the replacements for the HCRC or the Copper fixed line. This fixed-point network has the power to connect even the hardest to reach and most remote parts of Australia and we look forward to hearing about their developments.

Telstra Countrywide has been rebranded to Telstra Regional Australia and is available to all rural customers.

We eagerly await round 6 of the Blackspot program details although will not be released until after the Federal Election.

ICPA Qld thanks May Boisen and Scott Mullaly for their ongoing support for ICPA.

Nbn.

Earlier this year the Australian Government announced a \$750m investment following the above mentioned 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review into the adequacy of telecommunications services in regional, rural, and remote Australia. Containing \$480 million investment in the **nbn** Fixed Wireless network, and a \$270 million to a program that will help deliver faster wholesale speeds across regional Australia.

In March this year nbn announced the un-metering of Sky Muster Plus. Those who have a Skymuster Plus connection will have no data limit constraints from 12 midnight until 4pm. Those on regular Sky Muster plans will have double average monthly allowances. There is a collective of additional benefits that aim to significantly increase usability and affordability for rural and remote Australians.

The below three points were also included in the announcement.

Firstly, **Extended Fixed Wireless:** Enhanced extended coverage will see the expansion of the fixed wireless footprint coverage by up to 50%, enabling approximately 120,000 formerly satellite-only eligible premises to access fixed wireless services.

Secondly, **Faster Fixed Wireless speeds:** **nbn** connections in the expanded fixed wireless footprint will be able to order, through their retail services, maximum download speeds of up to 100 Mbps. With an anticipated 85% of the expanded footprint and has the potential maximum download speeds of up to 250 Mbps, (3 times faster than the highest speeds available today!).

Thirdly, **Improved Fixed Wireless busy hour speeds:** Fixed Wireless network aims to achieve “busy period speeds of at least 50Mbps, download.

Fly Away Kits.

Federal ICPA have been working with nbn to conduct a trial on solutions for Distance Education Families who are contractors and move around remote areas for work and have no access to reliable internet. Two Queensland Families participate in this trial known as the Fly Away Kit trial. Both families found the trial successful. These Kits are available however are not a financially viable option for most members at this point. ICPA Aust has been lobbying at a federal level to have these kits subsidised and we hope to see advancements in this area shortly.

Other services

nbn Local has been working on more regionalised support to be provided to ICPA members, with more localised information and supported via their **nbn** Local Community Ambassador in their region. ICPA members are encouraged to contact their local community ambassador for support not only with **nbn** but additionally with cyber safety and digital security. ICPA hopes members are enjoying our short information clips and we look forward to bringing you more “Convo’s with Kylie” on our Facebook page soon.

Department of Education Information and Technology Branch

Delivery Platforms.

Blackboard Ultra contracts continue as the early adopter schools partake in the “Sandbox” experience and work with the department of education to iron out some of the challenges of Qlearn. The Qlearn suite will be used by over 60 schools in Qld and CANVAS has been specifically designed to have a K-12 focus so this platform should be user friendly and endeavours to have a smooth rollout. The Canvas platform will work with Office 365, Teams and One Note and the schools can shape the platform to match their schools' specific needs.

NAPLAN – Update to come from David Preston

Bandwidth capabilities Upgrades for school -- information to come from David Preston

Screen time and online learning.

ICPA Qld is delighted to announce we have commenced initial partnership discussions with the Digital Child Centre, where together with the Department of Education’s Research branch can work collectively.

The Digital Child Centre is a public-facing upward space where the public can go for trustworthy information as well as been able to participate in the research. Their focus is across all facets of the community, socioeconomic and geographical standings with a mission of positive digital futures with a target group of birth to 8 years. This research is the first in Australia to have both “Early Childhood Education and Education as its codes”) and firmly believe in co-design and want to work with their partners and are very keen for ICPA’s input

The DCC has additionally been granted \$500,000 to make Common-sense Media valid for Australians and has expressed interest in our remote families' participation. Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child is based at QUT in Brisbane and directed by Professor Susan Danby. Professor Susan Danby is the Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child and leads a collective of national and international researchers and partners across education settings, government, business, and the community to work towards the centre’s vision. – Ensuring young children are healthy, connected and educated in a rapidly changing digital age. Interestingly Professor Danby grew up on a Station outside Winton.

ICPA together with the Digital Child Centre and the Department of Education are continuing to work proactively together and look forward to enlightening ICPA members about any developments or participation requirements.

ICPA’s Communication Portfolio has embraced every opportunity to share our state's requirements to gain equitable Communication. While we continue to lobby with our associated bodies, unfortunately, like a cuckoo clock have a magnitude of cogs turning only to have the occasional cuckoo appearance.

Equitable Communications, drives ICPA, it drives me.

Megan Easton

Communications Portfolio Leader

councillor8@icpaqld.com.au