

## **ICPA Conference Opening Speech**

**Ms Fiona Nash**

**Canberra**

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Ladies and gentlemen, people often underestimate, or don't even acknowledge, the massive contribution the regions make to the nation's economy, and social fabric.

Strong regions means a strong nation.

1/3 of population lives outside of the cities.

If we want people to live, work and invest in the regions, to stay in the regions, to move to the regions, we need to ensure that it is a very positive message that gets out there.

Too often all people hear about the regions is a negative story. About floods, fires, droughts, pestilence.

This is not a Pollyanna moment, thinking everything is wonderful. Of course there are challenges. Constantly. At the moment we are in the grip of a shocking drought. My sons both farm out in central west NSW so I feel it every day.

Can I just take a moment to acknowledge both the Federal and State Governments for making drought response a priority. Both the Federal Minister for Agriculture, David Littleproud and the NSW Primary Industries Minister, Niall Blair, understand how devastating this drought is.

But back to the issue of being positive.

I had some work done in my previous role, looking at a six month period of regional stories in the two major metropolitan newspapers in Sydney and Melbourne. It showed this:

In Melbourne, 80% of the regional stories were negative, 15% were neutral, and just 5% were positive.

In Sydney, around 75% were negative and only 25% were positive.

When this is what people in the cities are reading, it's no wonder they don't understand what's really going on in the regions.

Absolutely there are challenges. But if we want people to stay in the regions, or move to the regions, we need to make sure that, across the nation, there is a recognition of the very positive aspects of regional Australia, and that the regions do have a very bright future indeed.

The regions make an enormous contribution to nation's economy and social fabric.

Regional Australia responsible for around 67% of our exports, 45% of domestic tourism.

The contribution of agriculture is enormous. It directly employs over 304,000 people. The complete ag supply chain, including food and fibre industries, provides over 1.6m jobs, and is worth \$47.1b to the Australian economy.

Mining makes a massive contribution. It employs around 226,000 people – many of these jobs are based in regional Australia. Resource and energy exports are forecast to reach highest level on record in 17-18, \$230 billion.

**Regional Australia clothes the cities, feeds the cities, powers the cities.**

**Every morning when city people wake up they should thank regional Australia for their way of life.**

Regional Australia is the small business engine room of the nation. You don't need to live in a city to run a hugely successful business.

There are great success stories of businesses in the regions:

Jane Cay with Birdsnest. An on-line fashion business, run out of Cooma in NSW. She employs over 100 people.

Gerard Hines with Delta Agribusiness. A private and independent agribusiness in NSW. In 2006 he had 2 locations, 15 staff. He now has 28 locations, 230 staff, 64 shareholders.

And Jillian Kilby, an engineer and infrastructure entrepreneur. She founded The Infrastructure Collective in 2009 while living in Walgett. She is now Dubbo based and services clients across Australia and the United

States. She is the winner of the 2018 Agrifutures NSW Rural Women's Award.

The social fabric of the nation is made up of city and country. It's who we are.

Not everyone can live in the cities. And not everyone wants to!

There is a hugely positive future for regional Australia.

In the regions you can afford to buy a house. It's a fantastic lifestyle. A wonderful place to bring up children. People care. You just can't understand the wonderful sense of community until you've actually lived in the regions.

Some people think cities are better than the regions, they're not. They're just different.

Some people say they like the cities because they're fast-paced. Last time I looked people who live in the cities seem to be forever stuck in traffic jams going nowhere.

What I have seen so often in recent years out in the regions, is what I'm calling the "go home phenomenon". Young people, who grew up in a regional community but then moved away, are now wanting to go home, back to the region where they used to live. It's happening everywhere.

**As I said, strong regions mean a strong nation.**

**And confidence builds strong regions. Education is a huge contributor to having that confidence.**

Understandable that access to education is an absolute priority for those living in rural, regional and remote Australia.

So important that those making policy decisions have a real understanding of the challenges being faced in rural Australia, that simply don't exist in our cities, such as the tyranny of distance and higher costs associated with educating children.

I'd like to congratulate ICPA on your call for a Commissioner.

I noted in your submission to the Halsey review that "rural and remote education to be placed on a separate register when delivering and funding education for rural and remote students. ICPA (Aust) believes a National Rural Education Alliance, which would bring together all interested national

organisations, led by a Commissioner, would ensure the focus remains on educating students living in rural and remote Australia.”

One size fits all policy doesn't work. Cities are incredibly different to regional Australia – indeed, rural, regional and remote communities often have different needs to one another.

CSU makes a significant contribution to growing stronger regions.

Leadership is so important in instilling confidence in our regions. And CSU is educating the regional leaders of the future.

CSU – and great credit to the Vice-Chancellor, Andy Vann, for leading the way on this – has a real belief that CSU has a responsibility to help build stronger regions, and that is one of the main reasons I took up the position with them.

We are already doing a lot, but we're going to do even more.

We have a huge footprint in the regions, with our main campuses in Port Macquarie, Dubbo, Bathurst, Orange, Wagga and Albury-Wodonga.

We have 17,000 regional and remote students.

There is a huge economic contribution generated by CSU in the regions.

We have 2000 FTE staff, receiving \$409m in income. And across northern, central and southern regions, we generate \$653m in Gross Regional Product.

### **Our graduates are going to regional communities.**

Around 80% of our students from our regions stay and work in our regions.

CSU has strategic intent to develop a course profile that reflects student demand and meets workforce needs. We are especially focused on identifying and meeting workforce needs in the regions.

We have a large course profile, approximately 253 courses; 448 programs including specialisations. It is a course profile that is weighted towards 'the professions' with emphasis on critical labour shortages in rural/regional Australia, for example veterinary, dentistry, nursing, physiotherapy, pharmacy, accounting and teaching.

Student profile is weighted towards rural and regional students, with the view to retaining students in the regions where there are shortages in tertiary qualified professionals.

Around 80% of regional, rural and remote students who study on a CSU campus are employed within regional Australia; online regional student numbers are slightly less at around 75%.

We are actively involved in establishing productive and collaborative partnerships with employers to identify workforce shortages and industry requirements and have ongoing partnerships that are sustained through regular contact – for example we are involved in the collaborative committees of Local Health, and also have connections with Agriculture, Business Management, Accounting, Wine Science, Environmental Science and Veterinary Science.

Approximately 80 percent of on-campus and 73 percent of online graduates from the regions were employed in the regions four months after graduation from Charles Sturt University.

Out of pharmacy which is based in Orange, 92 percent of on-campus regional origin students who were employed were employed in the regions.

We now have a medical school as a result of the Murray Darling Medical Network, partnering with UWS. CSU led the way on this, recognising training students in the regions means they are far more likely to practice their profession in the regions!

We are building partnerships with regional communities.

CSU is building strong partnerships, which will help build stronger regions.

For example, with Royal Far West. CSU and RFW share a mutual interest in truly integrated health and education outcomes for children, family wellbeing and capability, and sustainability of rural workforces.

To this aim, we are setting the foundations of a co-branded National Paediatric Telecare Centre that will deliver world-class, technology assisted paediatric health, education and social care services to children living in rural and remote Australia

CSU is identifying and responding to regional community need. A great example is our engineering course, purpose built to provide engineers to regional communities where they are needed.

We have a great track record in Indigenous achievement - CSU graduates the most indigenous students of any university.

CSU plays a significant role in educating people from low SES background, many of whom are first in family.

Latest Good Universities Guide states that 22% of domestic students who commence study at CSU come from a low socio-economic background. It found no other Australian university serves as many low SES students.

**As I said earlier cities aren't better than the regions, they're just different.**

**I often say the same about universities.**

**City universities aren't better than regional universities, they're just different.**

Ladies and gentlemen, I was very honoured to be asked to open your conference, and am delighted to be here this morning.

In spite of challenges, need to be positive about the future of rural, regional and remote Australia.

We must never let the contribution the regions make to the nation be forgotten.

Strong regions need a strong nation, and those regions need a strong voice.

Congratulations to the ICPA for being such a strong voice. Your sound consideration of the issues that are important, the professional way you conduct your advocacy, and your in-depth understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing regional Australia is extensive.

Never underestimate how important your role is in shaping the future of our rural, regional and remote communities.

I wish you all the very best for your deliberations here, and have a great conference.

Ends.