

Conference Ticks all the Boxes

On Melbourne Cup Day, Tuesday 2nd November, I drove into Longreach, just a few hours from where I live near Alpha in Central Queensland. The drive itself was amazing as most places along the way had received some good early rain and things were looking wonderful – until we got to the downs country near Ilfracombe. Rain is much needed out that way so let's hope it falls soon.

The conference commenced, for me, with a lovely slideshow projected onto a massive jumbo jet at the Qantas Museum. What a fitting place to relive the history of the ICPA organization which started, 50 years ago, in Bourke. I was stunned to catch up with my primary correspondence school friend Moira, who now lives in the Northern Territory, and is heavily involved in ICPA there. It was such a lovely surprise to see her walk onto the bus.

The conference was convened beautifully in the main street of Longreach at the Civic and Cultural Centre. This conference was unusual in that it was a "hybrid" event with people contributing via an online platform as well as those participating in person. We were lucky enough to have delegates attending, in person, from WA, Tasmania, SA, NSW and the NT, albeit reduced in numbers, especially from some states. The majority of delegates who attended in person were from Queensland.

We heard presentations from online speakers, performers and members of parliament. Due to COVID many could not travel to Longreach but were still able to provide input. I thought the attendance of our online delegates worked very well; we could hear their voices easily and some of the settings they were in (e.g. the car) only added to the uniqueness of this event.



The amazing 50th anniversary cake cut at the 2021 conference

Motions about issues relevant to ICPA members were presented and all were carried at conference. Some of the topics these motions covered included assistance for geographically isolated students, tertiary education access and support, early childhood services being expanded or restarted and communications problems, to name just a few. A floor motion was presented right at the end of conference which will urgently pursue the National Code for boarding students. We heard heartbreaking stories of families not being able to see, or support, their kids when they attend boarding school in another state. COVID has really been so hard for some families and one family was unable to see their son get his school captain badge, even with the best travel plans and being fully vaccinated.

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Following afternoon tea on day one we heard journalist Jayne Cuddihy, presenting on the couch, a Q & A session with Federal ICPA Life Members. It was lovely to listen to their stories, the fun they have had, what they have gained out of ICPA and what keeps them passionate about the organisation, after all this time. Jayne is presenting a series of podcasts with other life members who were not at conference.

We discovered the wonderful recent achievements of Federal ICPA, including the new website. The website is vibrant, informative, interactive and has a section for branches also. It can be found at www.icpa.com.au

Presidents' presented their reports over the two days and it was great to hear the different issues and victories each state has dealt with lately. Federal conference will be held in Perth in 2022.

After a full formal day of conference proceedings we all travelled by courtesy bus to a venue called "Smithy's", on the Thomson River, and had a beautiful meal with live music and dancing. An auction was held to raise funds for the ICPA, which was well supported.

Thank you very much to all the outstanding donors and sponsors of the Federal conference. All the hard work done by Federal Council and the convenors would not be achieved without your support.

ICPA Federal Council are also very appreciative to 4 Season Company Pty Ltd and the McDonald Family whose 5% donation from the proceeds of all sales of their ZM lick blocks (named after the late Zanda McDonald) goes to ICPA. This donation appeared in the Federal Council Treasurer's report and it is a substantial donation that will

continue to ensure bush kids receive the advocacy they sorely need for years to come.

Day Two comprised of communication presentations from Telstra and NBN and we were kept advised of what is happening in this area. Satellite technology is becoming more affordable and families that move frequently, for work, will soon have access to more internet options. Our landline technology is changing and soon the old cable system will be replaced with satellite technology. 3G will be phased out in 2025 but Telstra assures us the data component in the new systems will show an improvement in connectivity whilst maintaining coverage.

Personally I found conference to be relevant, informative and so well run. Thank you to my branch for allowing me to attend as I feel so much more connected with people all around Australia. It also gave me a feeling that the wheels are actually turning during very testing times and that much is being achieved for our members. Federal Council has been so busy working on all the issues that people in rural areas are dealing with and I sincerely thank them for their efforts.

Sarah Bridgeman
Alpha Branch

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