



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

**FEDERAL COUNCIL  
" Access to Education"**

**STANDING COMMITTEE  
08 APR 2005  
on Family and Human Services**

**SUBMISSION**

to the

**The House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on  
Family and Human Services**

**Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family**

from

**Federal Council  
of the  
Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc  
ICPA (Aust)**

**8<sup>th</sup> April 2005**

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**The House of Representatives Standing Committee**  
**on**  
**Family and Human Services**  
**Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family**

**Background**

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Incorporated (ICPA Aust.) welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to the Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family.

ICPA Aust. is a voluntary national parent body dedicated to ensuring that all geographically isolated children have equality of access to a continuing and appropriate education. It 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 access to education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve this. Their children are educated in small rural schools, by distance education, at boarding schools or school term hostels.

**How can the Australian Government better help families balance their work and family responsibilities?**

**1. The financial, career and social disincentives to starting a family.**

The financial status of people who live in rural and remote areas very much impinges not only on when they will begin a family, but as to how many children they will have. The impost of educating children by Distance Education for 7 or 8 years whilst trying to survive in the small family business, and at the same time trying to accumulate necessary finances to send those children away to school, whether it be a boarding school or school term hostel is a huge disincentive for people to have more than one or two children.

In rural areas, where there is usually access to a small school, the families are also very conscious of the fact that at some time during their children's high school education, they will need to fund some form of boarding to enable them to complete their schooling. It is common to hear people in rural and remote areas comment, "We would like to have more children, but could not afford to educate them."

Many families also take into consideration that if their children are close in age, it will be necessary to finance several amounts of boarding fees at one time. The financial burden to their annual budget is enormous. They opt to have a wider than desired gap between the birth of their children.

There are also young women who are prepared to travel long distances to continue in their chosen career and often spend several hours daily in a vehicle. When they finally have a family, it is not feasible to continue or even return to work part time in that situation.

## 2. Making it easier for parents who so wish to return to paid workforce

There are many rural and remote women who never return to the paid workforce, particularly in their chosen field of expertise. If they do work within the family business, or assist a husband who is a manager in a small business, it is often unpaid work. Many of those have no choice but to forgo a future opportunity to return to the general workforce when they live in isolated areas.

If these same women have to teach children on Distance Education, or have pre-school children, with no child care facilities available to them, there is very little opportunity to return to the paid workforce. This is frequently a disincentive for many women to work from home, or even begin a small business from home, because the time consuming factor of teaching children, the enormous task of attending to pre-schoolers, as well as doing all the other normal household chores, and also helping out in the small business that the family may own or manage.

It is not unusual for a home tutor, usually the mother, to be teaching children who are spread across several primary school grades and at the same time have a toddler and baby to care for. She has no option, but to accommodate all her children in the school room. For these women, the prospect of facing years and years in the school room without any assistance is a daunting one. The cost of employing a governess to teach the children is often not a financial option.

Some husband and wife partnerships have no choice but to work alongside each other in farming, pastoral or small town business. Finances are so tight that they are unable to employ other workers. If they have a family, somehow the children must be accommodated in the work place, and this raises very real issues of safety in the workplace. It is not uncommon for very young children to be in workplace areas, but this is because families do not have a choice.

Often people who wish to return to the paid workforce and have an opportunity to do so, are restricted by distance to a nearest town or location, for that work. Sometimes the distance involved can be at a greater cost than what the job will pay, bearing in mind people have to have a reliable vehicle that needs to be well maintained, and often the roads that these people travel on are far from well maintained. Access to any form of public transport is just non-existent. It is often feasible to return to some sort of casual work, but this frequently involves finding accommodation for two or three nights per week, and once again, the pay for the job makes this a disincentive to do so.

### Solutions:

One of the major issues is the access and availability of child care.

Many small rural towns do not have a suitable child care service. For the towns that do, it is likely to be Long Day Care with very limited places, which prevents many other families from accessing it, as they either can't get a placement, or the service does not meet their specific needs, as they require an occasional type care. The other consideration is the long distances that many rural families must travel to reach their nearest town, which means it is not feasible for them to access this type of service and they need in-home child care.

Families in remote areas need access to mobile in-home child care. At present there are some areas of Australia where this service is in place and families are able to have 3 to 4 weeks in-home care per annum. For others, there is nothing.

The child care needs to be affordable. Some of the limited services available that meet the needs of rural and remote families do not attract the full Child Care Benefit. Due to the small population, an 'approved child care service' would not be sustainable. There is a need for Government to work out ways to overcome this inequity.

If families do not have access to any form of child care, as is generally the case, then there should be a payment made to parents in lieu of the care. This 'Bank', which relates to what other Australian families receive in child care assistance, would enable parents to either employ their own child carer or give them the financial support that they so desperately need because they do not have access to the workplace.

A payment for a parent who teaches their own child/children on Distance Education, so that the payment can be used to employ another person to teach the children, or the home tutor can be paid to do the task.

If a person works for a government agency some form of travel payment and/ or accommodation cost would help.

### **3. The impact of taxation and other matters on families in the choices they make balancing work and family life.**

Families who are non business owners, like a manager of a pastoral property, often find themselves in a situation where they need the services of a governess/home tutor to teach their children on distance education. These non business owners are unable to claim a tax deduction for the wages that they pay this employee. The solution for this is to make provision in taxation legislation for them to do so.

### **Conclusion**

The Australian Farm Institute's *Farm Dependent Economy* (FDE) report (<http://www.farminstitute.org.au/>) shows that the farming sector and its allied support industries contributed an average of 12.1 per cent of GDP for the six years to 2003/04. This equates to \$72 billion of GDP and accounts for more than 17 per cent of national employment. The result highlights the impact that agriculture policy changes have on the whole economy.

The report accentuates the inequities in the distribution of support services across the country. Farming and its related industries eg fertiliser, chemical and machinery companies, the local store, the stock agents, abattoirs etc, contributes a considerable percentage to Australia's GDP, and yet the bush has limited access to support services, like child care and education facilities. Families in rural and remote Australia deserve to have some share of the contribution it makes to Australia's economy, with the provision of equitable services, so that work and family can become a more realistic and balanced way of life.