



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

Submission

to the

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission

on the

Mobile Roaming Inquiry

from the

Western Australian State Council

of the

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

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Western Australia (ICPA WA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment from the perspective of families living in rural and remote Western Australia, for the mobile roaming inquiry.

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 to tertiary. The member families of the association reside 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.

Many of our members live on isolated stations, great distances from their nearest community with their only access to education being via distance education programmes. Many of these same members conduct their businesses from these same rural and remote locations. For our members, communications is important for both the delivery of education as well as enabling enterprises to conduct their business which includes engaging in competitive commercial activities, relying on ready access to communication tools to do so.

How important is mobile coverage to you? Are you willing to pay slightly more for services on a network that has more extensive coverage in regional and remote areas?

Mobile coverage is the most important issue for our regional and remote members. Like all Australians, our members desire equity of access as a basic requirement in the provision of telecommunication services. Lack of sufficient mobile coverage impacts 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. Our members already pay significant costs to access mobile services that are often not usable from their place of residence. To ask them to pay more for services that are readily available elsewhere is unfair.

What are the most important factors to you when choosing or switching between mobile service providers?

The most important factor when choosing a mobile service provider for our members is the coverage network that the provider offers. Mobile companies making investments in the latest mobile technology and their own network infrastructure in regional areas play a significant role in the decision making process. Our members require access to the best services available. Remote and regional Australians would benefit greatly if all mobile providers were to invest in expanding their network infrastructures.

Are you satisfied with the range of mobile services (including prices) available to you?

Our members are generally satisfied with the limited range of mobile services available to them. We acknowledge that Western Australia is a big state and the situation varies from region to region. For instance, in the north of the state, Telstra provides the only option. Whereas elsewhere in the state, members have a number of mobile service options available to them. Our members benefit greatly from the intense competition between mobile network operators, and they are seeing falling prices and increasing data inclusions due to this competition.

Do you have access to 4G services? How important is it to you to have access to the latest mobile technology?

The majority of our members don't have access to 4G services as they are too remote or in regional towns that have not yet been upgraded. Having access to the latest technology is important for rural communities to thrive. We acknowledge the Western Australian Government investment, via Royalties for Regions funding, into the extension and further improvements to mobile technology. It is vital that the current strong competitive incentives to continue investing in mobile networks are preserved.

Do you think that requiring mobile network operators to provide roaming to each other is a good thing?

We feel that requiring mobile network operators to provide roaming to each other would destroy incentives to keep mobile providers investing in their networks. This could jeopardise future upgrades in coverage or technology without delivering the necessary additional coverage that remote and regional Australia needs. All mobile network providers should be investing in expanding their mobile coverage, this would increase competition and provide customers with greater choice. Requiring mobile network operators to provide roaming to each other would not be a good thing.

The majority of Western Australia is sparsely populated and allowing mobile network operators to provide roaming to each other would considerably erode the commercial benefit to the companies who have already heavily invested in infrastructure. The majority of our members may not have a choice of provider and circumstances may not be ideal for rural and remote Western Australians, but the current regulations provide our members with the best options into the future.

Our organisation believes that unless more investment is made in the development of communication infrastructure in rural and remote locations, discrimination against rural residents will continue. Without a funding boost to this section of the Australian population, those residing in rural and remote Australia will find it difficult to achieve par with their urban counterparts due to historically low initial levels of funding. Lack of equity will continue as an issue for rural Australia.