

## **COMMUNICATIONS MOTION UPDATE – FEDERAL CONFERENCE 2016**

From a communications perspective, it seems that there is no greater issue in regional Australia than telecommunications. No matter where you live, you should have access to affordable, reliable internet and voice services.

There were 32 communications motions presented at Federal Conference in Perth last year –mainly concerning **nbn** services, the Mobile Black Spot Program and Telstra faults and services. These have been actioned in our delegations to Canberra, through submissions and letters as well as through the many communications groups that ICPA (Aust) is a part.

### **Nbn**

ICPA (Aust) has regular meetings with **nbn** as part of the satellite stakeholder roundtable and enjoys a good working relationship with them. The education port is in use in Queensland, SA and WA. Currently Western Australia is the only state that has their **nbn** internet connection paid through their Department of Education. Trials are taking place to further improve the delivery of educational materials over Sky Muster.

Many members have been concerned about the Qantas Wi-Fi trial that is about to commence. **nbn** have assured us that this is a trial, designed not to have an impact on Sky Muster users and they are 100% committed to ensuring that regional and remote Australia remains their top priority. The trial with QANTAS and ViaSat should help fast track technology that could support a similar service for the Royal Flying Doctor Service so their planes can communicate with specialists on the ground. The software developed in the trial will open the door to the development of products to support mobile satellite units for emergency services to use when there is a natural disaster.

As the number of users on Sky Muster has increased so have the bugs in the software, and network failures have started to appear. **Nbn** are working hard to address these issues, however the Sky Muster satellite service will never be as reliable as the service many people receive in metropolitan areas. The satellite is susceptible to rain fade, so when there is heavy rain the service goes out. Bill Morrow, CEO of Nbn Co has stated that “There is only going to be so much we can do, but we will make sure that at least it can perform at the best possible according to that design.”

### **Mobile Black Spot Program**

The third round of the government Mobile Black Spot Program will commence its competitive process to allocate funding in 2017. Hopefully our lobbying efforts have not fallen on deaf ears as we advocate for more rural and remote areas to be covered by the program.

### **Telstra**

ICPA (Aust) has worked with Telstra since conference to address members’ concerns. It is important that motions are accompanied by specific examples and customer reports. Telstra are working on ways to improve the speed in which they identify issues and arrange repairs. Many of the motions dealt with issues that were included in our response to the Draft Productivity Commission Report into the Telecommunications Universal Service Obligation. The final report is due to be released in April 2017.

The adding of unmetered educational sites for NSW & NT has been fully completed. Telstra offers unmetered access to a number of key Education websites for all BigPond and Telstra Mobile Broadband users.

**Submissions**

Over the months since conference Federal Council has had input into the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) discussion papers on Broadband Speed Claims and the Domestic Mobile Roaming Declaration Inquiry.

We contributed to the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) Review in November and we have presented submissions to the Productivity Commission's Draft Report into the Universal Service Obligation and the Telecommunications Reform Package. Judy Sinclair-Newton and Joanna Gibson presented in person at the Productivity Commission Public Hearings that took place ensuring our members' voices were heard.

ICPA (Aust) is also part of the Rural, Regional and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC) whose purpose is to bring together like-minded groups that are concerned about a lack of connectivity in the bush. Together with organisations such as National Farmers Federation, ACCAN, CWA Australia, AgForce, WA Farmers, GrainGrowers and the BIRRR group our collective voices are being heard across the country. There are many vital issues being debated in 2017 that will shape the future of telecommunications in the bush and it is important to ensure the voice of non-metropolitan end-users is heard.