

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2023 FEDERAL CONFERENCE COMMUNICATIONS PORTFOLIO MOTIONS

Internet Access

A14. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to request the Minister for Communications ensure all rural and remote students have adequate internet access with regard to speed, quality, capabilities and cost of the service.”

Explanation:

We acknowledge and thank ICPA (Aust) and the Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia for their continuous and effective lobbying of the Federal Government, Telstra, nbn™, Starlink and other providers on internet issues in the bush. The prioritisation of installations required for education is paramount. Many remote families are using the internet provided by the family business. Or are having to pay for it themselves if educational internet data is not part of their employment package. This includes tertiary and training students. Small rural schools and boarding students who've returned home for a period.

While expected data speeds, plan sizes and service reliability are continually improving, our members have concerns about the data allocations in plans being heavily loaded towards unreasonable off-peak times. The Mb/\$ continues to fall extremely short of those available to our urban counterparts, thus ensuring maintenance of the internet divide between regional and urban areas.

Currently many families are paying for two services to ensure reliability whilst undertaking recent internet trials. To ensure there are no disruptions to their children's education, including Home Tudors studying to complete university degrees or TAFE courses.

A15. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

WITHDRAWN

“That ICPA (Aust) requests that the Minister for Communications and the Minister for Education, investigate if all state and territory governments are offering the deliverance and maintenance of a high-speed internet connection to geographically isolated families with children enrolled in Schools of Distance Education and Schools of the Air at no cost to the families.”

Explanation:

For the past couple of years, The Northern Territory Government (NTG) have been advising Schools of Distance Education, such as Alice Springs School of the Air (ASSOA), should recommend to families who are enrolling at the school, that they would receive a better connection if they organise and supply their own internet such as SkyMuster rather than STARS network; This is the free internet connection the NTG offers to families with a child enrolled on Schools of Distance Education.

The Northern Territory Government have an obligation to all Remote Schools and Schools of Distance Education to provide satellite internet connection. They are able to do this via the STARS network.

There is now only a hand full of families in the Alice Springs ICPA Branch who are still able to access the STARS internet connection. These are families who have been enrolled at ASSOA long term. These families experience **no** out of pocket expenses, no ongoing monthly fees, no initial set up costs, no out of pocket expenses for repairs/maintenance – the STARS connection is fully funded and provided by the NTG.

This leads us to the dozens of other families, mostly new enrolments to the school, who have been told they would be better off supplying their own internet service as the STARS network, provided by the NT Government, is not recommended.

Those families are then required to source, cover installation and initial equipment costs, ongoing expenses, repairs, maintenance and technical support all at their own up-front expense. With the option of applying to the NTG for a predetermined subsidy to help cover monthly bills, which doesn't cover the minimal monthly amount available.

How is it reasonable that some of our geographically isolated families face these costs, while other families are having internet supplied into their remote classrooms that is fully funded and maintained by the NT Government via the STARS network.

The subsidy for families who incurred out of pocket monthly internet expenses to provide their own internet did not always exist. The NT ICPA have lobbied the NT Government to provide this subsidy and we have seen increases to this monthly amount over the past couple of years.

The core business of schools of distance education is to deliver a free public education to the most geographically isolated children in Australia. To do so, these families need access to High-Speed Internet without the burden of financial outlay of equipment, monthly connection costs and any ongoing repairs/maintenance.

If respective States and Territories are still using slow and obsolete satellite internet connections for their Schools of Distance Education, then it is time they invest in High Speed, reliable internet for ALL of the families who are currently enrolled at these rural and remote schools and schools of distance education. They should NOT be able to place this responsibility back on the families.

This raises the question, why are families responsible to provide the delivery mechanism (the internet) of education for their geographically isolated children?

It is so disappointing to hear that the NT Government / NT Department of Education are quietly instructing Schools of Distance Education (like ASSOA) to recommend that new families use their own internet connections instead of the FREE service provided and maintained by them.

If the department is supplying a slow internet service to families, they should be accountable to upgrade it – we are talking about our children accessing an education and to do so, they need to be supplied with a good High Speed internet connection.

The Alice Springs ICPA Branch would like to ensure, ALL Children enrolled in Schools of Distance Education have access to High-Speed internet connections for their remote classrooms that is delivered and maintained by their relative state or territory governments with **no upfront or ongoing cost** to the Families.

Extra Information

STARS (internet) = Northern Territory Government is the provider and the responsible entity for the delivery, maintenance, costs etc.

STARS (internet) = Alice Springs School of the Air (ASSOA) is the conduit through which NTG delivers education to geographically isolated children in the remote home school rooms. ASSOA does bear some costs and responsibilities associated to STARS network does not have ultimate responsibility.

A16. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests that the Minister for Communications and the Minister for Education encourage state and territory governments to deliver and maintain a high-speed internet connection to geographically isolated families with children enrolled in Schools of Distance Education and Schools of the Air at no cost to the families.”

Explanation:

Children who are receiving an education via schools of distance education are faced with a myriad of challenges when it comes to interacting with their teachers and classmates. They complete their daily school lessons, assemblies, sports lessons, private learning assessments, reading tasks, group activities and even singing lessons all via the home school room computer on platforms such as Microsoft Teams, React, Zoom and more.

If states and territories are not providing families (enrolled in Schools of distance Education) with High-Speed internet connection to the home school rooms of these geographically isolated children, they face major disruptions to the quality of their learning experience. Poor connection, sound, images may hamper their daily lessons and cause disruptions for the other children on the lesson.

The ONLY way our children are accessing their public education in these remote locations is via a satellite internet connection. If, over time, this connection has become slow or obsolete, then it is the responsibility of the Department of Education to ensure it is upgraded.

In our case, The NT Government is providing the STARS network for Schools of Distance Education. However, instead of upgrading their internet to a High Speed and reliable service, they are recommending that the schools direct families to supply their own High Speed internet. This is highly distressing and disappointing.

Telephone

A17. Queensland State Council

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Minister for Communications to ensure all communication providers fulfil their Universal Service Guarantee (USG) obligations in the provision and functionality of essential communication services that are reliable, fit for purpose and are maintained at a fully functioning standard to enable the delivery of rural and remote education.”

Explanation:

Remote communities of Queensland and the Northern Territory recently experienced the failure of essential communication services at critical times and for extended periods, leaving remote families in a state of true isolation. With the inability to fly, drive or even walk to safety, it is critical that these remote areas are protected and supported for both human safety and for the continuum of education.

Case Study 1

This family lost internet and mobile connections due to a flooding event and their landlines had been problematic for some time before the event. The family was evacuated and post the event, the parents returned home to begin recovery clean up while the child remained in town with the Home Tutor. Communication during this time was sporadic with the child's family; however, to ensure minimal disruption to schooling the child and home tutor could not return home until communications had been restored.

Case Study 2

Due to extended rain periods and cloud cover, all communication - mobile/landline/internet - were problematic. Landlines and mobile then became non-operational as batteries that power equipment were not receiving enough sun to remain charged. For the majority of Term 1 the student had little to no contact with their DE teacher and could only attend online lessons sporadically (the internet would work one day but not the next, or part of one day and due to mobile outage they could not hotspot to get coverage, either). Systems are now working well in Term 2.

A18. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Communications to insist Telstra meets their Universal Service Guarantee of providing quality, efficient, and reliable voice services to rural and remote premises including fixed address pastoral leases, remote communities, and remote roadhouses by ensuring new USO voice services exceeds the reliability and quality of existing voice services."

Explanation:

Through the Universal Service Guarantee, Telstra are paid by the Australian Government to ensure all Australians have access to a standard telephone. With the announcement that Telstra would be phasing out the copper landline services in the coming years it's important that they are replaced with the same quality as provided in metropolitan areas including no delays and interruptions such as those experienced when using satellite phone systems and that these services be efficient and reliable during all Australian weather conditions with appropriate backup power supply to ensure students can access education/schooling. In areas where a mobile network has already been established, it's important that these are upgraded to current standards such as 4G or 5G.

Any technologies used in RRR areas must be thoroughly tried and tested in all weather and terrain types, and come with consumer support and engagement with RRR stakeholders.