

RURAL SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL TRAVEL PORTFOLIO

Di Skene

Before I begin, I would like to express my sincere thoughts to you all during the current hard times of drought and flood as things are tough, I know. I am very fortunate to be delivering you this report for the second year as the leader of the Rural Schools and School Travel Portfolio in amazing Adelaide for 2019. The Rural Schools and School Travel Portfolio has been very busy advocating for our families by forwarding submissions, sending letters, many a phone conversation and email communication on current issues and previous motions. If you wish to review the 2018 motion updates you can view this from the following link on the ICPA website.

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1192/federal-conference-motion-updates/federal-conference-motion-update-2018.pdf>

RURAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS

Federal Council works across a number of portfolios when it comes to rural schools' issues, particularly around the communications and curriculum topics and members should refer to those portfolios for more information on those matters. There have been no recent motions presented at Federal Conference regarding rural schools, however ICPA (Aust) continues to seek quality educational services be delivered to students in rural and remote schools.

Members schooling their children in remote schools may like to visit the **Schools Plus Website** <https://www.schoolsplus.org.au/> which offers eligible schools assistance with raising funds for programs that give students the best chance of success. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is used to determine if a school is disadvantaged – schools must have an ICSEA value below 1000 to be eligible for support through Schools Plus.

RURAL SCHOOL TRAVEL

Federal Council has taken forward members' request that rural and remote students should receive a Student Fare Allowance that reflects the actual costs involved to get students from their home, to their place of education within Australia. The inequity that exists across Australia is to the detriment of rural and remote students, particularly given the limited boarding options within some states.

The lack of consistent travel assistance for rural and remote students has been raised in the Operation, Regulation and Funding of Air Route Service Delivery to Rural, Regional and Remote communities ('Travel Inquiry') and through letters to Government and conversations with Ministers to alert them to the situation of different allowance schemes being offered in different states. This being so, the point was made that there is currently no Federal travel allowance under the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC), however there are fares allowances under both ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance which highlights a discrepancy in Commonwealth Allowances if they were tabled side-by-side. At the end of 2018, I was privileged to talk with various State Rural Schools and School Travel portfolio leaders to listen and learn about what states currently have, what is needed and how best to move forward.

BUS – GREYHOUND AUSTRALIA

After our last Federal Conference, I hit the ground running with Greyhound Australia's announcement to 'no longer take children aged 15 and under being 12-14 years of age without a chaperone.' We contacted Greyhound to ask for an explanation and how they saw families being able to use their services with these new protocols. With Greyhound services no longer catering for children's travel requirements to and from schools, families that live a considerable distance and rely on bus services will have to make other arrangements. Bus services are often a rural or remote student's only practical

means of travel. Greyhound responded by voicing concern for the children's safety on board and at stops. These issues were at the forefront of their thoughts when changing the criteria. ICPA does support the safety concerns and through assistance from the Australian Boarding Schools Association, we found this decision by Greyhound resulted in affecting some 250 students, mostly in Queensland. Although Greyhound is a national company, other States have not seen the same impact, as Greyhound were not visiting a lot of areas or States make their own arrangements where they have dedicated buses for long distance school travel for this to cause the same detrimental effect that is currently happening in Queensland.

ROAD TRAVEL

Moving onto roads and having conference motions seeking our regional and remote roads network be maintained at a safe standard for all to travel has seen Federal Council talk with Federal Government and stakeholder groups. We did receive a reply from the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and regional Development, at the time, the Honourable Michael McCormack. The Minister expressed that the "strengths of our roads continue to be the Government's core focus and have a number of programs in place to provide funding to regional and remote communities to assist with ongoing road maintenance". The Minister also stated they have 'Roads to Recovery' funding that will be given to councils to choose which programs they will direct this funding to, according to priority of course. He went on to say that his concern was with the National Road Toll and serious injuries and he believed the new programs have been a long time coming.

AIR TRAVEL

It has been very encouraging to note that some airlines serving regional areas have announced changes and increased assistance for air travellers in regional areas.

Qantas, in response to the Inquiry into the Operation, Regulation and Funding of Air Route Service Delivery to Rural, Regional and Remote Communities, has increased some Residents' Fares locations. This has been detailed in Qantas' response and re-iterated that 'residents can book return leisure or personal flights from Cloncurry or Mt Isa airport to Brisbane or Townsville, or from Moranbah airport to Brisbane. All return travel is from eligible Western Australia ports are for leisure or personal travel to Perth only'. Qantas also went on to say that residents from surrounding councils and neighbouring regional, rural and remote communities can apply the discount as long as the residents are able to demonstrate that their nearest airport with Qantas service is one of the ten eligible ports in Queensland and Western Australia.

Qantas expressed to Federal Council in writing on the 31 March this year, that there will be direct flights from Darwin and Adelaide to Uluru. The Darwin to Alice Springs route will be upgraded to a Boeing 737 with Business class. Also, the introduction of discounted fares program for Alice Springs residents has been welcomed, though on the downside, some routes to Cairns will cease and also a reduction in flights to Perth. On the upside, Jetstar has increased flights between Cairns and Darwin during peak season. ICPA (Aust) has raised in discussions with Qantas that members have requested further expansion of the Resident's Fares Program which we have seen some additions in recent times as seen below.

The following return trips qualify for Qantas' discounted fares for residents:

Queensland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cloncurry (CNJ) - Townsville (TSV) - Cloncurry (CNJ) • Cloncurry (CNJ) - Brisbane (BNE) via Townsville - Cloncurry (CNJ) • Moranbah (MOV) - Brisbane (BNE) - Moranbah (MOV) • Mount Isa (ISA) - Brisbane (BNE) - Mount Isa (ISA) • Mount Isa (ISA) - Townsville (TSV) - Mount Isa (ISA) • Longreach (LRE) - Brisbane (BNE) - Longreach (LRE) • Barcaldine (BCI) - Brisbane (BNE) - Barcaldine (BCI) • Blackall (BKQ) - Brisbane (BNE) - Blackall (BKQ)
Western Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broome (BME) - Perth (PER) - Broome (BME) • Kalgoorlie (KGI) - Perth (PER) - Kalgoorlie (KGI) • Karratha (KTA) - Perth (PER) - Karratha (KTA) • Port Hedland (PHE) - Perth (PER) - Port Hedland (PHE) • Newman (ZNE) - Perth (PER) - Newman (ZNE) • Paraburdoo (PBO) - Perth (PER) - Paraburdoo (PBO)
Northern Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alice Springs (ASP) - Darwin (DRW) - Alice Springs (ASP) • Ayers Rock (AYQ) - Darwin (DRW) - Ayers Rock (AYQ)

Qantas has also extended their discounted fare scheme to increase the number of flights that can be booked per year from four to twelve. The scheme has also been extended to Longreach, Blackall and Barcaldine residents for return travel to Brisbane, which keeping in mind does not incorporate Western Australia. Also, they have just recently stated that they are waiving the \$99.00 change fee for bookings made through the Discounted Fares for Residents Scheme in the program portal on Qantas.com, this is to provide flexibility for residents when booking return trips. Members have been apprehensive about booking a return trip through the residential fares scheme at times as return dates can be uncertain, particularly for students who may have different exam dates and school activities such as sports or music camps/workshops at the end of term. Having the change fee waived should offer families the ability to book a return trip at the start of school terms and adjust the return travel as needed with no additional cost. Remember to take advantage of these discounts you must book through the Qantas.com portal.

Rex Airlines have been hugely supportive by committing a large amount of money to assist families in the North Queensland floods and offered students discounted fares to be able to return home for Easter. Regional airlines such as Rex continue to try and offer ways to help students travelling in regional remote areas for example pledging assistance for drought relief. Rex has also increased their Community Fare Scheme to include flights between Kangaroo Island and Adelaide, Narrandera-Leton and Sydney, Griffith and Sydney just to name a few.

ICPA (Aust) appreciates the announcements which may bring some benefits to members and our rural students, though we recognise the cost of air travel still significantly impacts families of students needing to travel by air to access educational opportunities.

INQUIRY INTO THE OPERATION, REGULATION AND FUNDING OF AIR ROUTE SERVICE DELIVERY TO RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1118/federal-submissions/federal-submissions-2018/regional-air-fare-inquiry-submission-feb-2018.pdf>

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Rural_and_Regional_Affairs_and_Transport/RegionalAirRoutes/Report

As some of us have been apprehensive on the length of time it has taken for the Federal Government to release their final report, we can finally give this inquiry some light. The travel inquiry gave Federal

Council the opportunity to raise previous and current motions. It is with appreciation we receive their findings and know that the Government has been made aware of the difficulties our members face with regards to air travel, but also disappointment that only 9 recommendations have been handed down. We welcome the recommendation to upgrade regional airports which we believe will improve access to areas that are not currently being serviced. Some of these upgrades are the Oodnadatta airport, Yorketown airport, Port Lincoln Airport and the Elliston airport. On the other side of the coin we may be looking at increased costs for some shires, for example Charleville, where the Council owns the airport. This may have huge impacts and as some media are already reporting the situation may become inviable if the shire had to pay the running costs which could possibly force closure of some regional air services. We understand the safety issues as the Senate inquiry found, though regional areas of Australia rely on these services to be able to function. The inquiry recommended the Government consider providing ongoing financial assistance to a number of airports that will be affected.

An example of the cost difference for regional travellers- for a child to get home from boarding school in Adelaide to Alice Springs would cost in the vicinity of over \$500 and if they were to fly to Brisbane then it will only be approximately \$180. A similar trip from Alice Springs to Perth is about \$850 and to Brisbane from Alice Springs is over \$1000. These costs are outside the average person's understanding and we will continue to advocate for decreased costs to be able to get our children an education that they deserve.

I note that within the Inquiry there was a recommendation to the Federal Government to direct the Inquiry to the Productivity Commission for them to investigate the costs; we can only hope that this will happen.

We strongly encourage branches to continue to send in their case studies to form the foundations of our ability to advocate for our children, improved services and equitable future with the Government at every opportunity.