

21st April 2005

The Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
Inquiry into Adoption on Family and Human Services
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

Dear Sirs/Madams

Thank you for the opportunity to be able to make a submission on this very overlooked area of the Australian Community. Thank you to those who called for this inquiry. We ask that our name please be withheld from public viewing as we are in the process of adoption and continue an unfortunate struggle with the WA Adoption Service. This seems to be a very common story amongst adoptive families who once they actually receive their children don't speak out as they could as the energy and finance in the process has taken it's toll and they are now focused on raising their child/children. They don't speak out during the process for fear of jeopardizing their application. What a terrible position for citizens of this nation to be placed in! The adoption process is one about adoptive couples placing their future into the hands of a Government Department that regrettably has incredible power to make their lives miserable if they so wish to.

The inquiry has called for comment on any inconsistencies between state and territory approval processes for overseas adoptions. As already pointed out in submissions received by this committee there are many major inconsistencies between the states and territories. We agree and support all those that have been posted on the site that could be read via the internet (12 were able to be viewed). Age differences, fees and costs, waiting times, same sex couples, defacto relationships, efficiencies (or not) of the individual departments (we must comment that we are appalled with the Queensland situation) etc

In Western Australia, the Adoption Assessment Committee has the power to not only approve or disapprove your application to be an adoptive parent but just recently have been given the power to state the age, sex, number and nationality of the child/ren you may adopt if they so wish. Previously they would just approve you to be suitable /unsuitable and then the overseas country you are applying to would determine the eligibility of your request. We were informed by the Dept that the board makes these decisions because they can. It would appear that one of the reasons this has been implemented is to stop sibling adoption. This for couples is a very important option so the child adopted will not be an only child (because of costs, age etc) and children are able to grow up with their biological siblings. Why would a State Dept/s not allow this to occur if couples are competent to parent siblings? We are constantly told it's about the best interests of the child and yet there are such anomalies with the practices of the Departments and this statement.

The adoption of sibling groups should be encouraged across this nation if the couple applying meets the requirements to do so. It should not be a board or a state dept that decides on this. It should be left to the country from which the children are being relinquished. **We strongly request that this committee recommends that legislation be made for sibling adoption to be given as an option to all suitable couples across this nation** and not be disallowed by a board or dept because of their beliefs in this matter (which from our research is unfounded). Why would this nation not allow orphans or those children that have no family to raise them, to come to this country to be adopted by families who for reasons beyond their control cannot have their own children and be raised as responsible citizens of Australia?

We feel that we could write so much on this matter and also on the limit of age of the adoptive children that is starting to be imposed here in Western Australia. If any of the committee would like to speak further with us on this matter we would be more than happy to discuss this with you. Please feel free to phone us.

Another inconsistency is the availability of a private adoption agency. The only state to have one operating is South Australia although we do believe that there have been moves to close this down. **We feel that it is VERY important that the Australian people who wish to adopt from overseas have a choice to adopt from either the government agency or a private agency.** The adoptive parents we have spoken to who have adopted from this agency have wonderful stories of an excellent service and a positive experience which unfortunately is not what we hear from those who apply through the government agencies (maybe one in four have a positive story and that may be being generous) which of course in all states except SA have no other choice but to go through the government agency. If there are groups/individuals within our communities that meet the criteria to run an adoption agency they should be encouraged to do so and be given all the support that is possible to work hand in hand with the Government Adoption Agencies of their state. This would take the pressure off the over worked State agencies, (in WA there is a big turnover of staff) and hopefully provide a much better service for those Australians wishing to adopt children from overseas.

We personally have had 3 different Social Workers in 18 months. On top of that we have initiated 90% of our contact with the Dept in following our progress. They have too much work to cope with the demand and too little staff. Queensland certainly indicates this and speaking with friends from NSW the Dept is ridiculously overworked there as well with prospective adoptive parents having to wait up to 2 years before even being approved to be suitable to adopt. Then of course the application file goes overseas (this can take up to another 3 to 6 months to prepare) and then the adoptive applicants wait again. No doubt other couples in other states have similar experiences. I recently was told by the WA Dept that the reason it took the Dept 14 weeks to re-send our file overseas was because they were too busy. To do this all they had to do was write a covering letter and get the other papers notarized which is not a very difficult or time-consuming task. For people not involved with adoption 14 weeks may not seem a long time but we can assure you that every week counts when your age is creeping up over limits for adoption to occur.

We strongly urge that committee recommends legislation be put in place that allows and encourages the establishment of private adoption agencies in all states and territories and allow them to be operating as soon as possible to give all the thousands of people who wish to adopt intercountry the opportunity to do so with a choice of service providers and a much faster process.

This of course then leads to benefits and entitlements, which need to be given to those who adopt children from overseas. Provision and financial support definitely needs to be made for the Australian people wishing to adopt in the same way and manner that is given to those who have biological children. The cost to adopt from overseas is astronomical which has been demonstrated by some of the submissions already received. As we are still in the process of adopting we are not sure of what is and what is not available to those with adopted children but would certainly ask for the government to look at compensation of the costs associated in adoption with comparison with the IVF refunds. Australians now have no choice but to adopt from overseas to be guaranteed of a child/ren with so very few children available for adoption in our own country. In Western Australia alone in the past few years there have been approx 4 local children per year available for adoption with over 30 plus couples waiting for local allocation. **A fair financial compensation needs to be worked out so that every Australian couple has the opportunity to adopt children if they wish to do so especially those that are unable to have children biologically.**

How this is done we will leave to those with more knowledge in this area. One suggestion is 80% of the fees being reimbursed which is in line with IVF. Then it's a question of which fees etc.

Thank you your time and the work that will go into this inquiry. We look forward to hearing of the recommendations of this committee.

Yours faithfully

