

PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

Amanda Nixon – Portfolio Holder, March 2018

The 2017 Communications Portfolio has seen ICPA Federal and State Councils work collaboratively to advocate for access and reliability to communication services for families educating children living in rural and remote locations. Improvements to affordable, reliable internet and voice services have dominated media releases during the past year. As a council, we have been involved in this discussion. We have submitted 2 letters supporting the *ACCC draft decision not to declare mobile roaming*. Attended Broadband for the Bush forum in Fremantle and teleconferences with *Federal/State communication portfolio holders* run by ICPA Australia.

Collaboration between Federal & State Councils: 2017 Motion S3 from the Kimberley Air Branch required the collaboration between Federal Council and WA State Council to address the need for urgent upgradesto remote radio telephone services. Given the enormity of this task, the WA Area General Manager of Telstra Countrywide, Boyd Brown gave ICPA Federal and State an invitation to work directly with his office to address WA remote radio repair issues.

Broadband for the Bush Forum. Fremantle 22 & 23rd June 2017. Attended by State council reps Tash Johns, Elaine Egan & Amanda Nixon. Roxanne Morrissey presented in a panel session on behalf of ICPA (Aust), "Demands on online services by students engaging in and building, new interactive technologies in learning". In this session it was interesting to hear about interactive curriculum resources and capturing indigenous culture and story. However, a similar story ran through most workshop sessions; that remote access was limited by data traffic and allocation.

ICPA WA State Council have been supplied with 2 **trial mobile phone boosters for vehicles (Cel-Fi Go)** and we agreed to give feedback to Telstra countrywide. There is a great summation by Tash Johns in Sept ICPA WA newsletter Bits & Pieces. The booster was invaluable for Tash to host the monthly State Council 'GoTo' meeting from her fenceline camp in the Pilbara (see cover page). We have also received comments and recommendations from industry consultants in Eastern Wheatbelt areas as to coverage increases.

Dowerin Field Day ICPA booth - Good ICPA conversation generated by presence in Telstra Tent. After 4 years spent attached to the Education Tent ICPA accepted the invitation to join Telstra Countrywide in their tent. This was a great opportunity to promote ICPA's efforts in lobbying for equity solutions to communication issues for education.

Mobile Black Spot Program: The third round of government Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) funding locations was announced in May 2017, with an aim to address areas that may not be commercially profitable but have a need for coverage. This round will target 125 specific priority locations that were not included in previous rounds. There is an indication that Mobile Black Spot Rounds will continue, although possibly not in the format we have seen up to now. ICPA will continue our lobbying efforts as we advocate for more rural and remote areas to be covered by the program. We still have many members in areas of limited or non-existent mobile service.

nbn wholesale data allowance announcement saw the monthly data allowance for satellite customers double as at 1st October 2017. Wholesale allowable peak plans on the Sky Muster™ service go to 150 GB (from 75GB) and total monthly plans go to 300GB (from 150GB). Retail service providers able to offer at a similar pre-October price. This announcement also provides Distance Education students and small rural schools with extra data through the dedicated Education Port which will allow for further opportunities to access a full curriculum.

Nbn Education Port: The education port is available for geographically isolated distance education students receiving the Assistance of Isolated Children (AIC) allowance. Since the first education port connection in Queensland in June 2016 there is now take up in all states and territories of Australia. Queensland and Western Australia have the majority of working connections to date. The nbn sets the access rules and the wholesale price for the Education Port. The individual RSPs set the retail price, however not all RSPs provide access to the Education Port. Currently the education port providers are:

Activ8 - <http://www.activ8me.net.au/internet/skymuster>

ANT- <https://www.ant.com.au/nbn/lts/education>

HarbourISP- <https://www.harbourisp.com.au/plan/nbn-educational-pip-plan/>

Skymesh- <https://www.skymesh.net.au/services/nbn/satellite/education.php>

Clearnetworks- <https://www.clear.com.au/residential1/nbn-sky-muster/plans-pricing/>

One strong message is that nbn cannot fix a problem if they do not know about it and we encourage members to contact us if they are experiencing difficulties with their service in relation to their students' schooling.

Domestic Mobile Roaming: ACCC's draft recommendation that wholesale mobile roaming not be implemented was released on May 5, 2017. ICPA WA has submitted 2 letters *supporting draft ACCC decision* not to declare mobile roaming. ICPA Federal and State message is that priority for our members is expansion of mobile coverage into the areas where they live, work and are educated. We also support the comment that if mobile roaming is not being undertaken, that service providers in the bush need to fulfil their obligations and expand infrastructure to additional areas as well as maintaining services.

Since coverage cannot be extended further without new investment, it is equally critical that mobile providers continue to invest in their rural networks on both a standalone basis and as co-investment partners with governments. ICPA believes that unless more investment is made in the development of communication infrastructure in rural and remote locations, discrimination against rural and remote residents will continue.

Reform of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) and its significance to fixed landline access:

The Productivity Commissions (PC) report on the Telecommunications Universal Service Obligation (USO), which ensures that all premises can access a voice service, was released to the public on June 19, 2017. The PC found that the current system does not deliver for consumers or Government and have recommended significant changes, including removing the current contract with Telstra that delivers voice services, leveraging the National Broadband Network to deliver data services and the introduction of targeted programs specifically to provide for voice and community services. ICPA's position has been and remains that all customers must have access to an affordable, reliable and adequate/appropriate voice service which is standalone from satellite internet so that they have two communications services available to them, just as those in the city do (mobile and then an nbn service for internet). One day, something that is an

improvement on landlines may be available for rural and remote customers and we want to ensure we support the investigation of this but are clear that removal of landlines cannot be considered until such a service is available. The guarantee around broadband in the USO is something that ICPA does support and welcomes the assurance of this. It was very encouraging to see that the govt's response to the USO inquiry made so much mention of remote and regional customers.

The government formally responded to this report in December 2017, saying it will be working to develop a new Universal Service Guarantee (USG) that will ensure that all Australians have access to voice and broadband services, regardless of where they live in the country. The new USG will still ensure access to payphones or equivalent technologies in areas with no mobile coverage or in remote Australia.

Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia (BIRRR) has put together information documents for people who are navigating the broadband jungle. Thank you to BIRRR for collating this information and allowing ICPA to provide it to our members:

How to choose an **nbn** provider-follow this [link](#):

<https://birrraus.com/2017/10/30/how-to-choose-an-nbn-provider/>

Internet provider details printout sheet-follow this [link](#):

<https://birrraus.com/2017/10/30/internet-provider-details-printout/>

Wi-Fi Trial: Many members have been concerned about the current Qantas Wi-Fi trial. nbn have assured ICPA (Aust) that this is a trial, designed to not have an impact on Sky Muster™ users and they are 100% committed to ensuring that regional and remote Australia remains their top priority. The trial with QANTAS and ViaSat should help fast track technology that could support similar services. A 6-month trial for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, so RFDS planes can communicate with specialists on the ground, will commence in September 2017. The software developed in the trial will open the door to the development of products to support mobile satellite units for various situations requiring emergency services when there is a natural disaster and also explore the possibility of mobile Sky Muster™ receivers for tractors and utilities.

Providing ICPA with your case studies and communications issues helps us advocate for this portfolio. Thank you for the support of ICPA federal council in supplying information to create a unified message.