



**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc)
"Access to Education"**

Submission

**to the
Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee**

**on the
Regional Telecommunications Review 2015**

**from the
Federal Council**

**of the
Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc)
ICPA (Aust)**

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The Federal Council of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (ICPA Aust), welcomes the opportunity to have input into the Regional Telecommunications Review 2015 Issues Paper.

ICPA is a voluntary parent body dedicated to ensuring all geographically isolated students have equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education. This encompasses the education of children from early childhood through tertiary. The member families of the association mostly live in rural and remote Australia and all share a common goal of achieving access to education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve this.

Our members may reside in or near small rural towns and access schooling in small schools or live on isolated stations, great distances from their nearest community with the only access to education being via distance education programs. Accessing secondary education usually requires students to live away from home in school term hostels or boarding schools.

In its 44 years as a volunteer organisation, ICPA has achieved much for families and children who are isolated from access to educational services. For rural and remote residents, ICPA seeks to ensure, as the minimum communication standard, services at a level at least equivalent to that available to the majority of urban Australian residents.

Communication objectives pursued by the association include:

- ensuring quality communication services comparable to those available in urban areas and demonstrating similar reliability, economy, features, voice quality and data are accessible by people residing in rural and remote Australia
- that the Universal Service Obligation include internet services
- fast, reliable and affordable two-way voice and data communication for all students
- creation of a priority category within the nbn satellite access guidelines for students who, due to geographical isolation, study by distance education
- continued increases in mobile phone service coverage in rural and remote areas to fill the void of telephony services

Families living in rural and remote locations, use their homes as the base for their businesses and the home often doubles as the classroom for distance education students. For our members, communication is important for the delivery of education, accessing government services and for enabling enterprises to conduct their business, which includes engaging in competitive commercial activities. All these activities rely on ready access to communication.

Due to the location of our members, they will greatly benefit from the **nbn** Long Term Satellite Service (LTSS) and the expansion of the Mobile Blackspot Programme. Access, reliability and affordability of services are the most pressing communication issues for our families residing in rural and remote Australia. Members pursue equity of access as a basic requirement in the provision of telecommunications.

Q1. Do people in regional Australia believe their reliance on telecommunications differs from those in urban areas? How does it differ and can you provide examples?

Fast, reliable, affordable, digital access is an urgent priority for remote and rural communities, for business, schooling, health, professional training and recreational purposes so that remote and rural Australians can effectively participate in the global digital economy.

Our membership base falls into the rural, remote and very remote categories. Services members utilise vary between satellite broadband or Next G mobile for both voice and data, and fixed line services which may be High Capacity Radio Concentrator (HCRC), Wireless Local Link (fixed phones provided by the mobile phone network), satellite phones or single to multichannel wireless services. Our responses and included examples of usage, reflect these service types.

Residents living in rural and remote areas have a different and greater reliance on telecommunication than their urban counterparts. This is mainly due to distances from mainstream services, a harsh and unpredictable working and living environment and isolation. People living in regional areas often have little or no choice of network provider and they may be reliant solely on their landline for telephone service due to no mobile coverage in their area. Satellite broadband is a costly alternative for rural and remote people in comparison to the more competitive urban-based services on offer.

As the digital revolution continues to accelerate and place demands on people leaving them no option but to use technology to access necessary services, it is vital that safeguards are in place to ensure rural and remote based users are not left behind and further marginalised. Increased levels of data will be needed as usage continues to increase at a vast rate.

Rural and remote internet users differ from their urban counterparts as, for the most part, they do not have separate internet services for home, school and business. Metropolitan users commonly have a home system, access to Internet at their place of business for work, and their children are able to access internet (or intranet) via their school during school time. Rural users have all areas bound together under a single usage classification.

In addition to the above, remote primary production businesses may have an added sector, that of needing to provide access to services for their staff who, due to isolated locations, are accommodated at their place of work. Numerous places do not have separate internet systems for staff and therefore the staff must use the home system to meet their needs. This is fairly common with contractors or seasonal workers. Permanent staff often have obtained their own internet service due to their more permanent status in qualifying to have a service installed. During busy work periods, for example when contracting camps are engaged on pastoral stations, contracting staff often access the station's internet when they come in from the camp. Some places have their regular staff connected to the family or station internet if there are only a few employees, such as a family with a governess.

Government services continue to move towards a more digital environment, particularly with the establishment of the Digital Transformation Office to drive delivery of government services. Customers are encouraged to complete forms online, use an application (app) to access services or update personal details via a web link. Many people in remote areas find that these services time out during usage, requiring them to recommence the activity. This has a detrimental impact on their limited available data.

The writing of education courses for distance education students is a challenge. The standard of course materials and curriculum offered by educational institutions throughout Australia is advancing at a great pace and it is assumed that distance education students and small rural schools can access the new technologies needed for the implementation of the curriculum.

However, the reality is that in the main, rural and remote people do not have access to sufficient technology required to complete courses on offer. ICPA is looking for increased opportunities to be available for rural and remote students to successfully engage in online learning. Students should be able to take advantage of the myriad of learning experiences and tools offered by technology. The focus needs to be on providing this improved access in order to help these students overcome the educational challenges associated with the isolation in which they live.

SA
 Firstly, our curriculum is now delivered 100% online. We have an assembly and online 45 min lesson each day via Centra, and the day's tasks are on a Moodle. If a family loses its internet connection for any reason, they are unable to access school at all. The school pays a subsidy but it is up to individual families to supply their own internet and for many this is unreliable and the plans do not allow much data use. Geographically isolated students make up just 6% of Open Access College enrolments, so we feel that the school has pushed ahead with online learning before satellite internet is ready. Many of the links are videos and high usage files. It is up to families to download and print all the resources. We have families with up to three students on 20 GB plans. The college principal advised families to increase their plans, but for many on the **nbn** Interim Satellite Service, this is not possible, as the service has been capped due to congestion.

Existing plans differ enormously between urban centres and rural/remote Australia. Currently TPG are offering an **nbn** + Home phone bundle that *includes* unlimited data, unlimited local calls, unlimited national calls, unlimited calls to mobiles within Australia, unlimited international calls to many countries and a speed up to 100/40 Mbps for \$109.99 per month. Many of our members are paying not much less for a very poor service that does not offer nearly as many inclusions.

Type	Available data per month	Cost
Satellite (Telstra)	20 GB	\$599 /month
Mobile (Telstra)	25 GB	\$160/month
Bordnet	20 GB/20 GB	\$74.95
Activ8me	20 GB/25 GB	\$49.95/ month
Skymesh	20 GB	\$49.95 / month
Skymesh (NSS)	2 GB /6 GB	\$54.95 / month
Cost comparison to non rural and remote access		
ADSL	100 GB	\$100/month
Cable	100 GB	\$100/month
Telstra nbn plan	1000 GB	\$115 / month

The cost of the plan is of no relevance (as Activ8 and Skymesh look relatively inexpensive) if the speed is so poor that the internet is ineffective and for the most part unusable.

Q2. For those users already connected to an nbn network service, has the service met your expectations?

The majority of our membership falls into the category of the approximate seven per cent of premises in Australia that will be serviced by either fixed wireless or satellite. Our responses focus on these services.

The current Interim Satellite Service (ISS) is neither reliable nor capable of delivering what people require for internet usage. Members report connections constantly dropping out and being too slow to connect and download files. Rural customers are therefore unable to fully utilise and keep abreast with the latest happenings. Currently, the Fair Use Policy (FUP) is barring those customers who need to use the internet for education, from accessing necessary amounts of data to allow them appropriate access to materials and activities which provide the level of education similar to that available in metropolitan areas, where download limits are far greater. Members are finding that they are reaching their data allowance quota very quickly and even those who have not reached their allowance limit, experience encumbering speed issues that render their internet service practically unusable.

User experience since the end of March 2015 has worsened and this appears to coincide with the introduction of video streaming over the internet. A reduction in the already small data volume available to rural customers, will not improve the user experience. An equitable solution must be established. The reduced usage capacity is impacting the ability of distance education programs to be effectively delivered to the home schoolroom. Internet users in the city can gain internet access from multiple sources. In the bush, the one available source is inadequate.

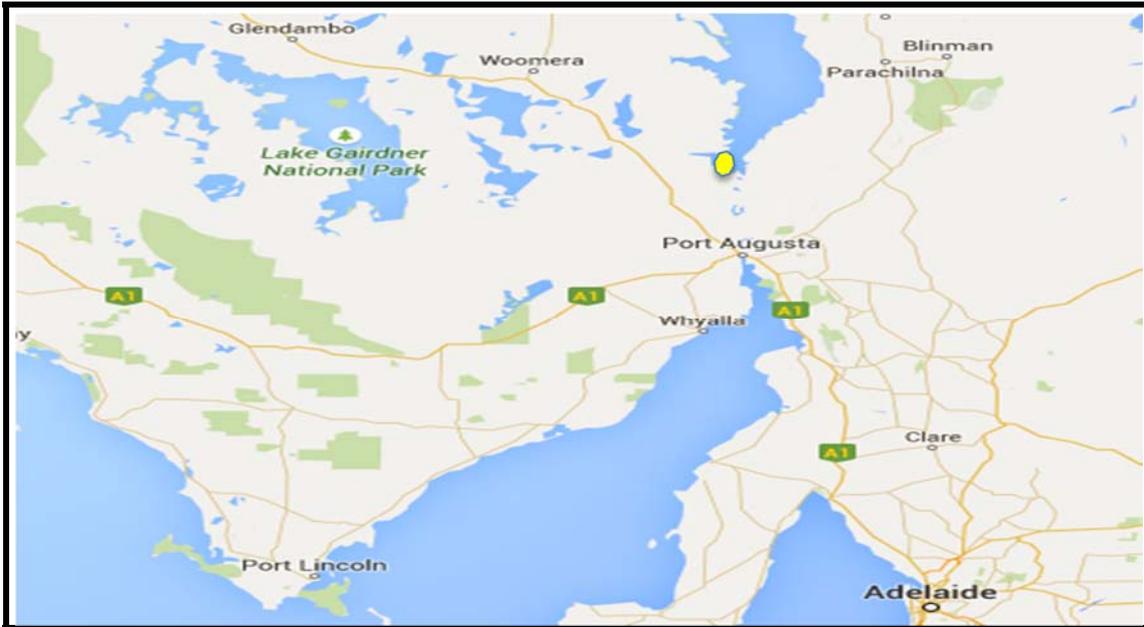
With the information provided below by parents of distance education (DE) students, we have included maps to show relevant locations.

130km north of Port Augusta, SA

.... my concern regards our internet usage and our ability to educate my son when we have used up our allocation.

We are with Activ8 on a 20GB Anytime plan that gets shaped if we go over. This is the highest plan that we are able to go on. We have one upper primary student studying through distance education on School of the Air. Recently we have found that we have been exceeding our allowance and consequently getting shaped. The impact of this is that he's not able to participate in lessons fully as audio is coming through garbled, often with the ending section of speech directly overlaying the beginning. Another difficulty is that many of the slides that the teacher shows are not loading and leaving him with a blank slide and so he is unable to follow the lesson. Web searches too become increasingly difficult.

You cannot be enrolled in our school of distance education without a connection. It is incredibly frustrating when you run out of allowance to have to wait a further two school weeks before your son can participate again fully. Speaking with Activ8 I was told that we'd just have to wait and that nbn were responsible for us being unable to secure more internet data packages even though it is for educational purposes.

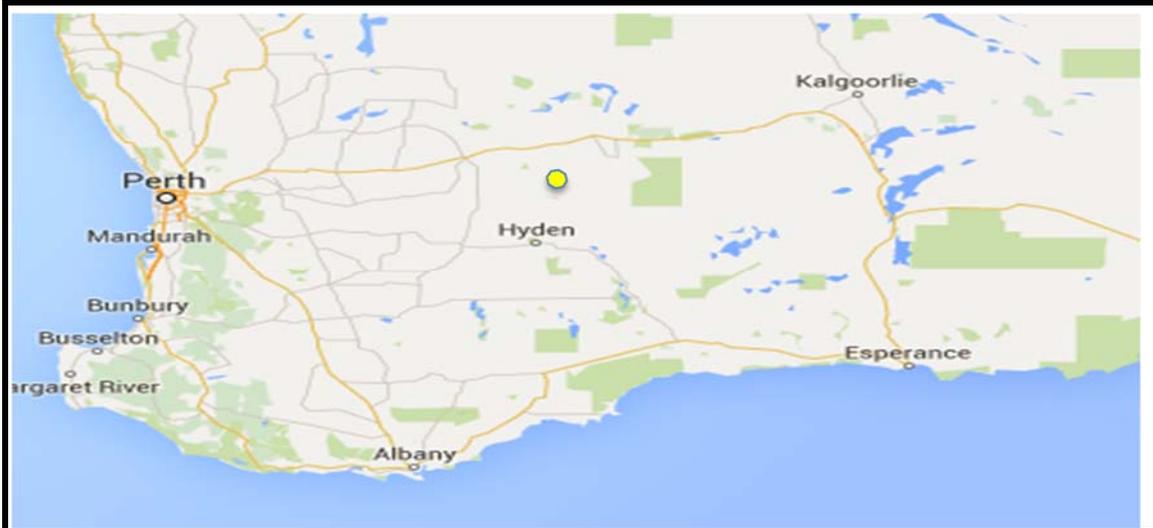


Hyden, WA

We started with 60 GB Anytime, which was really great and rarely used, except on school holidays. Now we have been cut back three times to 20 GB peak and 25 GB off peak (which we can't really use – we are usually asleep)!

We are on a grain farm in WA and use internet mainly for business, particularly email (we have disconnected our fax line). Also for personal use, like Skyping my sister in the UK. Our other problem is that we get no mobile access so satellite internet is our only option. This also means that when we have employees (about 6 months of the year), we have to let them use our internet. It would be unreasonable to deny them keeping in contact with family and friends when they can be here for up to 3 months at a time. There is public internet access in Hyden (office hours Mon-Fri) but when we are busy, we can't give them a couple of hours to go into town. So now we have to monitor our usage daily and if it is getting too high and we are in danger of running out of download, we can only turn off the wi-fi, which cuts off access to the workers.

It is really annoying when you speak to family and friends who have ADSL and they can get plans of 100GB plus per month for about what we pay for 20GB. Every day we are bombarded with information that we can download and there is so much available now on the internet. It also seems that is the way entertainment is heading, where you can download movies and TV shows as soon as they are released. This is no good if you don't have the download usage available or speed.



NSW

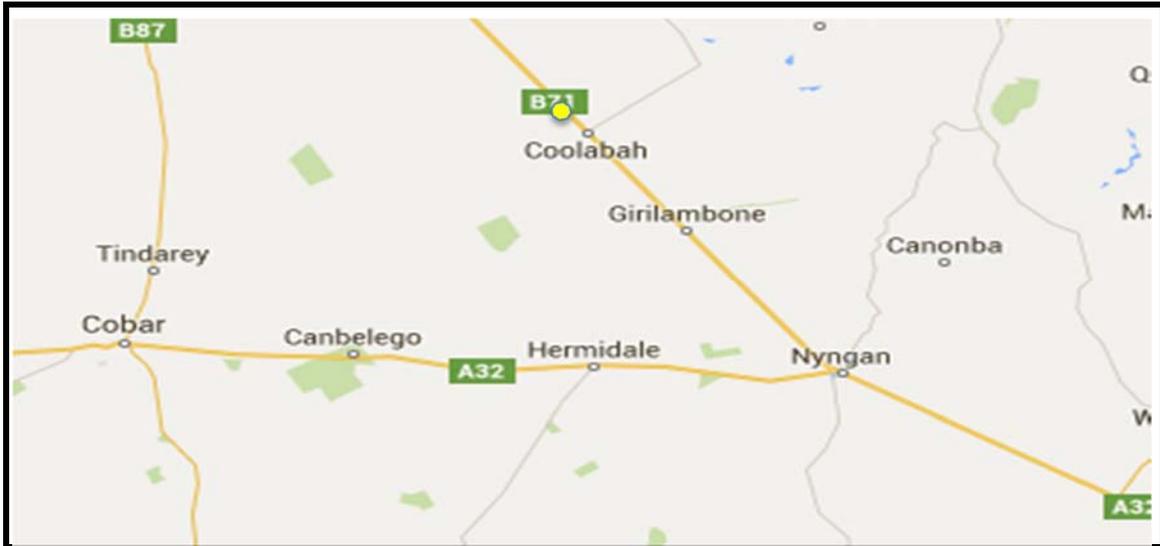
The internet is slow, especially during the mornings when lessons are being generated via REACT and therefore using a lot of bandwidth. The REACT system seems to freeze if three or more microphones are on at any one time and there can be no more than one camera on at a time or the system crashes. When it freezes you have to log on and off which breaks the lesson not only for the student but also the teacher. The system seems to be slower since the service provider change over. The internet is slow when using additional online programs like Mathletics and Moodle.

Coolabah, NSW 2831

My family has been greatly affected by the **nbn** mandated data usage limits.

Prior to this year, my three, now primary school aged children, have studied at home in our farm's schoolroom. The internet has been enormously important for the children's schooling. I have one child who has dyslexia. It is very important to him and to our family that he has been able to still engage with books and reading through using the nbn to download audiobooks from the district library and the Vision Australia library. He also downloaded Audible audio books and Amazon Kindle audio books, which sync together on his Kindle Fire. Doing this he was able to participate in the NSW Premier's Reading Challenge in 2014. He is rightly proud of his certificate. This sort of internet use requires a large data package with usable speeds.

This year we have established a second home in Orange solely for the purpose of educating the children in mainstream school. The children and I miss my husband/their father terribly but we know that we do this to achieve our goal of the best education we can provide for them. Our daily routine includes phone contact with Dad. We would like to be able to Skype with him every night, instead of using the telephone, but the current internet package does not make this practical. I think that the immediacy that this would provide would be helpful for our youngest, aged six, in particular. The actual speed and data usage limit on the package available now on nbn, means that my husband, at night on the farm, phones rather than Skypes with us. I recently took photos of the weekend's activities for him to share in the day's sport, play and gardening. It took so long for the (reduced file size) emails to come in, at his end i.e. using nbn, that the screen timed out.



Q3. Having regard to the technical solution likely to be used in your area, do you have views on the adequacy of that solution in terms of meeting needs now and into the future?

ICPA has strong and clear views on communication requirements for the non-urban population, which have come about due to the inequalities experienced over the last decade or so in comparison to available metropolitan services. We are aware that delivering services similar to metropolitan areas, to the rural and remote population, is far more expensive and time consuming to deploy. Therefore, it is essential that the **nbn** Long Term Satellite Service capacity is sufficient for both current and future demand. Existing usage is limited by the inadequacy of current systems.

ICPA supports a special classification within the **nbn** Interim Satellite Service (ISS) and the Long Term Satellite Service (LTSS) for students of distance education schools. This classification would also include priority of access to the LTSS for any existing services that deliver distance education to rural and remote students.

If a Fair Use Policy is to continue to be employed, education related internet usage must be allowed for, on top of any capped plan allowance. This additional educational allowance should be calculated on a per student basis.

The provision of peak/off peak plans is totally unsuitable for distance education students due to the times allocated for the commencement of these services. Distance education lessons do, for the most part, fall within the allotted peak service times. Peak times are not faster speed periods - they are the times of greatest usage when the most people are using the internet (for example Activ8 - **nbn** satellite 20GB/25GB ISS plan: Peak Time is 8:00am - 12:00am and Off-Peak Time is 12:01am - 7:59am). Providers are trying to encourage people to use the internet during non-peak times when there is less congestion on the satellite. Unfortunately our distance education students do not have this option.

ICPA is making a submission to the Distance Education and Broadband working group set up by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications, specifically to address the needs of this cohort of Australians.

Q5. For users living in areas without mobile coverage, what priorities, other than specific locations, do you consider should be recognised in future efforts to improve coverage?

Access, reliability and affordability of service are the priorities that ICPA considers should be recognised in future efforts to improve coverage for our families residing in rural and remote Australia. Like all Australians, ICPA members desire equity of access as a basic requirement in the provision of telecommunication services. With many of our regional towns and locations having low population numbers, the preference for commercial viability in the provision of new services, often cannot be met.

Lack of sufficient mobile coverage impacts on 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 this situation wi-fi hotspots at regular intervals along major transport routes and tourist destinations could be of value.

Rural and remote internet is not only a useful tool and 'equaliser' in allowing shopping, business transactions, schooling, training and healthcare to be more accessible and assist in overcoming the tyranny of distance. It is also a lifeline when landlines are out of service due to no mobile coverage for vast distances in many rural areas of Australia.

ICPA believes that all students, irrespective of where they live, should have the opportunity to receive the education they require to participate to their full potential in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the community. To this end, the provision of effective communications in regional, rural and remote areas is crucial to enable students to access an equitable education. Inadequate or non-existent mobile coverage seriously disadvantages rural schools and their students and consequently, the entire community.

Rural schools are at the heart of their communities and wide-ranging community meetings and activities may occur at these schools as well. Schools are significant indicators in determining the value of having mobile services allocated to an area. Given the vital role that schools play in rural and remote areas, it is essential that areas which have schools with inadequate or non-existent mobile coverage, be prioritised for service provision. Mobile phone service availability to school staff and students is not a convenience but an essential safety requirement.

North of Balranald, NSW

One very important facility is Clare Public School (155 km North of Balranald, NSW), which sits within a 15,000 square km mobile phone black spot. Clare Public School is recognised by emergency services as a 'safer place' in the event of a natural disaster and also holds the Royal Flying Doctor medical chest. It is the hub of a remote farming community. Unfortunately, Clare Public School has no mobile phone coverage so all communication not via a landline must first go through the UHF radio base located in the school teacher's residence and then relayed to the relevant authorities. Clare Public School presents a unique mobile coverage problem in that Clare Public is the only school in the state not situated in a

town. Access to Clare Public School is situated along the main transport route in the western division in NSW, to the southern markets in Victoria.



Q7. Do you have any views on co-investment approaches that might help to improve the broadband technology outcome in your area?

ICPA supports co-investment, as it will help expedite broadband technology expansion for the families that ICPA represents, particularly as our members are often in more isolated areas where it is commercially unviable for single enterprises to establish mobile services. The intervention of government may be needed to ensure services in these areas are comparable to those delivered in urban areas, to ensure equity. Greater promotion of the benefits of co-investment to local government and private enterprise is needed. There is much infrastructure out in the bush that currently only has a single use e.g. UHF repeater towers. The potential for co-location of services is great especially when you consider the resources sector and potential co-investment from sharing towers at mining sites and tourist facilities.

ICPA would welcome new technologies suited to remote geographic areas e.g. who knows what Google's ambitious plan - Project Loon could deliver for such areas. However, following on from the disastrous experiences many families have had with the ISS, although not a new technology, it highlights the need for instigation and administration of new initiatives, needing a guarantee that they would provide a superior service.

Q8. How might new applications and services that utilise mobile networks for voice and data transform the way you live and work?

For many living in regional Australia, the ability to access applications readily available to urban dwellers would overcome the current digital divide. The ability to use new applications and services would see increased access to business marketing and selling options, greater access to education courses and reduced travel time and expense to engage with specialists

and allied health services. Combined, these would reduce the impact isolation has on many living in the more remote locations.

Due to many of the online services being developed for users of fast, reliable internet, it has meant those not able to access such these high-speed services, experience extreme frustration. The take-up of broadband has led to the greater reliance of online services. However, this is not always a choice but rather the only option available at times as shop fronts in both small and large communities, continue to be replaced by online services. The need for fast, reliable internet becomes obvious yet again.

Q9. What communications barriers have you experienced in expanding or operating your business or providing services, such as health or education? Have you been able to overcome these barriers and if so, how?

Some of our members face a lack of choice with regard to the type of internet service they can access. While mobile wireless broadband is enticing for some customers due to the portability of access, some of our members have ended up using this service due to the limited choice of affordable services being available prior to the ISS. Using a high gain antenna and relying on access to base stations on mine sites, various members have been able to use this technology. These users are not seeking a portable service just an affordable one. The result is they are limited to a service offering a relatively small download at a high price in order to gain access to a basic internet service. A similar situation applies to members living in not so remote rural areas where ADSL and other services are not on offer.

Over the last couple of months, many members who use satellite internet have commented on the significant decrease in their internet data speeds. This frustrating situation appears to have coincided with the release of internet-streamed movie programs such as Netflix and is demonstrating the inadequacy of the current satellite systems. The progression and widespread adoption of online technologies is utilising more bandwidth than ever before.

The majority of satellite users are experiencing a tremendous slowdown in their internet even when they have not reached their 20GB limit. nbn plans allow for a limited amount of data for each user per month. Previously, when that data was used, the internet was 'shaped' or slowed down, to often unworkable speeds. When the internet is slow, it becomes impossible to operate a distance education schoolroom, especially when the curriculum is delivered 100% online (as is the case in SA). With increasing video links, computer updates and high usage web pages, it is easy to go through the few gigabytes made available to a family in a month. In the past, the user could purchase excess data packs, buying more internet to get through the month. Now, due to congestion, the nbn has introduced a fair use policy which means providers are unable to make available, extra data.

To compound this issue, members are now receiving notification of suspension of service until the roll over date of the service. In the case of distance education families, it is vital that this policy is waived to enable the family to continue providing an education for their children. Many distance education tutors are spending a huge portion of their day trying to access materials, downloading course materials and keeping computers up to date instead of presenting lessons to students.

Government services:

We are increasingly encouraged to complete forms online, use an app to access services or update details via a web link as more government departments encourage the public to assist in keeping records current. Many in remote areas are finding these services time-out during use and so require recommencement of the process. New, fast reliable services would overcome this issue.

Education:

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 or access to small rural schools often with highly inadequate internet services.

It is imperative that education related internet use, particularly for distance education students, is considered an addition to the data cap allocated under any fair use policy. The additional allowance must be provided on a per student basis. Tertiary students studying externally will need a larger allocation.

Due to distance, internet and telephony are seen as tools that may gain access to specialists for students with specific needs (learning difficulties or gifted and talented students) in both distance education and small school situations. For this option to be successful, the infrastructure must not only be provided but also operate at a satisfactory level e.g. internet speed is a problem for students needing speech therapy as they need to see the formed words and hear them at the same time for it to be most effective. For students hundreds of kilometres from the nearest specialist, the infrastructure to support students with specific needs is critical as weekly face-to-face interaction is unattainable due to distances required to be travelled.

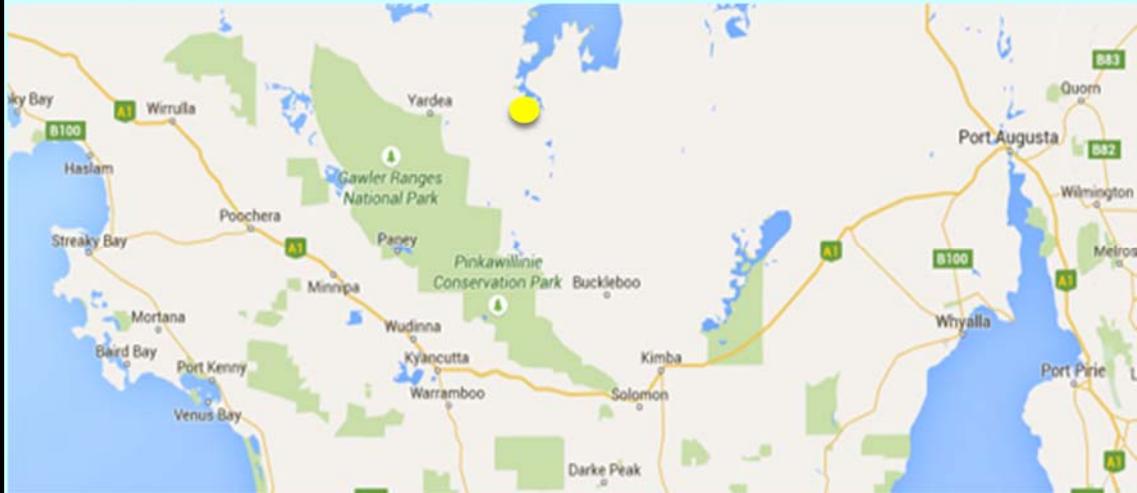
The standard of course materials and curriculum offered by educational institutions throughout Australia, is advancing at a great pace and it is assumed that distance education students and small rural schools can readily access the technologies needed for the curriculum. However, the reality for many in rural and remote areas, is that lack of adequate internet speed and capacity results in people not having appropriate access to the technology needed to complete these courses. ICPA is seeking improved and varied options to access the internet so rural people can avail themselves of these educational opportunities. They should be able to take advantage of the myriad of learning experiences and tools offered by developing technology.

Music classes that are delivered by distance education schools prove to be a challenge, due to the latency issue occurring in satellite internet. With the LTSS and high orbit satellite in operation, the chances are that this time lag will increase making it more difficult for full participation with only the most dedicated persevering.

Socialisation is imperative for all children, more so for those in rural areas who have limited face-to-face access to their peer group. Improved connectivity has the potential to allow this and give them the opportunity to feel connected, albeit they may rarely see their peers due to living long distances from one another.

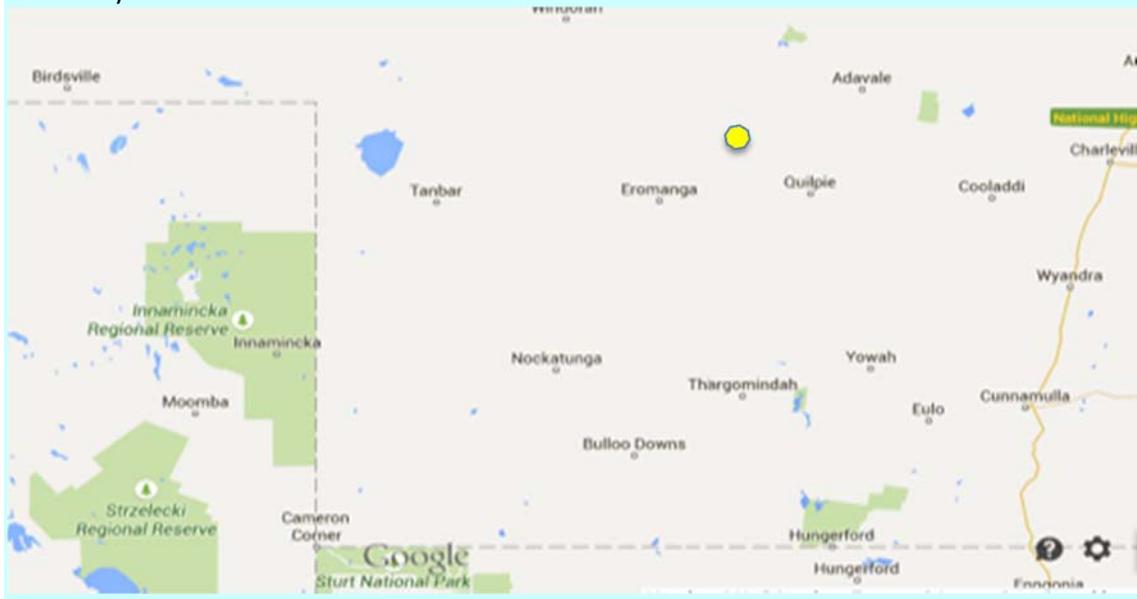
Located Gawler Ranges, SA

So we have been having trouble with our internet now for a few days. Today it was so bad, kids have four lessons online, plus their work to download to use. Completely impossible task today!!! I know we choose where we live but this is unacceptable. My kids can't get educated because we have used all our data allowance. Can't buy a data block. Am being charged a ridiculous amount for a s*** service. I'm sick of being a second rate citizen because of where I live. The cost of educating kids in the bush is back breaking and mentally and physically exhausting. No wonder so many people are leaving. I feel like it today.



Quilpie, QLD

Our internet is far beyond workable for tertiary study, distance education and our agricultural business. The 50GB cap is a joke I must say. There is no way we would ever use that with our download speed. For us it is not the size of the plan but rather the download speed. We chew up the data so quickly because downloads drop out halfway through and I need to download again using up more data than necessary.



NT

...my daughter is with Northern Territory Open Education Centre NTOEC which is Yr 10 - 12 in the NT. It (the internet) is getting slower, all the bandwidth is used, as the emergency services and the health system are also on the STARS satellite from what I have been told, to the extent that my daughter couldn't have a 'group' lesson to collaborate with other students by talking to each other and often the teacher will turn off his video so that the system works faster. It is slower than it used to be for sure. We also have a separate nbn service as well. Our personal computers cannot be 'plugged into' the STARS satellite, only school computers.

75km from Richmond Qld

I am on 4GB in the office/home I have a 25GB for \$150.00 /month plus an extra data pack of 8GB for a further \$55.99 /month. In the schoolroom I have an 8GB for \$65 /month.

I originally was on a 15GB plan last year (with the extra 8GB pack). I had two kids in the schoolroom. The plan kept blowing out (sometimes in the first week). I was getting phone bills for over \$1000.00! So Telstra put me up to the 25GB (keeping the extra 8GB pack) and then I purchased the one for the schoolroom. Now that I only have one child at home it is probably a bit of overkill because we have not gone over our usage and I will probably take off the extra 8GB in the home/office. We never download movies or anything like that and when the kids are home they have been very well versed in not playing games on their phones/devices that use the internet as well as not updating apps. I have found that anything starting with 'i' (iPads/pods/phones) absolutely gobble the data! YouTube is also a dirty word in our household even though I think they get on it when I am not looking. Our main downloads would be general office operation to search things on the internet as well as day to day general internet shopping/research/Facebook (but not much), plus the research I do for ICPA and of course the school room stuff. We have not gone over the 8GB in the schoolroom. I find the amount of GB I have very satisfactory now, but of course very expensive. At present internet is costing us \$280.00 /month. I find the speed very good on the 4G service. We do have problems with dropping out of iConnect but I think that is more of a system issue rather than our internet. The 8GB plan that we have is certainly adequate for school needs with one student in the classroom.



Located NT, with activ8

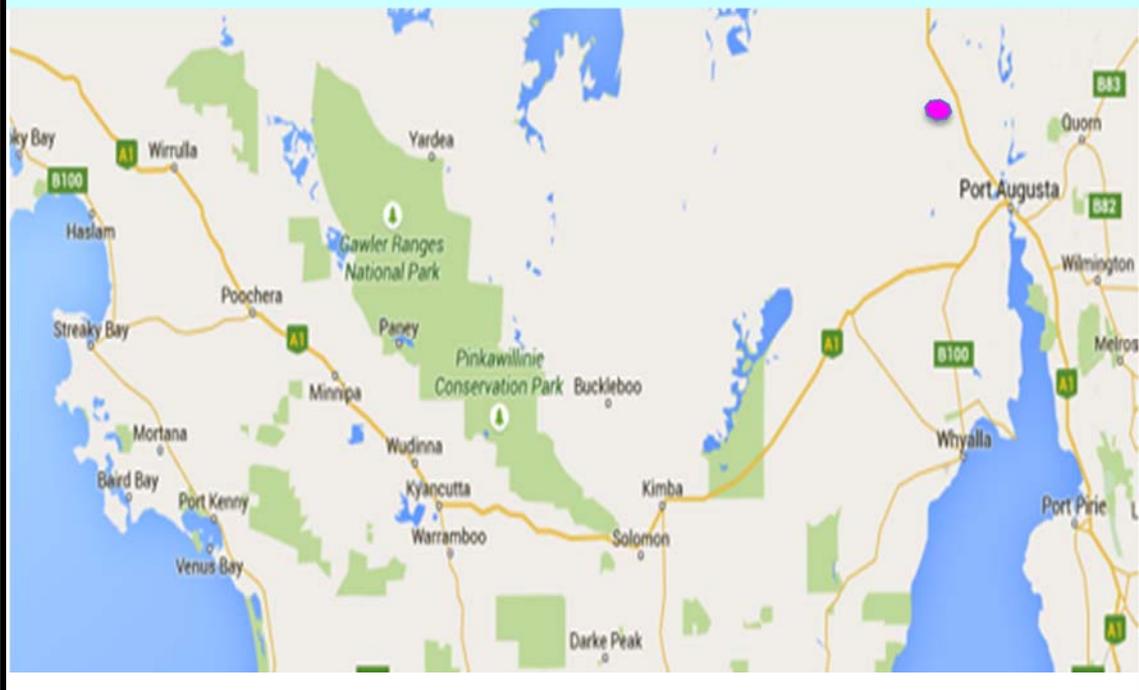
Not only has the speed been causing issues, lately I have been having drop outs. Activ8 also dropped our service from 60GB unlimited to 50GB peak/ off peak system. And while doing this, it has increased the per GB price!

60 km north of Port Augusta SA

Presently I have a Yr 10 and Yr 12 student studying full time at home. Over the years I have seen the schooling change from radio 'air' lessons to the introduction of lessons using Centra and Webex which require high speed internet to access. Downloads used to be relatively small in the past due to support materials being mailed to families.

Over the years virtually all of the curriculum material and resources have become only accessible online and need to be downloaded so students can complete work. Video tutorials are everyday occurrences now and most teachers require students to watch anything up to 20 or 30 minute videos before completing a task each day. Just last year we needed approximately 2GB a day to complete school and now we need at least 3 or 4GB a day.

The cheapest and highest plan for us is a wireless broadband allowance of 25GB a month for \$160. Even at only 3GB a day, that is just over eight days before we run out of data each month.



Ability to compete on an equal footing when attempting to gain access to an appropriate education, brings with it its own set of problems. How can isolated children compete with metropolitan based children for scholarships and places in their school of choice, if, on top of not having access to museums and musicians, libraries and the like, they have a lesser quality internet to use? Virtual tours of places of significance would enhance the educational experience and be ideal for our children to access but the internet limits us significantly.

There are many opportunities on offer where the internet could be a major educational tool and overcome restrictions presented due to physical distance. We are not suggesting that a virtual tour can replace the hands on experience. Our rural and remote students would love to embrace and use some of these available tools but the inadequacies of the internet service on offer, prevent this.

When telephony fails, there is an added burden with children away at boarding school. Having children far away at a young age (in order to access education due to isolation) is very difficult for families. The children need to be able to talk to their family for support and contact with home is essential when they have problems they are dealing with or are missing home whilst away at school. It is difficult for families in general to provide support and assistance to their children from so a distance but this is compounded when they are unable to speak to them due to the phone services not working. When a phone service is out, parents cannot be reached by the boarding school if emergencies occur and treatment or permission for treatment for their child, is being sought. For many parents, the option of school not being able to just 'ring the mobile' when having a child anywhere from several hundred to thousands of kilometres away and not being contactable due to phone outages, is a concern.

Q10. What communication functions (for example, speed, mobility, reliability, data, etc) would best suit your needs, noting the limitations of each technology (for example, mobile, wireless, satellite, fibre)?

Most of our members require a mix of these functions. They would be satisfied to have access to a service that was reliable, allowed adequate download allowances and speeds for education, business and personal use.

As outlined in earlier responses, the population that ICPA represents will be relying on the Long Term Satellite Services (LTSS) to deliver a service that is adequate in meeting the combined needs of customers. The service to be offered through the new satellite will see a huge leap forward in accessible communication services. However, in order to achieve an equitable service, it must be affordable.

Q11. Do we need to continue to guarantee the standard telephony service for all (or only some) consumers, and if so, to what extent?

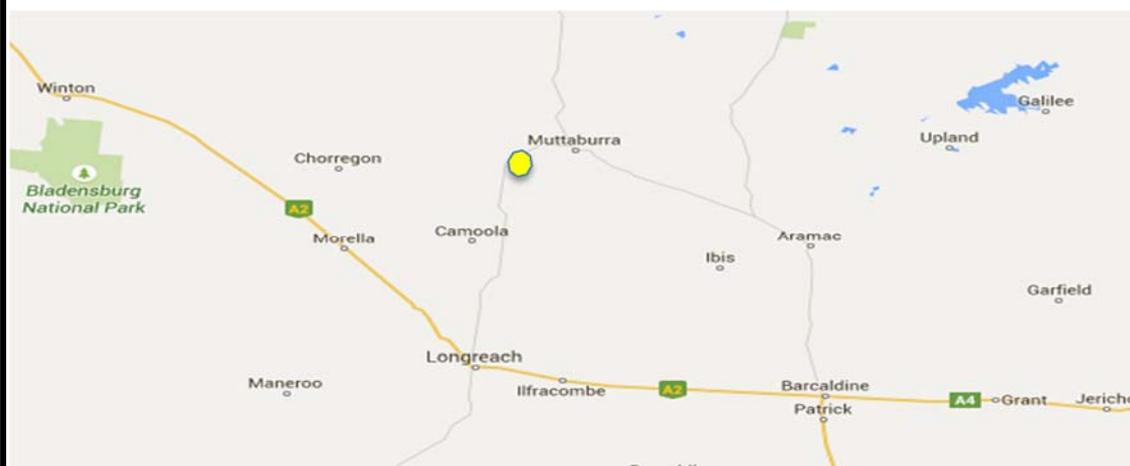
Consumers should have a guaranteed standard telephony service particularly those residing in rural and remote areas. Shortages of trained staff, lack of availability of parts and failure to carry out essential maintenance, has reduced the reliability of outback services with repair times blowing out at times to three and four weeks. A guarantee is required to ensure these customers can be confident that service repairs will be carried out within a set time frame.

Some users of the Digital Radio Concentrator System (DRCS) covered by the USO, after their first upgrade moved to the CDMA Wireless local loop which was covered by the USO. The next upgrade moved them to the Next G Wireless link. Remote customers were given the option to go on a satellite service but were advised by Telstra that the Next G Wireless link was the better option as a more reliable service because it used the latest Next G mobile technology. Customers were then advised that Next G Wireless link was not supplied in

fulfilment of the USO due to preselection not being able to be offered. This was not a satisfactory situation in which to place rural customers.

Property 60kms from Muttaborra (small Central Qld town pop 100) and 190 kms from Longreach Qld

I am not usually one to go public with complaints but our phone has been out for over 3 weeks. A technician was meant to come on the 28th of April to fix it and nobody turned up. Obviously we have no mobile service here so we are always emailing a friend or family to ring for us to find out what is going on and the next date set to fix the service was meant to be today. When our neighbour rang them for us, they have now said a technician might be out on the 20th of May but only maybe. Our kids need the phone to do School of the Air and we bend over backwards out here to get our children an education but it is really hard when it is out of our control and Telstra does not seem to care. (I like it though that if you are a day late with the money for them, you get a \$15 fine.) When I drove to town to ring about it, they told me, "You do know there are floods on in NSW" to which I replied, "You do know we are in the middle of a three year drought in Qld". Then they promised a sat phone when I aired my concerns about the kids not being able to do their schooling...that was meant to come a week ago. Does anyone know of anyone that I can email about this and bring awareness about it or is it just dramatising things and we just accept it as something that happens and it will get fixed when someone gets around to it? I can do without the phone but my main concern is the kids' education that is suffering because of it all. A week or so, I was prepared to put up with but I find 5 weeks hard to accept.



Q12. Are there new or other services, the availability of which should be underpinned by consumer safeguards?

ICPA believes a Customer Service Guarantee is required for an internet service given it is now a widely used and relied on means of communication. This would cover provision, fault restoration and performance.

Safeguards must be in place to ensure that small operators coming into the market place have sufficient financial substance and capacity behind them to provide and maintain the offered services for the long term.

While ICPA understands that the delivery technology will be determined by **nbn**, our members feel there still needs to be more information advertised about the retail service providers, who understandably differentiate their services in terms of price, quality, content quotas and value-add services. Historically, customers signed up with whichever provider was marketing in their area at the time and it is now very obvious that there is a huge difference in offered customer service and actual service provided amongst the RSPs that venture to inland Australia.

Q13. What standards should apply to your services? How might they best be enforced?

ICPA believe that our members, as consumers, have the right to access the same levels of service and support at costs comparable to those services on offer in metropolitan and major regional areas. Achievement of this equality would best be enforced by simply having one set of standards for customers, nation-wide.