

ICPA Qld Presidents Conference Report Townsville – June 2024

Madam Patron, Federal President, Life Members, the Belyando – Mt Coolon Branch convening committee, Distinguished Guests, fellow ICPA members, ladies & gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure to present my 2024 President's Report:

Goodness, it is humbling and at the same time, an incredibly proud moment to be standing here delivering my first President's Report for ICPA Qld - certainly not something that I had thought I would have the courage or knowledge to do, let alone the skills to do, and yet here I am!

In the blink of an eye, we are here in Townsville embarking on the 53rd ICPA Qld Conference. Still very fresh in our memories is the incredible 2023 conference, not only due to the LAFHAs increase that was announced by Mr Michael De'Ath, Director General of Education on behalf of the then Education Minister the Hon. Grace Grace, but also due to the country hospitality, friendliness, and exceptional organisation of the Julia Creek Branch in delivering the 52nd conference for ICPA Qld.

The acknowledgement of Mr Jack Beach's contribution to ICPA through the presentation of his Queensland State Life Membership, and his reflection of his years in ICPA was a truly noteworthy moment in ICPA history. The honouring of Mrs Christine McLean and Mr Neville Dolinski with well-deserved State Certificates of Appreciation was also very special. Council also welcomed Mrs Robyn O'Brien, Mrs Sancia Fegan and Mrs Sonya Shelley into the roles of State Councillors. Mrs Fiona Murray joined us as the Fundraising Officer and Mrs Tina Barrett joined us as the Membership Officer, both of which are Off Council Roles. The 2023/24 Council was full as we also had Mrs Louise Martin in the role of Immediate Past President.

Reflecting on and recognising 12 months of dedication and tireless hardworking commitment from each and every member of the ICPA Qld State Council is important. As volunteers, the 16 members on council and five off council have committed and delivered a truly mammoth year worthy of reflection.

This year State Council has achieved Post-Conference Meeting, three Brisbane Delegations (August, November and March) including Face-to-Face Meetings, Mid-Year Council Meeting, over 77 meetings with Stakeholders whilst on Delegations, three Parliamentary Hearings, more than 13 Council Teams meetings, 86 Meetings with Stakeholders when not officially in Brisbane, Mentor Branch Meetings, telephone calls, emails and messenger conversations. That is more than 184 declared meetings.....it is acknowledged that all of this is in a voluntary capacity, all members of the team having full-time responsibilities away from Council and families too. Dedicated, passionate and all extremely capable, these ladies of the 2023/24 State Council each deserve to be proud of themselves and their contribution to the organisation.

In February, Qld State Council joined representatives from all other states and Federal Council in Darwin for a Joint Council meeting. The knowledge and experience in the room was incredible and the opportunity to discuss all things ICPA, along with the sharing of information, tools and ideas was so valuable. I was fortunate enough to attend with Amanda Clark as the Queensland representatives. We thank the Northern Territory State Council for hosting and chairing the meeting. February in Darwin was certainly a warmer place to be, but the company was on point!

With so many meetings, reference groups, stakeholders, supporters, Members of Parliament and opportunities for ICPA to meet and further the lobby or advocacy of the motions and policies of ICPA Qld, one of our key relationships is with the Department of Education. The Rural and Remote team is led by Dr Grant Webb, Acting Assistant Director-General, Rural, Remote and Strategic Initiatives. We have a working relationship based on respect and understanding with both sides working towards the greater good for all children. ICPA Qld truly appreciates the time of Grant and his team, and that of Director-General Michael De'Ath, Sharon Schimming, Associate Director-General Early Childhood and State Schools, and Stacie Hansel, Deputy Director-General Schools and Student Support. We have the opportunity and ability to work with them along with so many others in other sections of the Department. This working relationship is truly valuable for the organisation and students alike.

I also believe it is valuable for those in the Department of Education to hear the genuine voices of rural and remote families throughout Queensland. Throughout the years, ICPA has taken a very considered approach to our lobby, and we continue to ensure that all meetings, correspondence and conversations are based on knowledge and evidence. ICPA genuinely portrays the voice of our members and their children. Council has also been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to discuss all aspects of Rural and Remote Education with former Minister for Education, the Honourable Grace Grace, and now we work with Minister Di Farmer; we thank you for listening and valuing our students too.

ICPA Qld also values its working relationship with Independent Schools Queensland and the Catholic Education Commission; I would like to thank Mr Chris Mountford, Chief Executive Officer, ISQ, and Mr Allan Blagaich, Executive Director, QCEC for their time and working with ICPA. With so many of our students receiving their education through either an Independent School or a Catholic School, it is vital that we continue to ensure that all bodies who deliver education have an understanding of our students and the added layers of complexities they experience.

In her Conference Report at the 2004 ICPA Qld State Conference, the President, Mrs Rose Philp, talked about the importance of the Joint Parent Network. Twenty years on, it has given me great pleasure to be a part of this group representing ICPA and working with Amanda Watt, Queensland Independent Schools Parent Network, Scott Wiseman P&Cs Qld and Carmel Nash, Catholic Schools Parents Association.

The group, along with QCAA, came together in October of last year to deliver a webinar on "Artificial Intelligence (AI) in School and at Home", to all parents. Over 600 parents tuned in on the night and more accessed after the day. This is a testament to the strength of the four groups working together.

The four organisations and their importance as Key Parent Groups, were recognised on Mother's Day by the Education Minister, The Honourable Di Farmer, Minister for Education and Youth Justice, with a "one-off" \$100,000 donation each, to assist us in helping families ensure that their children are accessing the best education for them, regardless of where they reside.

We thank the Minister very much for this contribution. As all of you would understand, financial responsibility and its implications for a voluntary organisation is a burden needing to be continuously assessed and reassessed. This is particularly so, as we hear each day in the news about the cost-of-living crisis we are currently facing. This contribution will assist enormously, and we know this grant is a reflection of the hard work and cost associated with ensuring all rural and remote families voices are heard. This gesture will assist enormously and as we undertake a new council year at the completion of conference, planning and costings will be undertaken, and we look forward to letting our members know how the grant is benefiting ICPA Qld and all members.

ICPA State Council is made up of portfolios, with each of those portfolios being led by a councillor. Whilst Council relates to many stakeholders, in turn, each portfolio associates with its own stakeholders. The

Boarding Schools and Hostels, Communications, Curriculum, Distance Education, Financial Assistance, Schools, Specific Needs, Teacher Education, Tertiary, Trade and Training and Travel Portfolio Leaders have, progressed and discussed the motions that are allocated to them from Conference. They have met with Stakeholders and all relevant persons. Please ensure you read their Portfolio Reports which will be on the website, and you can access them through the QR codes that are provided with your conference materials. Each portfolio leader is the expert on all aspects of their portfolio and their reports truly reflect their time, efforts, and achievements on ensuring the voice of rural and remote students in these key areas are always heard and considered. I thank each and every member of Council, who has contributed to these this year, along with all of the stakeholders who have also played an active part.

Delegations were held in August, November and March in Brisbane. I would like to make mention of Brisbane Boys College (BBC), Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) and St Joseph's College (Nudgee) for hosting State Council for our face-to-face meetings this year. These meetings are so important for the planning and co-ordination of impending meetings with stakeholders over the days ahead, and also the coming together of the council. It is where we have the opportunity to ensure our thoughts and plans for the progressing of motions is on course, update all of Council's policies for the year ahead, and strategize and plan for the best outcomes. There is nothing more motivating than all being in the one room.

To start our time in Brisbane in August, Council engaged the services of Directors Australia to deliver a training course on Governance for all of Council. This was insightful and useful training for one and all and has enabled Council to ensure that the integrity of the organisation is maintained, and governance is followed with diligence. It was also an opportunity for councillors as individuals, to learn and grow, and develop skills that are able to be utilised.

Each of the Delegations have seen a timetable full, combining meetings with the Department of Education (and the numerous relevant sections within), Queensland Catholic Education Commission and Independent Schools Queensland. Key stakeholders' meetings are integral to the discussion of motions, policy and ensuring always that rural and remote students are considered in all decision-making processes. Stakeholder meetings have been held with numerous bodies, including Queensland Curriculum Advisory Authority (QCAA), DESBT, In-Home Care, Queensland College of Teachers (QCT), TAFE QLD, AgForce and Autism QLD, allowing the opportunity to ensure the voices of rural and remote families are heard and considered across the broad spectre.

Council went into the year knowing that it was going to be the year leading up to a State Government election, and at our Mid-Year Meeting we formalised the 2023 Key Issues Document. This document was created with the intention of circulating to all stakeholders, all sitting members of Parliament and to anyone else with whom ICPA meets – Council determines the "Key Issues" that by reviewing the motions that have been carried at Conference. This year these issues came under TTT, DE, Travel and our small schools (in Schools) Portfolios. Our small schools are hurting and need assistance to ensure there is equity as well as equality to cover their needs immediately.

This document gives the opportunity to speak about the issues that really are having an impact on families with their students and their learning at all ages and stages. Sometimes, despite the best of intentions, policies do not fit and work as intended. Rural and remote students experience very different classrooms and curriculum delivery than their urban counterparts. ICPA has appreciated the opportunity to share these experiences with the Department and other stakeholders. Council determined the Key Issues for this year, with Small School Staffing the first area of priority. We have seen a growing number of motions each year in the Schools Portfolio with members voicing their concerns around student ratios, teacher workload and responsibilities.

Our “Key Issues” document outlined three important areas – two full-time teachers in small schools when the enrolment numbers reach 16 instead of the current magic number of 21; an increase of minimum funding for a second teacher in Level 1 schools - this is a compounding problem in rural and remote areas with the burden of attracting part time teachers and the flow on and interruption in the classroom; and ensuring that teaching principals are allocated and resourced with the required levels of administrative support to ensure teachers can do what they are trained for and want and need to do – teach the students and not be in an office attending to the time-consuming administrative tasks.

With Queensland announcing and then implementing free kindy for all students, the second Key Area identified was for Kindergarten students to be able to have guaranteed seating on a school bus. This is particularly pertinent for the students who attend State Delivered Kindergarten (SDK) and we see families needing to drive their kindy student to school whilst siblings are able to be transported on the school bus. A second element to recognising Kindy Students was the request for the extension of the Conveyance Allowance to give provision for families who have students attending an SDK to receive assistance with transportation of their student to the local school – this change of policy would only be necessary when the kindy student is the eldest in the family.

ICPA Qld also sought the implementation of a Pastoral Care Program to support students who undertake an apprenticeship. Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) need to provide regular audited and measurable levels of assistance to all apprentices to assist with ensuring completion of tasks. Further in the post-schooling space, we support the expansion of the Country University Centres (CUCs) as valuable resources that offer support services to assist local tertiary and vocational students who are pursuing higher education whilst remaining in their communities.

The final issue raised in the document was ensuring that Geographically Isolated Students are always the priority in Schools of Distance Education, regardless of the percentage they represent in enrolments.

Following the distribution of the Key Issues Document, State Council was heartened by the response and met with many stakeholders, both current and new. As a result of the many conversations, we can report that ICPA Qld now has a seat on the Queensland Virtual Academy (QVA) Stakeholder Group. There has recently been an announcement of a further expansion of the CUCs footprint in Queensland.

In October, State Council had all roads leading to Theodore, where we were hosted by the Dawson Valley Branch for our Mid-Year Meeting. We thoroughly enjoyed our time, not only ICPA'ing but also learning about this community and its surrounds. Visiting branches throughout the state is certainly a highlight on the calendar year and is a wonderful opportunity to be able to speak directly to members and listen to their issues and concerns.

Any opportunity to ensure perspective and consideration is given to rural education has been taken throughout the year including attendance as a part of the Early Years Stakeholder Group, the Early Years Forum in March, and the Minister's Early Years Forum in November. Attendance has ensured that we have been able to connect with education staff and parent body groups, and also with representatives from many groups pertaining to early year education, engagement, and care.

Being an active participant in the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership and their Country Collaborative has broadened our reach, with attendees from all over the state and from a broad range of organisations. It has been valuable to us for our connections and working. ICPA Qld looks forward to continuing with this.

To ensure that any organisation is sustainable and viable we need to foster and maintain relationships with valued partners. We acknowledge ABSA, and Outback Insurance who have also now been joined by Telstra. Their financial support as well as in-kind support is valuable and appreciated. Partnerships is an area that in

the new council year we will continue to look at, evaluate, develop and strengthen. We are also extremely grateful to Bush Christmas for their generous support each year, with 2023 being no exception. This is a special relationship supported by past ICPA members who enjoy supporting current. We are also privileged to have a working relationship with Ningana Trust for whom Gina and Tim Fairfax are Trustees. We must also mention that thanks to Greyhound Australia, we have made it onto the back of two buses!

At the beginning of May, State Council made the decision to publish another document with the lead up to the State elections in October – the *ICPA Qld Election Commitment Document* was created and has now been circulated to all sitting members of Parliament, along with the listed candidates for election. Seeking an annual subsidy to contribute to the cost of student supervision in a geographically isolated, State Delivered Distance Education school room is listed along with full-time Administrative Support for Principals in Small Schools, access to a state-run agricultural boarding high school and the lowering of the enrolment requirements for the allocation of two full-time teachers in small schools from 21 to 16. As an apolitical organisation, ICPA Qld is happy to talk to any interested persons about these requests and encourages those who are seeking to lead the state to give priority to rural and remote students and their families.

As I am drawing to a close on an incredible year there are a few more acknowledgements to be made – State Council has also contributed to and submitted five submissions that are listed on our website and has spoken at three parliamentary enquiries/hearings. This year, the Council has been a team of strong knowledgeable ‘doers’ in On and Off Council positions. I thank Tina Barrett, Mt Isa BOTA Branch, who has been on a steep learning curve as our Membership Officer, a role that is continuing to evolve, as does the membership process. Tina’s patience and “doing” attitude has been commendable.

Lisa Southern, St George Branch, has continued another year of compelling compilations to bring the *News & Views* editions to you all; thank you Lisa - your experience and knowledge is very valuable.

Fiona Murray, Charters Towers Branch, is our Fundraising Officer; this task that is bigger than it looks and so vital to help ensure the name of ICPA is visible, whilst also raising valuable funds to ensure the organisation is kept afloat. The Art Union continues to be not only a lot of work but a major part of the ICPA year. We thank all of those who have bought tickets and encourage those who have not to do so.

Tammie Irons, Westmar Inglestone Branch has continued in the role of Web Tech Officer and assisted with Registrations for the website; Tam’s knowledge is more than you find in a manual, and we are grateful to have you continuing in this role. In the Off-Council role of Hospital Schools, we have our State Life Member, Judy Treloar. Judy attends meetings and we look forward to her reports as they are always fascinating. It is so important to ensure that there is a rural and remote perspective on the board. A mention must be made also of Westmar Inglestone Branch who continue to compile the New Member Packs on behalf of State Council; currently Natalie Slack is in the role.

This year State Council saw Tammy Bailey step off Council in October due to other commitments. Tammy was the Curriculum Portfolio Leader and embraced this role whilst she was on Council. At the completion of Conference, we will also see Kylie Camp, Megan Easton and Anneli Day retire from their roles as Councillors. Melissa Iland will step down as the Publicity Officer and Louise Martin as Immediate Past President. We thank you all for your commitment, dedication, and knowledge. We wish you well with all of those extra hours that you will be acquire back into your day - though I am sure at times you will miss ICPA!

To all in attendance, we thank you for making the effort to be here, whether you are a delegate, observer, guest, or sponsor - each one of you is as valuable as the other. To the branches who have submitted motions: this reiterates the importance of the organisation and the process. We look forward to debate over the coming two days and please remember that your voice is as valuable as anyone else’s. To the sponsors:

thank you - your support is not only vital to all of us, it is also overwhelming. I thank you and please know you are appreciated and make a difference.

To Members in attendance and at home - it is you who makes ICPA Qld. As a member-based organisation, we need you and encourage you all to spread the word of ICPA and encourage others to join. State Council has been committed to raising the organisation's profile, attracting the next generation of members, and increasing the communication and connection between Council and its branches, members, and potential members.

We hear frequently that there is a perception that ICPA is only advocating for distance education and financial assistance for boarding school. However, as everyone at this conference knows, ICPA is so much more than that. Our challenge is to make the organisation relevant for all who are affected by equity of access due to where they live.

As people are busy with daily life, career, and other volunteer roles that more often than not are part of the job description of living west of the divide, we must give people a reason to get on board. The strength and longevity of this incredible organisation is only as good as those coming after us, and having passionate people to take up the baton and keep running full steam ahead is about informing, engaging, and inspiring! This is something every single member can contribute to, and we ask you to support us.

For us to all be here, there has been a mammoth effort behind the scenes on the part of the Convening Committee from Belyando-Mt Coolon Branch. Amanda, you and your team have been a pleasure to work with and it is wonderful to see your hard work and vision come to fruition. We are certainly looking forward to the next two days here in Townsville.

To State Council, thank you for your patience and guidance as I have found my feet in this role. As Helen Keller is quoted as saying "Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much"; this year is a true testament to that. You are #iamICPA.

Thank you.

Wendy Henning
President