

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2020 Federal Conference Communications Portfolio Motions

A4. Queensland State Council (Qld)

CARRIED

"That ICPA Australia thanks NBN Co, Telstra, BIRRR and other communication suppliers for providing data relief and other initiatives such as SMS over Wi-Fi during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Internet Access

A5. New South Wales State Council (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) thanks NBN Co for supplying families with extra data during COVID-19."

A6. Mitchell-Tomoo/Dunkeld Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

"That the Mitchell-Tomoo/Dunkeld Branch ask ICPA (Aust) to pass on thanks to Better Internet for Rural Regional and Remote (BIRRR) for working with NBN Co and all internet providers to allow an increase in internet data allowances for on-line lessons which have had to be undertaken during this COVID-19 pandemic."

A7. Tambo Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

"ICPA Hay Branch thanks NBN Co for unmetering of Sky Muster data during the COVID-19 and requests the ongoing unmetering of data to ensure education quality for students in rural and remote Australia."

Explanation:

The unmetering of video meeting sites such as Zoom, allowed rural and remote students to continue their education during the lockdown conditions. This decision was a significant move towards educational equality.

Results from the Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2019 support the continued unmetering of data beyond the COVID-19 arrangements.

The index provides a national, state and regional level view of digital inclusion in Australia across three dimensions: Access, Affordability and Digital Ability. Scores are 0-100 relative to the perfectly digitally included person.

The Murray and Murrumbidgee Area (in which the Hay Branch falls) has the lowest scores in NSW for Access, Affordability and Digital Ability. With an overall score of just 53, the region has an obvious deficit in comparison to other parts of NSW. The region has the lowest internet data allowance in NSW. This has an impact on the equity for our student's education. The continued unmetering of data would be a proactive move towards an increase in the digital inclusion index score for our members.

A8. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

LOST

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Education and the Minister for Communications and other relevant Ministers to ask for a National directive stating that ‘geographically isolated students attending schools of distance education have the costs of their internet connections including the Education Port, used for education, reimbursed by the respective State or Territory Government.’”

Explanation:

Families should not have to pay for their own internet to facilitate their children’s compulsory, ‘free’ education via a public education system such as School of the Air. For many families this is their reality - wearing the costs of high speed internet connections so their children have access to the face-to-face lessons their children receive as part of the daily distance education delivery, a compulsory component, as outlined by the NT Department of Education.

Some Distance Education Students enrolled at Alice Springs School of the Air (ASSOA) have had internet supplied to them via NT Government 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 that when families are required to provide their own internet for their children who attend school via distance education, they are remunerated for the full cost of the service. We are concerned that children are not able to access adequate data to cover remote lessons, downloading work, uploading work etc. as this involves more data and in turn more costs to the family. Children being educated via distance education should be able to access enough data without placing financial strain on the family budget. We do not want to see limits placed on download, 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.

A9. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, and other relevant political figures to work proactively and cooperatively with companies attempting to bring universal broadband internet to Australia, including alternative satellite-based internet services and technologies, which would improve access to equitable education for all students in rural, regional and remote Australia.”

Explanation:

Internet woes are always high on the agenda for ICPA members. Cheap, universally accessible fast internet with large download limits could be available in Australia within 2 years. This would be a boon to many remote families who struggle with various aspects of their current internet connection. It would be especially welcome to travelling families, for whom there is no current affordable or practical solution for internet provision.

SpaceX’ Starlink system is the most advanced and promising universal broadband internet system. It is anticipated to provide a 480Mbit/sec connection (10x faster than the new Sky Muster Plus service), with a latency of 35 milliseconds or less for around \$125/month. The download limit is unknown but is anticipated to far exceed Sky Muster’s. The connection equipment will cost

around \$500 and should be able to be installed by the end user. Additionally, Starlink could be used for 4G and 5G small cell backhaul, allowing cheaper expansion and upgrade of mobile phone networks into remote areas. All this by the end of 2021.

The ACMA recently included SpaceX on Australia's Foreign Space Objects Determination. However, SpaceX must still acquire from the ACMA the appropriate Space Apparatus Licences and licences for using part of the radio frequency spectrum before they can offer a service in Australia. It would be a shame if such a beneficial opportunity was lost to remote families due to red tape and political point-scoring.

SpaceX has had resistance from several fronts. Foxtel, a service which is fast becoming obsolete, has voiced concerns to the ACMA over radio spectrum allocations. Astronomers have been worried about the brightness of the Starlink satellites. SpaceX is also worried that the ACMA will limit Starlink services unnecessarily to remote areas, reducing their potential market share.

All of these issues can be addressed satisfactorily if they do not become political battlegrounds. Frequency allocation should be able to be addressed satisfactorily for Foxtel by the ACMA, but if push comes to shove Australia should be considering whether they want to prop up a dying company just because it's Australian, at the expense of a cutting edge infrastructure that will benefit the Australian economy and remote education. Astronomers are happy with SpaceX's commendable collaborative approach, and Starlink satellites are iteratively improving on that front. It is anticipated that Starlink satellites will not impinge on naked-eye views of the night sky. As for astronomy, SpaceX re-usable rockets and low launch costs are opening up the possibility of a Hubble-like space-based astronomy era. And at the end of the day, should Australia be supporting the probing of galaxies millions of light-years away at the expense of Australian children's education? In terms of limiting SpaceX's Australian ISP market share, surely Australia can find other ways of getting the foreign company SpaceX to contribute to the economy through taxation, local employment etc.

Starlink satellites already have FAA approval in the USA (FAA is the USA's ACMA equivalent). This means Starlink satellites will be whizzing over our heads regardless of what Australia decides to do with them. It would be most unfortunate if remote Australian families couldn't make the most of them for their children's education. A can-do attitude is needed to ensure we do not miss out.

In the ACMA's spectrum management consultation paper, April 2020, they state: "Under current law, specific allocation processes depend on ACMA and, in some cases, Ministerial decisions made during the planning and allocation stages, and reflect other relevant government policy considerations about planning priorities. Information from incumbent and prospective spectrum users about the demand for access to specific bands and the timing of any possible allocation will also provide important input to allocation decisions." The ACMA periodically consults stakeholders on upcoming decisions. It would be great if the ICPA (Aust) could monitor and submit papers into these discussions on behalf of ICPA member families in their quest for affordable and adequate internet. Keeping the perspective of remote families in the ears of politicians and ministers on these matters is also important.

Mobile Coverage/Service

S2. Namoi Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant Ministers to obtain a rebate to upgrade equipment (aerials and boosters) to change from 3G/4G to other technologies for rural and remote customers who use mobile broadband for education."

Explanation:

We feel that with the changing over from 3G to 4G that the cost should not be a further burden on rural and remote customers. In some areas in the North West there are large gaps or distances between towers and some towers have been upgraded to 4G and others are still 3G. If you have old aerals and devices, they do not work on the 4G system. This is not a cheap exercise, and, in some cases, we are doing this just to get some service – not even a great service.

Telephone**A10. Queensland State Council (Qld)****CARRIED**

“That ICPA Australia requests that Telstra provide a customer end technology roadmap for the transition from existing mobile phone configurations to country 5G due in 2024.”

Explanation:

Although 2024 seems a long way off at the moment, it is critical for this transition roadmap be made available as soon as possible.

Educators in rural and remote areas depend upon having the latest information readily available prior to purchasing equipment for future planning and upgrading of facilities due to the difficulties of keeping abreast with the latest technological developments when living in isolated areas.

Additional Information and questions to be asked

Will all 3G bases be upgraded with 4GX with a bandwidth upgrade prior to changeover? Will existing 4GX bases be overlaid with 5G bases when 3G is turned off? 3G only Handsets and early Smartphones (No Voice over LTE nor 4GX) will need to be replaced prior to change over. Boosters (most are 3G only), which are compatible with 5G, and single band 3G antennas will not work with 4GX so all antennas (vehicle, fixed etc.) will need upgrading. 3G Telemetry installations will need upgrading. 3G Medi Alerts and the like will need upgrading.