

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

"Access to Education"



Submission

to the

Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee Inquiry

into the

**Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer)
Bill 2019 and the Telecommunications (Regional Broadband Scheme) Charge
Bill 2019**

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 participate in the consultation of the Telecommunications Reform Package.

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, non-profit, apolitical parent body, dedicated to ensuring all rural and regional students (be they indigenous, requiring special needs or battling drought and other hardships) have equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education. It encompasses the education of children from early childhood through to tertiary. The majority of member families (around 3000) of the Association reside in small communities in rural and often isolated areas of Australia and all share a common goal of seeking access to an appropriate education for their children and the provision of services required in achieving this.

Students whose family home is in rural and remote Australia and who are enrolled in Schools of Distance Education, rely heavily on telecommunications to access daily lessons, via both telephone and internet. Most would be in the 0.7% of the population that have no access to any mobile network and the majority would also be in the 3% of the population that will rely on satellite to access the internet. Our member families also attend small rural schools that are dependent on internet for schoolwork, research, teacher assistance/mentoring, specific needs sessions as well as landlines for contact for teacher support, emergencies and general administration tasks of a school. There are quite a few rural small schools which are not in mobile coverage areas and struggle with receiving adequate internet service.

ICPA (Aust) supports the re-introduction of the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer) Bill 2019 and the Telecommunications (Regional Broadband Scheme) Charge Bill 2019 that would establish an effective funding arrangement towards the long-term costs of regional Australia's nbn satellite and fixed wireless services through contributions sourced from the nbn and networks comparable to the nbn.

ICPA (Aust) also supports the Statutory Infrastructure Provider regime to ensure that students in rural and remote areas of Australia can access a superfast broadband service, as long as there is no reduction in quality of the service as this is essential for distance education and online learning.

In relation to accessing education in rural and regional areas our members are increasingly reliant on adequate and affordable internet and are still dependent on fixed line telephony, particularly as mobile phone coverage is not available in many rural areas. The assurance of funding for this non-commercial nbn service is something that we as an organisation are highly supportive of as long as the cost of providing this funding is not ultimately transferred over to the customer.

Conclusion

ICPA (Aust) supports this new Telecommunications Reform Package in order to facilitate equity of access to education for our rural and remote students with the best technological opportunities through superfast broadband and commends its future development.