

## **Federal President's Report Conference 2018**

Federal Life Member, Mrs. Roxanne Morrissey, fellow ICPA members and guests, I would like to update you on the work of the ICPA Federal Council.

It has been an encouraging time for ICPA as there has been an undeniable focus on regional, rural and remote education in many areas.

After travelling to Alice Springs for the Federal Conference last August, Federal Council set to work actioning the 100 motions that were carried at that conference.

At the 2017 Federal Conference, five new councillors were elected to Federal Council and we also had four executive role changes. After the Conference, Federal Council soon found their feet and dove head first into the tasks to be done. To their credit, the new councillors and executives did a tremendous job in learning their roles quickly and have been very enthusiastic and a great assistance in our advocacy.

With numerous federal government position changes earlier this year, it has at times been challenging, as we have tried to keep our foothold and maintain the momentum that we had achieved on several issues. ICPA (Aust) continues to work closely with numerous other organisations as well as the various Commonwealth Departments and we have a good working relationship with many in government.

With our Federal Conference being held in Canberra this year, it has made it possible for a number of the Departments which we work regularly with to attend and become more familiar with ICPA and our members. We have representatives from the Department of Education and Training, Department of Human Services, Department of Social Services and Department of Communications present at the conference.

Besides the meetings, delegations, letters and consultations we have been involved in, Federal Council has worked on numerous written submissions. In the current climate, the federal government has been seeking input and discussion in many areas and there seems to be a submission available for comment on just about any topic imaginable, and certainly plenty to comment on in the area of regional and rural education. Attending to these submissions has kept Federal Council busy but it has been very beneficial to have had so much opportunity to provide comment. We've completed 15 submissions since the 2017 Federal Conference.

Our largest submission undertaking by far was the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education or IRRRRE as it has become affectionately known by.

A promise from the 2016 federal election, the IRRRRE saw, for the first time in decades, government showing a significant focus on rural and remote education. Professor John Halsey was chosen to lead the Review and members of Federal and State Councils met with Professor Halsey at last year's Federal Conference. We also attended various consultations around the country to bring to the forefront multiple rural and remote issues. This Review provided ICPA with an avenue to seek address for the majority of the issues and concerns that members have raised over the past years. Trying to define and compile in their entirety the many educational challenges that our rural and remote students have faced for years and fit them into one document certainly tested the mettle of our Federal Council, particularly as submissions were called for almost immediately after our Federal Conference which had

seen, as I mentioned earlier, a number of new councillors join our team. It was a steep learning curve for the new councillors, but they were up for the challenge. In the end, Federal Council finished with a 44 page submission and our new council had become cohesive in working through the submission process. The final report from the Review was submitted to the Australian Government in January 2018 and at the end of May, the Government responded that they would accept all 11 recommendations from the Review. It is encouraging to see regional, rural and remote education having such a focus at present and ICPA looks forward to seeing what follows on from the recommendations.

The arrival of the Federal Budget 2018-2019 saw a win for regional and remote students. While it wasn't the increases to the Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance that we had hoped for, what the Federal Budget announcement this year **did** include was the news that as a result of the IRRRRE Review \$53.9 million will be allocated to improve regional students' access to Youth Allowance by changing the threshold and assessment year for parental income. The regional independence criterion for parental income under youth allowance will increase from \$150,000 to \$160,000 and the "Family Pool" will also now be considered for students from regional and remote areas. ICPA (Aust) welcomed this announcement in the Budget and we have also welcomed the national focus on regional, rural and remote education which will hopefully provide future improvements for our students.

Federal Council continued to work in a number of key areas this year and we will be hearing more detail about these topics in the portfolio presentations later in the conference, but I did want to mention some of the main issues we have been working on.

Communications continues to be a major sector of our efforts. ICPA (Aust) remains a member of the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition and this has been a very welcomed forum where we can take our members' issues. By being a part of the RRRCC, we have managed to strengthen our voice as the Communications Coalition now encompasses 21 member bodies.

ICPA (Aust) with the help of State Councils continues to be very active in many networks as we seek better internet, telephony and mobile services for regional, rural and remote students.

One communications issue in particular that I would like to mention is the concern around landline phones remaining in place. Uncertainty around the future of landline services for voice has been a major concern for our members. ICPA (Aust) and RRRCC have met with numerous government representatives this year and strongly voiced our members' concerns over a potential loss of landlines and the possibility of landlines being replaced by VoIP services which currently do not adequately meet the need of those living in rural and remote Australia. ICPA (Aust) also maintains that Australians living outside of large metropolitan centres must have at least two methods of accessing communications (i.e. landline and satellite internet) due to the distance to other means of communication and the implications for safety when one service fails. This message seems to have been understood and supported by many in government and we are hopeful that this consideration for voice services for those in regional, rural and remote areas will continue to be upheld. Federal Council met with the office of the Minister for Communications in May and we were reassured

to hear that “Current USO arrangements will remain in place unless and until robust and workable alternatives that are more cost-effective are identified, proven and able to be implemented”.

The last few months have been very busy in the area of Early Childhood Education and Care. Federal Councillor, Jane Morton has attended numerous meetings and sessions around the new In Home Care program that replaced the previous In Home Care and the Nanny Pilot Program from 2 July 2018. Jane will be talking more about the new program and its guidelines in her Early Childhood Education Care Report.

ICPA also continues to monitor the transition from Budget Based Funding for mobile playgroups and other mobile services utilised by rural families to the new model.

For a long time, ICPA (Aust)’s request for changes to assist more regional, rural and remote students to access tertiary study seemed to go unheard, however in the last few years, we have seen some tremendous changes. Another very positive result in the tertiary portfolio was the welcome change in Youth Allowance at the start of this year for those rural and remote students qualifying for independent Youth Allowance through part-time work or earnings, in the reduction of the Gap Year from 18 months to 14 months. ICPA (Aust) had been lobbying for this change for many years and now these efforts have been rewarded. This reduction of the Gap Year as well as the Budget announcement already mentioned should assist a number of our rural students.

When Federal Council learned of difficulties some families were having at the start of the schoolyear in getting their Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) allowance renewed or their applications processed, and in some cases, families receiving the allowance for some of their children but not for others, we created a survey to try to gather information around what our members were experiencing with their AIC applications. Members supported the survey well and the information gathered has been very beneficial in discussions with the Department of Human Services as well as the Minister for Human Services’ office and hopefully the comments and information gathered will assist in a smoother AIC application and renewal process in the future.

Federal Council has also begun a project revolving around students who need to board away from home in order to access an education. As geographically isolated families are aware, the gap between the allowances available and the cost of keeping their children in education is widening and continues to be very difficult for families to meet. We hope that by showcasing where our students live, what they love about where they live, and also, that due to distance, they have a necessity in going away in order to receive further education, may help foster a better understanding and support for these families. So stay tuned for more on that project in the future. With drought continuing to cripple a large section of our country, the out of pocket costs families face is being exacerbated. It is critical that we do everything we can to ensure families can keep their children in school during times of rural hardship, whether this is due to drought, fire, flood or an industry impact on their family income.

Of course, ICPA is not only about boarding and we also want to showcase all of the students we represent and the various ways they attend school. Federal Council will also be working on a larger, more encompassing project that will highlight all of our ICPA students, where they live and where they go to school.

One of ICPA's strengths is the way we unite and support each other. State and Federal councils have continued to work together this year in various ways including teleconferences between the state and federal portfolios and executives. In mid- February, representatives from most State and Federal Councils met in Sydney for face to face meetings and an information session at the nbn Discovery Centre. It was a very productive few days and extremely rewarding.

Federal Council would to thank the State Councils for their ongoing support of federal issues and their dedication and commitment. State Councils have been doing a terrific job in keeping the issues for ICPA families being talked about at all levels.

Federal Council looks forward to continuing to work with state councils, branches and members.

I would like to close with a quote from Walt Disney, "Our greatest natural resource is in the minds of our children."

ICPA seeks equity in access to education for geographically isolated children. We will continue to advocate wherever possible to ensure that our rural and remote children also have the opportunities to reveal the natural resources in them.

Our Conference theme is COUNTRY KIDS in CAPITALS and we are gathered here to bring the message of our children's needs to the heart of our nation. Let's keep the message loud so that we are certain it is heard, COUNTRY KIDS in CAPITALS.

Thank you.

Wendy Hick

1 August 2018