



Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc)

Federal Council
'Access to Education'

Transport and Regional Services Committee
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Hon Federal Secretary
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Inquiry Into Privatisation of Regional Infrastructure and Government Business Enterprises.

The Federal Council of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (ICPA Aust) appreciates the opportunity to offer the following comments to the '**Inquiry Into Privatisation of Regional Infrastructure and Government Business Enterprises**'.

ICPA Aust is a voluntary parent body dedicated to ensuring that all geographically isolated students have equality of access to an appropriate education. The Association comprises of approximately 3300 member families, residing in the more remote parts of Australia, who all share a common concern of gaining access to education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve this goal.

Membership of ICPA Aust comprises of a cross section of Australia's rural and remote population and includes fishermen, miners, itinerant employees, farmers, pastoralists and small business owners.

ICPA Aust believes that sustainable rural and regional development comes from stable progressive communities. For these communities to be stable they require infrastructure that encourages the population to stay in their community, to contribute towards its development and to provide an environment in which outside professionals feel welcomed and fulfilled.

Some important considerations

- If privatisation means the removal of cross subsidisation then rural and remote Australia will lose.
- The small and dispersed populations that make up rural and remote Australia are by their very nature more costly to service. Experience tells us that services are withdrawn when they are considered (by the share dividend private sector) to be no longer financially viable.
- Cosmopolitan access to 'deals' or 'specials' as the provision of the service is a profitable venture as compared to the remote location where the population distribution is not a big enough earner for the infrastructure. This could in turn lead to an increase in remote charges, justified to the watchdog by the cost of maintenance of the infrastructure.
- The **cost of delivery** will discriminate against families living in rural and remote areas and may also delay the delivery of updated services to their communities.
- Small and dispersed populations require access to a range of services. ICPA Aust would advocate that not all Government debt is bad for the economy when it services vital infrastructure that needs to be cross-subsidised.
- Well serviced small communities underpin Australia's tourism industry; for Government to continue to promote our Nations unique resources that are so attractive to tourists, attention must also be given to the fact that efficient transport and local service infrastructure is vital to both the tourist and the communities.

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Educational Impact

The overall impact of rural or remote location is not a good news story in education. Reliable data shows that rural and/or remote students are less likely to participate in schooling, more likely to be absent, less likely to complete Year 12, and less likely to participate in tertiary education and training.

Young people in rural and remote areas have less access to part time work that provides financial support, builds self esteem as well as an opportunity to become known in the workplace. Although many of them do not wish to leave their local community and home, they grow up knowing that it will be unavoidable if they wish to find work or access further education.

They need the support of a sustainable and continuing community, supporting and supported by sound and emerging industries to offer a reason for the reversal of their expectations.

The continued move from the bush to the city will accelerate if there is a further reduction in infrastructure and services including education. As services such as rail, postal, banks and air decline, so to do job and training opportunities. This leads to a decline in local populations and therefore a decline in student numbers, which in turn reduces class sizes and the number of teachers appointed to the schools. The impact on high schools is significant, because there are reduced opportunities for students in subject choice, particularly in maths, sciences and career based subjects. In some communities, the decline in population results in school closure.

A reduction in population will also affect the opportunity for TAFE and high school students with the reduction or removal of Vocational Education training courses.

Young rural Australians are acutely aware of the growing elite of privileged urban workers in secure and profitable positions who experience a working life that is far removed from that of many of their rural counterparts and urban workers in less secure positions.

A recent recommendation, in a report from the Centre for Independent Studies, that country workers be paid less than their city counterparts continues to promote the belief that cities are sites of privilege and country areas are sites of deprivation.

ICPA Aust members are yet to see tangible evidence of long term social and economic benefits flowing to rural and remote Australia through the privatisation of vital infrastructure and government business enterprises. In essence we believe that there are more avenues for Governments to be accountable for triple bottom line accounting than the private sector.

Rural communities, like the environment, have an ecology; a fragile ecology. Today, should an industry wish to alter the environment in any way, many protection mechanisms fall into place to minimise impact and protect the ecosystem, and rightly so. ICPA Aust would suggest that similar protection should be offered to rural communities. For far too long a fragmented and short sighted approach to services has shown scant regard for the ecology of rural communities.

Governments must look beyond the economical bottom line when considering the impact of their provision of services to rural and remote areas. The true benefits to these communities and to the nation are immeasurable.