
Communications Report

Dear Madam President, Extinguished Guests, fellow State Councillors, Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to present the Communications Report for ICPA-NSW for the 2021 year.

Communication issues have been at the forefront for ICPA-NSW, and thankfully we have been able to meet virtually to continue our meetings with our communication stakeholders, primarily being Telstra and NBN. In many ways, communication and the ways in which people communicate has reached a more accelerated level because of the Covid Pandemic. Members have had to utilise many forms of communications to get the job done, or to have children continue with their schooling from home. This was particularly evident with NSW Schools operating with students learning from home in term 3 of 2021.

The "digital divide" is still very apparent; however, the gap has shortened due to Covid and the need for people to explore and become accustomed to doing business via connectivity. As an organisation, ICPA-NSW looks forward to this gap shortening even more as Australia gets back to business.

In some ways the closure of the 3G connectivity will play into the hands of the digital divide or digital literacy problem. The average age of Australians owning a 3G device is 75 years and older. Back in August 2021, there were 700,000 3G devices needing to be upgraded. Some of these devices are connected to telemetering and security equipment, or telephone handsets that are used infrequently. Telstra did embark on a campaign to try and educate these users of the need to upgrade, however the campaign did not achieve marked results, so similar campaigns will need to be continued, so that people become more informed, as we move closer to the shutdown date of June 2024.

Telstra have reported that switching from a 3G to 4G connection provides a noticeable improvement in your download speeds and call quality and reliability. It is very important for customers to understand that 3G and 4G will co-exist until 3G is switched off in June 2024. Telstra will be there to help customers and have given an assurance that they will make the changes as seamless as possible. It is hoped that the lunchtime information session has been or will be beneficial to those members who attend.

Telstra is assuring customers that maintaining existing coverage is important for all customers and their communities as well as visitors to regional areas, so no 3G service will be shut down until a comparable 4G service is in place.

There is not only a lack of understanding around devices, but also with the types of connections available such as with the NBN Sky Muster products. NBN are very keen to enhance members knowledge about the Sky Muster products. If you are keen to utilise an NBN Sky Muster plan and your current provider does not offer it, you should seek further information as this will be the issue rather than an NBN Sky Muster connection not being available to you. The Better Internet for Rural, Remote and Regional Australia (BIRRR) is a good website to browse for information.

All service providers recognise the digital literacy problem that exists across the Nation. Therefore, NBN have created OSCAR (Online Skills Check and Resources), to assist Australians to measure their level of online literacy and find the resources to become more capable and confident online.

A digital survey using OSCAR is currently circulating amongst members. Members are being asked to complete the survey to give NBN a clearer picture of where our members skill level and confidence sits in the digital/online world. I would encourage you all to complete this survey. The link can be found in the February Top Wire. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you in advance for assisting NBN with collecting such information. For your information the link is here too.

<https://surveyv8.humanlistening.com/survey/08578e09-5cc0-44ff-915d-72fad9e2b848/?ambassador=LOCAL-NSW-ICPA-NSW>

In March 2020, the Namoi Branch requested ICPA-NSW and ICPA (Aust) to contact the relevant Ministers to provide a rebate for rural and remote customers who will need to upgrade equipment such as aerials and boosters to change from a 3G to a 4G connection. As our members can have many boosters and aerials attached to sheds, houses, school rooms, farm equipment and vehicles to even get a connection and in some cases, not even a great connection, it was felt that this expense should not be borne completely by the owner, as this upgrade is being forced upon them. During the year this issue was taken to deputation and letters written seeking such a rebate, however a result has not been achieved yet, so it will continue to be taken forward.

Congratulations to Telstra who are bringing all call centres back to the shores of Australia. The pandemic certainly started rolling this ball, much quicker that it would have happened otherwise. By June 2022 we should have all call centres operating from within Australia and members will notice a more consistent and hopefully a greater understanding when approaching Telstra to have their troubleshooting issues resolved. In recent years the Namoi and Collarenebri-Mungindi Branches have been calling for a more direct line for customer service telephone assistance, that effectively assists rural and remote students, and their families troubleshoot their communication issues.

There are also big changes happening in the ownership of Telstra stores. These stores are coming back under Telstra ownership and staffed by Telstra employees rather than being owned by a third party. Hopefully those members who can access a Telstra store will find these stores much more helpful with customer service. Telstra is keen to build relationships, and more digital skill education and training with their customers, hence their drive to take on the ownership of these stores again. Telstra is committed to maintaining their role in connecting regional and remote communities with much ongoing investment and co-investment programs with an aim to boost connectivity.

2021 saw the rolling out of the Fibre Optic (FO) connection to the 12 remaining Satellite Schools in NSW. The schools that are now connected have reported the improved difference with their ability to effectively engage and utilise educational resources using an internet connection, and the school administration staff are able to achieve a full and rewarding day's work recording student and financial data for the school and the NSW Department of Education. The Balranald and Rankins Springs branches have been vigilant in bringing this

issue to conferences for years. Well done to these members, we celebrate and share your success in never giving up on the fight.

The Clare Public School is the last school to receive this connection. Hopefully it will not long before this community are enjoying these benefits too, as the connection is now just waiting on Essential Energy to complete an upgrade to the power service. Wanaaring is just waiting on the firewall install at the site before it is switched over.

Site Location	Baseline RFU	Forecast RFU	Forecast Cutover
Colo Heights	13/08/2021	COMPLETED 19/02/2021	COMPLETED 02/06/2021
Booligal	12/11/2021	COMPLETED 26/02/2021	COMPLETED 08/03/2021
Weilmoringle	30/08/2021	COMPLETED 19/05/2021	COMPLETED 10/06/2021
Louth	30/09/2021	COMPLETED 14/05/2021	COMPLETED 08/06/2021
North Star	13/08/2021	COMPLETED 13/05/2021	COMPLETED 18/06/2021
Wattle Flat	30/06/2021	COMPLETED 11/06/2021	COMPLETED 29/06/2021
MacDonald Valley	16/07/2021	COMPLETED 16/07/2021	COMPLETED 20/10/2021
Erngonia	12/11/2021	COMPLETED 09/07/2021	COMPLETED 19/10/2021
Upper Coopers Creek	29/10/2021	COMPLETED 28/10/2021	COMPLETED 08/11/2021
Wanaaring	17/12/2021	COMPLETED 29/11/2021	COMPLETED 15/02/2022
Naradhan	12/11/2021	COMPLETED 04/02/2022	COMPLETED 16/02/2022
Clare	29/10/2021	Mar -22	Apr-22

The other important point to note in this rollout of a Fibre Optic connection, is that in many cases these schools are evacuation points in times of emergency and disaster. So, a constant and reliable connection is of paramount importance to these communities.

For several years, ICPA-NSW has been calling on the NSW Government to expand mobile service coverage in rural and remote blackspot areas and that rural and remote schools remain a priority in the mobile blackspot programs. I can report that in 2021 we kept on with this call.

The NSW Government does not always contribute to these rounds, however during 2021 we did see the State Government contributing.

For ICPA-NSW members it is a continuing concern that remote families remain disadvantaged by not having access to mobile connectivity. ICPA-NSW is very grateful for the small cells that have been installed across the State, however we are aware of their limitations and generally because of these limitations, many ICPA-NSW members do not get the benefit of

them because they generally only cover a very small distance. To try and assist our members we would like the NSW Government and the Telco providers to continue talking to the Association about where best to install these towers to maximise benefits for our members. It is encouraging that with the 4G upgrade there will be a 200km radius of connectivity from the tower/site. 4G has 10 times the capacity of 3G.

There is an urgent need for these gaps to be filled for the safety of our families, the need to educate our students and members requiring a connection on a day-to-day basis.

Today, most banking sites and accounting programs require two factor authentication. If you have limited mobile connectivity, it is very hard to get these codes in a timely manner and conduct the required business.

It does give ICPA-NSW and the Balranald Branch great pleasure in thanking Telstra for the installation of the Small Cell Tower located nearby the Clare Public School. Thank you so much Telstra.

During the year ICPA-NSW has attended the Telstra Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) meetings. All of these have been by virtual means. On this platform we can get updates from Telstra on a wide range of services, and issues, as well as provide valuable information from our members. The seven top areas where RAC members have been able to provide feedback are:

- 1/ Closure of 3G network customer anxiety
- 2/ Network congestion
- 3/ Mobile blackspots, unfortunately there will always be blackspots
- 4/ Mobile Resilience particularly in times of natural disasters, when power is interrupted, and backup issues arise
- 5/ Fixed line services
- 6/ Digital literacy and skillset
- 7/ Customer service – particularly the ability to contact a service representative, and the Rural and regional needs because of the complexities and challenges that exist for these customers.

Malicious scamming is increasing at an alarming rate. Late last year Telstra was blocking 1300 million scam calls a month.

In 2021 the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (RTIRC) met across the country virtually to receive feedback on the adequacy of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia. This was a great opportunity to bring up branch motions and members concerns regarding the current adequacy of telecommunication services. The report is now with the Federal Government who are expected to hand down the findings in the first part of 2022.

nbn™ Sky Muster™ satellite services connectivity guide

This downloadable fully interactive self-help guide is designed to help you troubleshoot connection issues with your satellite service. Designed to be saved and used when problems

occur, this handy reference guide includes some of the common issues that you may experience, and the steps you can take to improve your nbn™ Sky Muster™ satellite service connection.

Download and save it to your desktop to ensure its readily available if you need it, <https://www.nbnco.com.au/content/dam/nbn/documents/support/satellite/nbn-sky-muster-troubleshooting-guide.pdf> .

This report is an opportunity to remind members that the Regional Tech Hub is a resource for members which offers independent advice and support and helps regional Australians navigate often confusing phone and internet options and technical issues. The Hub can be contacted by telephoning 1300 081 029.

All the best for the ensuing year, stay connected.

Libby McPhee

Communications Portfolio