

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2019 Federal Conference Communications Portfolio Motions

Internet Access

A14. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, National Broadband Network Company and Internet Service Providers to ensure that geographically isolated students have equity of internet access which is adequate with regard to speed, quality, capabilities, download limits and cost to meet their educational needs."

Explanation:

Some Distance Education Students enrolled at Alice Springs School of the Air (ASSOA) have had internet supplied to them via in-house satellite, modem and internet connections, other families supply their own internet connection for students at their own cost. The internet service provided by the NT Department of Education, is managed, monitored and fixed by the Internet Technicians at ASSOA. Alice Springs School of the Air is in the process of having tests carried out on families own internet connections gathering data to ensure when the school internet network is changed over to each families own internet connection, the children will still have enough reliable internet access to ensure speed, quality, capabilities, download limits and cost meet their daily schooling needs.

We would like to ensure there are no limits placed on download limits, speed, and capabilities of internet connections that are used for education for isolated students regardless of the service being provided by the school or a private connection provided by the family.

A15. Katherine Branch (NT)

D/C by A14

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to request the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts to ensure all Australian students have adequate internet access with regard to speed, quality, capabilities and cost of the service."

Explanation:

We acknowledge and thank ICPA (Aust) and the Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia for their continuous and effective lobbying of the Federal Government, Telstra, nbnTM and other providers on internet issues in the bush. In particular, the negotiations with nbnTM to provide dedicated ports for education an important breakthrough. The prioritisation of installations required for education is paramount. Many students, however, such as tertiary and training students, students of small rural schools and boarding students' home on "holidays". These families are required to use their business/family internet for education. Also, the NT is in flux with regard to internet provision for distance education and so some families are also using their own internet for that.

While expected data speeds, plan sizes and service reliability are continually improving, our members have concerns about the data allocations in plans being heavily loaded towards unreasonable off-peak times. The Mb/\$ continues to fall extremely short of those available to our urban counterparts, thus ensuring maintenance of the internet divide between regional and urban areas.

A16. Kimberley Air Branch (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government and other relevant stakeholders to ensure fair and equitable access to Sky Muster for those with genuine need for the service, and access which reflects the residential and educational needs of rural and regional Australia.”

Explanation:

With the heavy reliance on internet access to support distance education and plans to have all Australian government services available online by 2025, it is more important than ever that there is No Australian Left Offline. The current No Australian Left Offline policy focuses on equitable access for low income families and while this is important, we want to ensure that our remote families are secure in knowing NBN satellite installations costs will be met and more affordable access to internet is also available where it is needed most. Whilst it is appreciated that Sky Muster continues to be available for our remote families, the suggestion that there will be no assistance with installation costs from 2020 is of most concern. These costs escalate greatly in providing relevant technicians to our most isolated locations and would limit who can and cannot access the Sky Muster facility into the future.

A17. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies nbn Co that all students enrolled via distance education schools have access to the Sky Muster Education Port.”

Explanation:

In WA, only students studying via distance education and enrolled through Schools of the Air (SOTA) or School of Isolated Distance Education (SIDE) qualify for the Sky Muster Education Port, which the WA Education Department funds. There have been instances where students studying via Distance Education through private campuses have been told they do not qualify for the Education Port from nbn Co and referred on to the State Education Department. ICPA (WA) would like to see access to the Education Port for all students studying via distance education, with the option to fund their access themselves if enrolled in a non-government school.

A18. Northern Territory State Council (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to relevant Federal Government Departments and Ministers to ensure families residing in geographically isolated regions to have ‘unlimited’ data plans, for the Education Port/s for each enrolled student.”

Explanation:

Students in rural and remote areas, whether enrolled in Schools of the Air, distance education, or a small school require significant data and reliable internet to receive their education. Children in geographically isolated areas have very limited exposure to extracurricular interests such as

music, drama and social interaction. Good, affordable internet is key to providing these students with some of the opportunities their urban counterparts can easily access.

Some states, such as the Northern Territory, do not presently use the Education Port for School of the Air or distance education.

Access to the Education Port should be granted to all geographically isolated students who have no option for unlimited data plans, to reduce financial stress and help towards equity in access to educational opportunities.

A19. Northern Territory State Council (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) urges nbn™ to ensure education ports on Sky Muster services have multicast capability.”

Explanation:

Wikipedia explains multicast as *‘a group communication where data transmission is addressed to a group of destination computers simultaneously. Multicast can be one-to-many or many-to-many distribution ... making it possible for the source to efficiently send to the group in a single transmission.’*

Multicast functionality is an extremely efficient means of data transmission. Northern Territory Schools of the Air (SOTA) have been successfully delivering Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) lessons to their students using REACT, a multicast product, for over 13 years. The stability, reliability and functionality of REACT has often been envied by other distance education communities across Australia. The NSW Department of Education is also using REACT to deliver distance education.

Currently however, Sky Muster Education Ports cannot support multicast transmission. As many families with students do or probably will require the education port for distance education, families, especially in NT and NSW, would appreciate nbn™ ensuring multicast functionality for education ports.

A20. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies nbn Co to ensure that video streaming for educational use is included in future Sky Muster Plus plans for students studying via distance education.”

Explanation:

With the prospect of the Sky Muster Education Port being discontinued due to the introduction of Sky Muster Plus, it is imperative that video streaming, including YouTube, that is actively used, be included in the delivery of education programs for rural and remote students studying via distance education.

A21. Westmar-Inglestone Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, Minister for Regional Services, Local Government and Decentralisation and the National Broadband Network Company to extend the current Sky Muster Education Port to include Tertiary students studying online from rural and remote locations.”

Explanation:

Many rural and remote tertiary students are choosing to study by external or online methods as this allows them to continue to work and live in rural and remote communities. Currently the Education Port only allows access by primary and secondary students studying via distance education.

Online learning requires tertiary students to log in to streamed, live (and recorded) tutorials /lectures many times each week. Current download data quotas are inadequate, and students are unable to attend necessary online sessions. The Education Port needs to be made available to tertiary students studying from rural and remote locations.

A22. Western Australia State Council (WA)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) investigates the possibility of nbn Co continuing the installation of Sky Muster and its hardware at no cost to rural and remote student households to ensure affordable access for rural and remote students.”

Explanation:

With the likelihood of the Sky Muster free installation and hardware costs ceasing beyond 2020, there is great concern as to what nbn will have in place in regard to geographically isolated students accessing education through distance education at an affordable cost to parents.

A23. Northern Territory State Council (NT)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the relevant minister for the subsidisation of Sky Muster installations to continue past 2020.”

Explanation:

The value of the hardware for Sky Muster installations is reportedly \$6,000-\$7,000. The hardware and the cost of installations are currently fully subsidised by the Commonwealth government for a standard installation. While families in some states use their Sky Muster service and education ports for education, other states such as NSW and NT are still negotiating nbn™ satellite services for the delivery of distance education. These negotiations are likely to continue into 2020 and further installations of new services are likely to be required past 2020 in order for current and future distance education students to access education.

Further, internet is now a necessity and is required to attract families to live, work and therefore deliver education in rural and remote Australia. New installations will always be required to cater for new families or new residences in these areas and if the costs become prohibitive, regions already suffering from a diminishing workforce will further suffer.

A24. Pilbara Branch (WA)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies nbn Co to ensure the Sky Muster installation and hardware with nbn Co remains affordable for rural and remote students.”

Explanation:

Isolated students accessing education via distance education could be financially disadvantaged due to the Sky Muster free installation and hardware costs possibly ceasing after 2020.

A25. Queensland State Council (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies nbn™ Co to investigate the possibility of remotely identifying Sky Muster sites that are not performing in an optimum manner.”

Explanation:

It has become apparent that some Sky Muster sites are having issues with the performance of their remote site installations. There are increasing reports of dropouts and low fade margins that cause sites to fail while those around them continue to operate. Remote identification of problematic sites would enable issues to be resolved before they have a major impact on distance education students.

A26. Queensland State Council (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies nbn™ Co and Dept of Communications to provide a more viable alternative than Sky Muster for small towns in the nbn™ Satellite footprint that does not disadvantage access to education for existing ADSL users.”

Explanation:

Currently many rural and remote towns who are in the nbn™ satellite footprint have access to ADSL 1 or 2 for internet connectivity. ADSL provides a superior service compared to satellite and many residents are on unlimited data plans. The reliability and quality of service to schools, hospitals and other hubs of the community is highly valued.

Given that nbn™ is now Australia’s primary internet carrier, it is probable that ADSL will eventually be retired. For towns in the nbn™ satellite footprint, this will mean Sky Muster Satellite, which will be a significant downgrade from the existing service.

Many of these towns have existing fibre optic cable running past them. Some are owned by nbn™, and some are owned by other provider networks. It is imperative that nbn™ consider utilising other provider networks fibre optic cable to push broadband through the existing exchange, in order to provide equitable broadband services for residents. Co-investment by the Federal Government, State Government, nbn™ and local Councils is crucial. Initiatives such as Fibre to the Node or Fibre to the Curb should be explored.

Providing alternative connectivity solutions for towns in the satellite footprint will ease traffic on the Sky Muster Satellite, thereby relieving congestion issues and enabling a more adequate service (increased data allowances) for customers who have no other choice than Sky Muster, particularly for educational access e.g. Distance Education.

It is imperative rural and remote communities have access to an equitable broadband service for their education, business and health purposes in order for them to remain viable and sustainable into the future. Australia has seen great population decline in rural towns over the last two decades. A downgrade of internet connectivity of this scale will be another death knoll for rural and remote Australia, one that can simply not be sustained.

A27. Queensland State Council (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies nbn™ Co and retail service providers to advise rural and remote customers with details of suppliers who can provide battery backup units for purchase for mains powered nbn™ equipment plus mains powered retail provider equipment.”

Explanation:

The majority of equipment from both nbn™, and other Retail Service Providers that is required to provide service from the nbn™ network is mains powered. The major disadvantage is that any disruption to mains power, however short, will cause the service to fail and then the equipment has to reboot and settle down before it is usable. As well as disrupting any distance education lessons in progress, it may cause the loss of phone service at the most inconvenient time.

A UPS (Uninterruptable Power Supply) will keep the equipment going for a short period. As most of the equipment is actually powered from a battery eliminator that supplies 12 volts, the provision of a battery backup system that can stay operational for a number of hours becomes very useful. The use of a battery will also protect the equipment from power variations that could cause issues with the reliability of the service. This will also allow sites with non-continuous power to maintain communications when the generator is off.

Telephone

A28. Queensland State Council (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby Telstra to ensure priority is given to phone line installations and repairs in rural and remote areas when the purpose is education delivery.”

Explanation:

The digital curriculum has seen a dramatic increase in the direct teaching of lessons by the Centre teacher to the School of Distance Education (SDE) student in their homes. For many regional distance education schools and students, the landline is a compulsory piece of equipment that enables access to these daily lessons. In Queensland for example, in order to fulfil daily timetabling requirements, at least two phone lines are required for multi-age home schoolrooms. The installation and repair times for phone lines in rural and remote areas can be lengthy, at least six weeks in some cases. It is imperative Telstra prioritise these services in geographically isolated locations where it is used for access to education.

A29. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to work with the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts and the relevant Telecommunications Providers to ensure that all rural and remote students have consistent access to continuous and reliable telephone communications through regular maintenance of existing telephone infrastructure and they are:

- 1) prioritised for repair
- 2) a temporary satellite phone be provided to any rural or remote family where a phone fault is not rectified within three working days.”

Explanation:

It is highly important for our children learning via distance education, to have access to their teachers via phone as well as internet. Often Private Lesson Times (PLTs) are carried out on the phone while other children in the schoolroom are using the computer to access their lessons. When phone networks are not working due to any range of issues, we would like to ensure that the access our children have to their class teachers via the telephone network is placed at a high

priority. We would like to ask that telecommunication providers are able to place a temporary mobile satellite phone at any site where phone faults are not rectified within 3 Working Days.

Despite best intentions from one of the major telephone providers and this issue being discussed at conference over several years, members are still facing long periods of time with a substandard phone connection. One member has been waiting for nearly 12 months to have their phone fault rectified. Despite several on-site visits by technicians, the phone fault could not be identified let alone fixed. This has had caused great distress and disruption to not only the school room and accessibility the student has to their teacher but also for the family conducting their business and jeopardising connection with the Royal Flying Doctor Service for the children, staff and any other travellers passing through the area. They have been told on several occasions that no fault could be identified and at one point the fault was removed from the telecommunication server list. After over 7 months of reporting the phone fault, they were offered an interim phone service and 2 out of the 3 options required mobile coverage. (This family lives 400km from the nearest town) The 3 option was to have a satellite interim with the side note that when experiencing a long period of overcast weather, the interim service will only provide 15min of calls per day. The interim service was offered on the 2nd May and the family accepted the offer on the 3rd May. At the time of writing this explanation on the 16th May, they are yet to receive the interim service and the phone fault remains unresolved.

We have heard that there is Round 4 and 5 of the mobile black spot coverage on the table. We would like Telstra to consider families with ongoing telephone issues and not limit the roll out of mobile towers to remote communities. Since this family has moved from the old ADSL tower to the USO connection they have experienced over 14 years of consistent substandard phone connectivity. Since the update to the USO service about 12 months ago, this family has reported an ongoing fault that continues to worsen. They have been told, “next week”, “we are working on it”, “your service can’t be faulted by our system”, etc. While the people in the call centres receiving the faults are sympathetic to the issue, there is a huge gap when looking at rectifying the issue.

A30. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts to ensure the retention and maintenance of landline services in rural and remote areas, until another means of reliable, affordable and appropriate voice service is available.”

Explanation:

ICPA (WA) acknowledge and thank ICPA (Aust) for its advocacy in explaining that families living in rural and remote parts of Australia, due to the nature of where they live, require two separate forms of communications i.e. phone/voice and internet/data as separate services, not relying on the same mode of delivery thus ensuring if one service fails, the other is still available. The Universal Service Obligation (USO) should remain on landline telephony services for those living outside of mobile coverage areas and that these landline services are maintained and upgraded as necessary.

A31. Queensland State Council (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts to direct Telstra and other suppliers to provide backup battery power to at least one Wireless Local Link (WLL) service when a site is converted from another technology to WLL.”

Explanation:

Telstra has committed to migrating 350 services from old technology to WLL (Fixed phone via Mobile technology). Existing radio services have up to 3 days of battery reserve that will likely be lost in the conversion to WLL. It was directed by the Minister that customers fed by nbn™ optic fibre in large built up areas (normally with good mobile coverage and availability of services) would receive a battery backup unit if they chose. This backup gives 5 hours battery reserve to keep the fixed phone operational.

As a minimum, any WLL backup should be at least 5 hours, but preferably 24 hours. Additional backup units should be available for purchase for more than one service e.g. Distance Education home schoolroom requires uninterrupted service.

A32. Queensland State Council (Qld)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts to provide guidelines on telecommunications options should fixed lines fail but nbn™ internet is available.”

Explanation:

While VoIP over satellite is not a recommended option for distance education and general telephone use, if the normal telephone (Fixed and Mobile) is not available and the nbn™ satellite is working, a guideline on how to access these services would be appreciated. Voice services that use the available data services, such as VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) voice service, Voice over Wi-Fi, Viber, and other VoIP type apps, will provide some security until normal service is restored. Members have been experiencing extended outages and is extremely disruptive in the Distance Education classroom.

A33. Queensland State Council (Qld)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies Telstra to expand the Remote Area Sales and Service Centres to include Rural and Remote Small Business Customers.”

Explanation:

Currently the Remote Area Sales and Service Centres in Adelaide and Townsville only cater for Residential Customers more than 100km from a Telstra store. As a large number of distance education home classrooms are located on sites classed as Small Business, these locations are at a significant disadvantage. They use the same technology and have the same issues as Residential Customers in the same area but do not receive the required support.

Mobile Coverage/Service**A34. Queensland State Council (Qld)****CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies Telstra to advise future 4GX upgrade plans for the remaining 3G remote area mobile bases (including increased bandwidth capacity if necessary) to enable the full benefits to be realised.”

Explanation:

There are still 3G mobile sites that have not been upgraded to 4GX. These sites often also have a very limited bandwidth back to the network that restricts the usability for distance education. There are also reports of some sites being upgraded to 4GX, without an increase in the bandwidth to that site. This limits the capability of these sites.