

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

"Access to Education"



Submission

to the

Bank closures in regional Australia enquiry

from the

Federal Council

of the

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

ICPA (Aust)

April 2023

Contact:

Kim Hughes

Federal Secretary

ICPA (Aust)

'Harrogate'

RICHMOND QLD 4822

FedSecretary@icpa.com.au

Tel: 0427 377 985

Contact:

Alana Moller

Federal President

ICPA (Aust)

Star of Hope Station

5090 Pioneer Rd

CLERMONT QLD 4721

FedPresident@icpa.com.au

Tel: (07) 4983 5353

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on and enquiry into Bank closures in regional Australia.

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, grassroots, not-for-profit, apolitical, national parent organisation, which advocates on behalf of members for equity of access to an appropriate education for all geographically isolated children and students, from early childhood through to tertiary and the provision of services required to achieve this. The majority of member families of the Association reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia. They often live great distances from their nearest education institution and from services required to support the education of their children.

While our organisation's focus is advocating for equitable access to education for students living in rural and remote areas of Australia, rural bank closures are directly impacting the viability and capability of our organisation to function particularly at a local level.

Our local ICPA Branches (over 100 throughout rural Australia) represent our members at a local level. Local advocacy provides an important voice for those who live in each of the representative areas and contributes to state and national policy development.

Many ICPA branches contact us with concerns about bank closures and the impact it will have or is having on them. When ICPA branch executives change, and new banking information is required, it is often essential for identification and forms to be signed in person, which for rural and remote residents can mean travelling hundreds of kilometres to the closest bank branch. As physical bank branches in rural towns diminish, this trip becomes even further for many. This delays changes taking place as most families usually only travel to large centres when the need arises and this often requires hours or days of travel. In turn this is impacting our membership as ICPA branches are unable to process memberships, hold fundraising events, or carry out day-to-day business.

Some ICPA branches electing to move to online banking with the exit of their bank from their local community have endured exorbitant monthly online banking fees and charges which soon deplete any funds raised for the purposes of advocacy and community support.

Australia Post currently supports banking services for many regional communities and is often the only local option available. However, some banks, including one of the big four, have refused to enter into a banking agreement with Australia Post, which makes managing cheque and cash transactions very difficult for many small ICPA Branches and organisations supporting local rural and remote schools.

At a Federal ICPA level, we also face significant challenges when changing authorised persons with a change of executive positions within the organisation, as most ICPA Federal Council committee members live remotely across various states. Sometimes it takes months to transfer authority to an incoming treasurer for example which means all transactions and banking can be left in limbo for the same period if the exiting authorised representative has left the organisation.

ICPA (Aust) believes banks have an obligation to small rural communities to provide a bricks and mortar, face to face service to community based organisations such as ours.

If banks are not willing to supply the bricks and mortar branches, it is imperative that the following are in place when banks choose to withdraw from a community:

- systems that allow account and signatory changes etc to be done virtually
- simple processes and conditions for online banking fee waivers
- simple and cost-effective options for deposit and withdrawal functions

It is important that small community groups such as local ICPA Branches, school Parents and Citizens Associations and other volunteer advocacy organisations are not faced with undue governance and operational issues due to banks withdrawing from their community without adequate alternative banking services and options in place.

ICPA (Aust) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on and enquiry into Bank closures in regional Australia from a rural and remote educational perspective.

ICPA (Aust) is more than happy to provide additional information on any of the topics that have been raised should it be required.