

Claire Butler, ICPA-NSW President's Report – Federal Conference 5 & 6 August 2020.

It is with great pleasure to present the President's report on behalf of ICPA-NSW.

State Conference 2020

The ICPA-NSW State Conference was scheduled to be held on 18 and 19 March in Moree, with the theme "Education, Heart of Communities". This was also the week that COVID-19 restrictions were unfolding and whilst our State Councillors had travelled to Moree with every intention of continuing with the conference, it quickly became very apparent that a decision needed to be made to cancel. The Moree Convening Committee is to be commended for all their efforts and hard work in the months of work they put into organising the conference - it was a tough week for us all and as this was unfolding we were also dealing with the news that our children's schools were closing - being away from home making these decisions when clearly we needed to be home with our families was certainly a resilience building experience.

We have also had to find a way to work around our Constitution which does restrict us from voting on conference motions via postal or electronic means. We have asked our branches to advise us, in writing, if they consider their new matter to be urgent and based on that advice we will raise it as an 'issue' for their area, instead of a 'motion' for our State. This way, we can still represent our members with politicians and stakeholders.

Despite having to cancel our Conference, whilst we were in Moree, we took the opportunity to hold the AGM via teleconference. This ensured that we remained constitutional and also gave us the opportunity to present Caroline McDonald with a Certificate of Appreciation for all her hard work that she has done for State Council.

We would like to acknowledge the generosity of FRRR, who in the spirit of 'tackling tough times' allowed the \$46,000 grant received by Moree branch to be used to pay expenses relating to the cancelled conference - it ensured that local businesses such as caterers and motels were not financially burdened from the cancellation. Moree, like most of NSW in recent years, has been through a tough time with the drought and FRRR really helped out. This assistance then allowed for all conference registrations to be reimbursed. The State Conference for 2021 has been set for Hay in the Southern Riverina on 10 and 11 March and we sincerely hope that we will all be face to face in Hay. Thanks again to the FRRR for offering to transfer left over funds from the Moree conference to Hay. Hay branch theme is "Thrive in Isolation."

Mini Deputation 2020

We have had no face to face meetings, but we have embraced Zoom!

Instead of mini deputation to Sydney this year, there have been letters written and more online meetings, in particular State Council has met with NSW Education Standards Authority on the Curriculum review, The NSW Department of Education on the Rural and Remote Survey and Transport for NSW on the school drive subsidy (very pleasing to see ICPA-NSW quoted and a recommendation on the need for a preschool drive subsidy in the recent NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Drought). We have worked on two more submissions for NSW

Parliamentary inquiries – the review into the NSW Curriculum and the review into Future Development of the NSW Tertiary Education Sector.

We have, of course, also deal

t with the ongoing issues that COVID-19 throws at us on a daily basis. This has been particularly challenging to manage as we find ourselves catching policy on the run. NSW is a State sandwiched by three other States, who, in the past few months have closed their borders and this has had a huge impact on the ability for children to access their education, not to mention the children who also attend boarding school within NSW.

State Council has been very focused on writing and telephoning interstate Ministers and Health Departments. We find ourselves averaging two radio interviews a week, constantly updating our facebook page and emailing members updates as we find things out. It was very pleasing to see Queensland relax quarantine rules on NSW children who reside on rural and remote properties as they return to boarding. The Chief Medical Officer of Qld said that “refusal of entry into Queensland would cause disproportionate hardship to these children given the importance of education in our community”. We have been working hard to ensure that remote NSW children boarding in South Australia can be allowed back in without quarantining. South Australia has been particularly challenging but we won’t give up on these children who are our most geographically isolated in the Far West of NSW. We are also monitoring the Victorian situation closely and thank the NSW Government for listening to us by placing a permit criteria for boarding families. It is wonderful to see so many organisations advocating for rural and remote children and I would like to make special mention of Richard Stokes and the team at ABSA for all that they do for schools and our children. I would like to also thank NT Territory President Sarah Cook, whom we did a joint letter with, Qld President Tammie Irons for all her knowledge and for arranging that wonderful online rally, SA President Jill Greenfield, who we shared a South Australian Country Hour radio interview with, and Federal President Alana Moller who has been advocating at a federal level, these women are a true inspiration. The silver lining in COVID-19 is the opportunity to be in such remarkable company and working collaboratively under extraordinary circumstances. It is quite apparent that we will be dealing with this for some time and it is indeed a worrying time for many of our families.

The NSW Minister for Education was extremely quick to assist when we raised the issue of social distancing capacity in the State boarding schools and they found ways to get all children back to those schools in a very timely manner.

ICPA-NSW conducted a survey of boarding school families during the COVID-19 closures and overwhelmingly, we had 517 responses. In early June, 55% of boarders were not back in their boarding houses. The survey provided us with an insight into the struggles of many members and we thank everyone for participating, we also gave each State Council and Federal Council the results so that they could utilise the information. Our current membership numbers are 783 and whilst the survey did capture 40 new members Australia wide, we still need to look at ways to encourage more memberships. For NSW, our challenge is finding ways to keep members staying on whilst new ones join.

State Council is scheduled to have our first face to face meeting in late August where we will plan what our main deputation will look like as it doesn't look very promising that we will be in Sydney for face to face meetings in October. More Zoom meetings!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the remarkable team of Councillors on ICPA-NSW State Council. Despite their own challenges with Drought, Bushfires and family commitments, they continue to inspire me every day with their willingness to volunteer to help our members. The life of a State Councillor means that every single day you do something for ICPA-NSW. Every. Single. Day. It might be whilst in the sheep yards hanging off one bar of phone service, in the car, late at night whilst everyone is asleep, or during family events, on the tractor, on Mothers or Father day, it doesn't matter what day it is, every day there is a team of people doing something selfless for our members.

Thank you also to Alana Moller and her Federal team for being supportive mentors to us throughout what has been a very interesting year. The unwavering support from ICPA (Aust) has been such an incredible strength to us in NSW.

I will leave you with a wonderful little quote from the letter written to us recently by our Patron, Her Excellency Margaret Beazley AC QC Governor of New South Wales ***“take care of yourselves and thank you again for living the challenge of being in isolated communities with such good humour and such big hearts”***