

## Isolated Children's Parents' Association (Qld) Inc. submission to the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association (Qld) Inc. represents the interests of over 1200 rural and remote Queensland families. It consists of forty-seven Branches throughout remote and regional Qld. ICPA seeks to gain equitable access to educational opportunities for isolated children. Families in rural and remote Qld may live in rural, regional or remote towns and have access to Preparatory to Year 7/10/12 schools and a variety of early childhood education and care facilities depending on the population. Isolated families may have no daily access to educational services and enrol their school-aged children in Schools of Distance Education or arrangements which require their children to live away from home to access an appropriate schooling

ICPA (Qld) Inc. would like to comment on the efficiency and competitiveness of inputs to the agriculture value chain — such as skills, training, education and human capital; research and development; and critical infrastructure;

Where there is no face-to-face access to a school, families are faced with the option of either Distance Education, or utilising a Boarding School. While financial support is provided for these options, though the Australian Government's "Assistance for Isolated Children" (AIC) allowance, this allowance falls far short of actual costs.

Most families beyond reasonable daily travel to a school utilise Schools of Distance Education for primary education. Unless a person is going to be removed from the available workforce for the purpose of being the home tutor, a governess or home tutor must be employed.

For secondary students, most families access Boarding Schools. The average combined boarding and tuition fees in Queensland for 2014 are \$28,694.00 per student. Anecdotal evidence suggests Queensland boarding schools are, on average, less expensive than other states.

This causes skills and labor shortages in many rural areas. Many wage and salary earners relocate to larger centers rather than cope with the financial impost of providing an education in isolation. The social anomaly caused by this demographic being so under-represented has wide-ranging consequences.

*Australia's farmers tend to be considerably older than other workers. In 2011, the median age of farmers was 53 years, compared with 40 years for people in other occupations. This is partly due to the fact that farmers are more likely to continue working well beyond the age at which most other workers retire. In 2011, almost a quarter (23%) of farmers were aged 65 years or over, compared with just 3% of people in other occupations..*

*The age profile of farmers has changed markedly over the past few decades. The median age of farmers increased by nine years between 1981 and 2011, while the median age of other workers increased by just six years. Over the same period, the proportion of farmers aged 55 years and over*

*increased from 26% to 47%, while the proportion of farmers aged less than 35 years fell from 28% to just 13%. (1)*

This lack of young people in rural areas obviously influences the available peer group for social interaction, support for services focused on that age demographic, (such as early childhood services, etc.) and obviously affects school enrolment numbers. Implications flow on to such areas as sporting opportunities, social groups, school bus runs, and so on.

Education expenses for this cohort result in large sums of money leaving the district in which it was generated, with obvious flow-on effects. This capital is then not available for investing back into the business, and can place the viability of the business in jeopardy in years of poor income, due to seasonal conditions, low commodity prices, etc. They also lead to financial constraints for families at a time when young people are considering their future options, and may consider urban families to enjoy a better standard of living than their own.

Australian Governments, State and Federal, have a responsibility to provide access to an education. Where population densities dictate providing schools is impractical, adequate assistance to access that education is essential for the very existence of rural Australia. National Rural Health Alliance data states that a young person from a rural area is four times as likely to establish themselves in such an area when qualified. The provision of services necessitates encouraging young families to remain in the outback, or a shortage of skilled people keen to practice their profession will surely follow.

Traditionally, farming and grazing families are asset rich and cash poor. The average net worth in 2009-2010 was 1.3 million, while the average disposable income in that year was \$568 (1) In times of drought in particular, available cash reserves can be stretched to the limit maintaining the health of livestock while there may be no reasonable option of selling them. In previous droughts, an Exceptional Circumstances (Drought) status could exempt a family's assets when a Youth Allowance application was assessed. Despite the horrific widespread nature of the current drought, there has been no Exceptional Circumstances declaration. Youth Allowance has been a support mechanism for many tertiary students. This circumstance can prevent youth from farming and grazing families the opportunity of this education.

(1) Australian Social Trends, Dec 2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics`