

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.
"Access to Education"



Submission
to the
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
Into the
Domestic Mobile Roaming Declaration Inquiry
from the
Federal Council
of the
Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.
ICPA (Aust)

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ACCC *Domestic Mobile Roaming Declaration Inquiry* discussion paper.

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), is a voluntary parent body, dedicated to ensuring all rural and remote students have equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education. This encompasses the education of children from early childhood through to tertiary. Many of our members live on isolated stations, great distances from their nearest community with their only access to education being via distance education programs. Many of these same members conduct their businesses from these same rural and remote locations. For our members, communications are important for both the delivery of education as well as enabling enterprises to conduct their business which includes engaging in competitive commercial activities and relying on ready access to communication tools to do so. Our members share a common goal of access to an appropriate education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve this.

Access, reliability, and affordability of service are the most pressing communication issues for our families residing in rural and remote Australia. Like all Australians, our members desire equity of access as a basic requirement in the provision of telecommunication services.

ICPA (Aust) appreciates the opportunity to highlight issues that concern our rural and remote members in relation to domestic mobile roaming. Mobile coverage impacts our members in their general access to communications, at an efficiency level when trying to conduct business and at a safety level when driving long distances for family, educational or business purposes.

In relation to the Terms of Reference for this submission, ICPA (Aust) is responding on behalf of our members, to the questions posted in the consultation hub.

What is your postcode?

We are responding on behalf of our member families who reside in regional, rural and remote areas of all Australian states.

Which mobile service provider are you with at the moment?

The majority of members have services with Telstra.

Do you have a choice of provider where you live?

The majority of our members have no choice in who they choose as their mobile service provider as historically Telstra have been the only provider that has serviced the bush.

What are the most important factors to you when choosing or switching between mobile service providers?

The most important deciding factor when choosing a mobile service provider is geographic coverage. Although many members would need to travel many kilometres before they are in range of a tower to receive a mobile signal.

Does your job or other travel requirements influence your choice of mobile service provider? If so, please explain how.

For members who can utilise mobile broadband to access the distance education curriculum most would choose Telstra. Since 2015, Telstra has offered un-metered access to a number of key Education websites for all Telstra Mobile Broadband users. These sites were identified in consultation with ICPA (Aust) and a number of Departments of Education.

Are you satisfied with the range of mobile services (including prices) available to you? Please explain the reasons for your answer.

There is no competition available for the majority of our members as there is only one network that provides a consistent and continuous service in many rural and remote towns and is increasing their coverage throughout regional and remote Australia. People that reside in these areas are used to paying a little bit extra in order to access a service. From comments we have received, our members would welcome more competitive prices and greater access. They also pay extra for accessories such as Yagi aerials, car kits and smart antennae to improve coverage.

How important is mobile coverage (in terms of the geographic reach of the network) to you? Are you willing to pay more for services on a network that has more extensive coverage in regional and remote areas than others?

Extended mobile coverage is of great importance to families living in rural and remote Australia, particularly for reasons of safety, health and business. With regards to rural and remote education, having mobile coverage is highly valued by those who have it as it affords a backup for the voice and data services of "On Air" lessons when landlines or other internet sources are out. Having mobile coverage also allows distance education students to continue their schoolwork and lessons if they are travelling between home and town or away from their main schoolroom (i.e. in a stock camp for a few weeks with their family).

Do you have access to 4G mobile services? How important is it to you to have access to the latest mobile technology?

It is more important for families living in isolated locations to have a service, if it is the latest mobile technology that would be welcomed but not essential.

Do you think that requiring mobile network operators to provide roaming to each other is a good thing? Please provide reasons for your views.

The provision of mobile roaming throughout Australia especially rural and remote will not actually increase the mobile footprint for those that live in these areas.

It runs the risk of increasing congestion of mobile towers along major highways and tourist destinations. Overcrowding mobile towers will lead to very poor speeds and dropouts. Congestion is an issue that many rural and remote families already struggle with during 'peak' seasons when numerous travellers visit their area and share their network. Members have also raised concerns over mining camps causing congestion in some areas, this seems particularly prevalent in NSW.

Are there other things you wish to share with us?

Our rural and remote members and their families require certainty that mobile coverage is guaranteed for emergency services, education and functioning of communities. This should include residences, rural properties, along transport routes, in small communities and in locations prone to natural disasters. When emergencies arise such as cyclones, flooding, bush fires and health emergencies, landline phone services often fail and it is imperative that other means of communication are available, especially for those living in areas that may be many kilometres from their nearest neighbour or next town. Expanding mobile coverage has clear public safety, economic and social benefits for people living, working and travelling in regional and remote areas.

At our recent Federal Conference, members voted against a motion asking ICPA (Aust) to lobby the Minister for Communications and the Minister for Regional Communications to investigate national mobile roaming to ensure that all Australians can access quality mobile coverage all of the time, regardless of geographical location. There was much discussion on the conference floor concerning this issue with Telstra commenting that mobile roaming has the potential to stifle investment in the bush - one of their key points of differentiation is continuing to expand and develop regionally. Having more mobile towers (or some future development) will be the biggest benefit to our members.