

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.**

**"Access to Education"**



**Submission**

to the

**Joint Standing Committee**

on the

**National Broadband Network**

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 contribute to the Joint Standing Committee discussion on the National Broadband Network.

Fast, reliable and affordable internet connections are essential to our members, however for far too long people that live, work and are educated in the bush, have had to put up with a less than equitable situation with regard to their telecommunication needs.

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, apolitical parent body dedicated to ensuring all geographically isolated students have equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education. The majority of member families of the Association reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia and all share a common goal of achieving equitable access to education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve 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. In 2016, ICPA produced a resource video showcasing distance education on rural properties and viewing the video provides a better understanding of some of the communication needs in relation to distance education lessons. [CLICK HERE to view the Distance Education Video.](#)

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.

We are pleased to provide the following comments for the Joint Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network:

***a. rollout progress with particular regard to the NBN Co Limited Statement of Expectations issued by Shareholder Ministers on 24 August 2016;***

- As the curriculum for the Schools of Distance Education has moved to an online format, it is essential that students accessing their compulsory years of schooling have priority of connection to the Sky Muster service, especially those with no other form of internet connection. The installation process has been plagued by problems with our members reporting multiple appointment cancellations with no notification, and that the service is not always up and running when the technician leaves.
- A troubleshooting guide needs to be given when Sky Muster is installed so that consumers can troubleshoot small problems themselves such as being plugged into the wrong port or for guidance on whether to call the RSP or **nbn** when the service is not working.
- There are people who would like to subscribe to the **nbn** network who are being told that Sky Muster is their only option but they are actually eligible for the fixed wireless network. Due to maps not being updated in a timely manner, their application is being refused by their RSP. For example:

*“Telstra will not perform a site assessment on a residence that does not show that service class 5 is available and they say that no service provider will do that.”*

However, **nbn** provide different information *“This address has not yet been updated on our rollout map, which is indicative only, but if you request that your service provider check the service portal, they should be able to place an order for **nbn**<sup>™</sup> fixed wireless installation for you. There is no need for further testing before placing the order but a determination of signal strength and serviceability will be made by the installer on the day.”*

This type of misinformation causes great confusion for our members.

***b. utilisation of the national broadband network in connected localities in both metropolitan and regional areas, and the identification of opportunities to enhance economic and social benefits;***

ICPA (Aust) values vibrant rural communities and the economic contribution these communities make to the overall economy is considerable. For those living in rural and remote areas, an adequate internet service can help bridge the divide, making the often great distances to physical services inconsequential. Those running businesses outside city centres, particularly in agriculture, crave an advanced internet service that allows them to uptake the latest technology to sustain and expand their productivity. Educational outcomes are enhanced when innovative experiences afford students an otherwise impossible learning experience such as virtual tours of faraway places including their capital city, museums and cultural performances for example. The revitalisation of regional communities is dependent on the NBN Co delivering all that it promised to do.

***c. Australia’s comparative global position with regard to residential broadband infrastructure; particularly relative to other large, developed economies;***

When it comes to internet service, Australia could be a world leader in technological advancements to overcome the challenges facing rural and remote connectivity. When our geographically isolated students are struggling to access the digitised curriculum due to substandard broadband infrastructure, this may be indicative that our position falls behind that of other large developed countries.

***d. national broadband network activation rates, user demand, usage patterns and trends, and any identified impediments to the take-up of national broadband network services;***

There is a huge demand in rural and remote areas for a reliable and affordable internet service. The provision of an Education Port is a huge assistance for those studying via distance education however it does not assist those studying at a tertiary level or rural schools and students returning home from boarding school during holiday breaks who are required to complete assessments. Again, it could be a great equaliser but instead of bridging the divide it is in fact making the gap wider. The concern over reliability is causing a negative impact in uptake though many of our members have no option but to utilise the **nbn** Sky Muster satellite for their internet needs.

The Fair Use Policy (FUP) in place with Sky Muster plans negatively impacts on those studying at a tertiary level, students at rural schools and boarding students coming home for school holidays. The FUP is an impediment for rural students and not at all comparable to what is offered in metropolitan areas. Peak and off peak times are very constrictive and limiting and *Shaping*, which happens when the monthly data allowance is exceeded, restricts much of our members' ability to conduct their business or study unless they are a distance education student.

***e. any market, industry, or regulatory characteristics that may impede the efficient and cost-effective rollout of the national broadband network; and***

The issues around installations have caused great concern for our members. The lack of qualified installers and repeated cancelled appointments with no notice do nothing to instill confidence in the NBN Co. Instances where entire installs have had to be redone due to installer error or equipment failures are not uncommon.

***f. any other matter pertaining to the national broadband network rollout that the committee considers relevant.***

- Retail (Internet) Service Providers who sell **nbn**<sup>™</sup> internet into Legacy network areas (Fixed Wireless and Sky Muster) should be required to provide an information pack to potential VoIP telephone users that explains the pros and cons of converting to an Internet based Telephone service. ICPA (Aust) has concerns that some Retail Service Providers (RSPs) are touting VoIP over Sky Muster satellite as a replacement for a fixed line telephone service. NBN Co are saying that VoIP is NOT a suitable replacement for a fixed line service due to issue with latency (delay) and reliability as this service is impacted by adverse weather conditions i.e. rain and dust and also it is very dependent on mains (240 volt) power (no power = no phone). Both internet and telephone service rely on the same modem therefore if your modem is not working one would have no internet AND no phone. If a consumer does choose to swap to a VoIP service and cancels their land line and then finds that it is unsuitable it MAY be very difficult to get the fixed line service reconnected.

A VoIP platform can create a lot of potential headaches for Distance Education home schoolrooms if it is VoIP via a satellite network or a combination of networks which also include satellite networks.

Depending on how you have set up your internet plan, potential issues may arise that if you exceed your monthly plan then you may have no phone at all or the plan may slow down sufficiently that the phone will not work. The issue of fault restoration time - no phone as well as no internet. Potential consumers are not being provided with sufficient information to enable them to make an informed choice.

- A dedicated fault reporting line / advice line for Sky Muster customers with call centre operators who understand the situation for outback customers. Currently there are too many steps with fault reporting and customers being shunted back and forth between their RSP and **nbn**. This is causing unnecessary frustration for end users.

- A dedicated officer or advice line within NBN Co for the **nbn** Education Port would be beneficial. Each RSP offering the service could be mandated to have a main contact person who can speak to customers, with up-to-date information from each state's Department of Education on how it works for families.
- **nbn** needs to be reliable, affordable and meet the needs of the community. It would be very difficult to attend both university online and provide distance education schooling from a remote station.
- Reliability is a major concern at the moment, numerous outages and service disruptions are holding development back and confidence in the **nbn** system is waning.
- Affordability – return for investment. In comparison to the less expensive, unlimited data offered in metropolitan areas, those living outside city centres are being left behind. As more and more is developed, the "haves" and the "have nots" are getting further apart.

Commonplace online activities for those living in cities such as watching lectures, banking, cloud computing, working on research projects, or watching television is nearly impossible for those not very far from the cities themselves. People want to use the Sky Muster service but are unable to, due to its current inadequacies - reliability, data constraints and cost.