



Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia

Working together for equity of access to education for all students who live in rural & remote Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

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Productivity Commission Fails Rural and Remote

The Isolated Children's Parents Association is extremely disappointed that the final Report by the Productivity Commission into the Telecommunications USO has failed to address the importance of a fixed landline for many residents in rural Australia.

If the report's recommendations are accepted by the Federal Government, rural Australians who live in the nbn satellite footprint and rely on a fixed landline as their principal means of communication, could be forced onto a sub-standard service. A voice service over satellite internet could be the only alternative for these families and would be severely compromised by poor weather, power outages and latency issues.

ICPA Federal President, Mrs Wendy Hick says, "This report shows little consideration for the 90,000 premises across Australia who have no access to mobile phone coverage. We cannot let 'the last 3%' be forgotten and put in the too hard basket."

ICPA State Presidents are also calling for a rethink on this issue. Mrs Kim Hughes of Queensland says, "A landline is the most important asset for geographically isolated distance education students. This report has recommended the abolishment of the USO by 2020, but provided no solution for those who would have to rely on a voice service over satellite internet, and the impact this would have on educational outcomes. At present, Voice over IP (Internet) is not a viable alternative."

ICPA New South Wales President Mrs Kate Treweeke voiced the concern her state has, "ICPA-NSW members live, work and educate their children in isolated areas that quite often do not have mobile phone service. Satellite VoIP relies on electricity, and satellite internet has data capping restrictions that will provide a much less functional service. The removal of a USO, which currently stipulates 24hr access to landline, would also put these families at greater risk in a life threatening situation."

The Northern Territory, South Australian, Tasmanian and Western Australian ICPA councils have also raised concerns for rural and remote families in their respective States. Access to a reliable landline, especially for those with no mobile phone coverage, is critical for safety of life, education, health and business. It is simply not acceptable to further isolate the most isolated.

ICPA Australia implores the Federal Government to put the needs of rural and remote Australians, particularly students who rely on quality telecommunications for their education, at the forefront when considering the recommendations of this Report.

ENDS

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