

**Senate Inquiry into  
'Commonwealth contribution into forced adoption  
policies and practices'**

Submission from:

Allison Bosley

(...)

I Allison Bosley (ne Gravenor) am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia resident in the State of NSW.

As a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia I have an inalienable right to protection under the Australian Constitution and the common law of this country.

As an Australian citizen, the Commonwealth affords me protection from the unlawful and harmful actions that threaten my right to life, liberty and justice from those who would deny me these rights within and without, the borders of Australia.

I am one of the hundreds of thousands of mothers in Australia and all over the world who have lost their babies to forced adoption practices. Many find they are unable to speak. The deep sense of shame of leaving your baby is profound. The act of separating mother and child goes against everything in our human nature. Though I find writing this submission re traumatising I am, at the same time extremely grateful to have finally been 'given' a 'voice'. The silence in our culture of the true experience of our children's forced adoptions has been deafening. This silence has been isolating and endorsed our shame that we partook in something so unspeakable. By our being finally given the opportunity to speak, our children that we were separated from through trickery and force as well as our partners and our children that followed will finally hear the true story they have never been able to hear from their culture.

Here is my story:

I gave birth to my son at 9am on the (...) 1972 in Nambour Hospital, Queensland. I was 17 years and 9 months. During my pregnancy I was unable to seek financial support or see a doctor because I was frightened that I would be considered a delinquent runaway because of my young age and returned home. I had left home at 5 months pregnant having hidden my pregnancy from my parents in fear that they would either organise an abortion or put me in an unmarried mothers home. I had been forced to have an abortion at 15 because of a date rape pregnancy and my parents were extremely disapproving. I was frightened of letting them know I was pregnant and also felt morally wrong about having another abortion which I and the culture at the time considered murder. I felt my only choice was to conceal my pregnancy and protect my baby by leaving home to live in Queensland. My parents were happy to have me leave home and even gave me a suitcase with pamphlets of Queensland for Christmas. I left home alone with a small amount of savings to live in Noosa Heads, Queensland in April 1972 at the tender age of 17 years and 5 months.

I was fortunate to find a job as a housekeeper in a share house of surfers in exchange for my rent. These were happy days, living carefully on my small savings and keeping fit with beach walks and a newfound knowledge of 'health food' from my new friends. I chose to ignore the future and enjoy my baby's pregnancy, as I understood from my limited knowledge that my choices were few and I would most likely be forced to adopt my baby at birth because I was an unmarried mother. If I was lucky I might find a partner who would marry and support me but I knew this was unlikely because I only had a few months before



I would give birth. I concentrated on being very healthy so my baby would have the best start and relished every day of our precious time together.

Oddly enough I continued to smoke and increased the amount I smoked greatly as I grew bigger and my imminent separation from my baby became a reality. It was unknown to me at the time that smoking was bad for my health and my unborn baby and it made me feel less anxious. Looking back I was very young to be living away from home, I had left all my extended family and friends support and was all alone except for the kindness of strangers. At 7 months pregnant I got severe chest pains and my new boyfriend drove me all the way to our local hospital at far away Nambour. I was admitted and diagnosed with pleurisy (I now realise from my heavy smoking) and medicated for the excruciating pain.

During my stay in hospital, the doctor asked me if I was booked in to the hospital for my baby's birth. I told the doctor I hadn't seen a doctor about my pregnancy. He examined me and worked out my due date and told me I was booked in. I remember in this conversation he also asked me what was I going to do with my baby and I let him know that I understood my baby would have to be adopted. Later under the influence of the very strong painkillers I awoke in a strange state to the sound of screeching birds in the tree outside my hospital window. I decided the noise was unbearable and the nursing staff extremely unfriendly so I dressed and booked myself out and went home to Noosa. No one from the hospital ever contacted me afterwards even though they had all my details.

On the night before my son was born I had very strong contractions and arrived at Nambour hospital about midnight. I was in a lot of pain I didn't understand and was promptly put to bed. When my waters broke (much to my surprise) and the pain increased further, I began calling out in agony. A nurse arrived and told me to be quiet 'because your not a schoolgirl now!' She then promptly shaved my pubic hair apparently ready for the birth. My baby was born at 9am on (...) 1972. The doctor placed him in my arms just after the birth because he was crying. I looked into his eyes and he looked into mine and stopped crying. It was a very beautiful moment that has stayed etched in my memory. He was then taken away. The next thing I remember is waking up, back in a hospital bed with a lady in the bed beside me. She had lots of visitors who were very sad, she was sad too. From what I could understand her baby had died because it's head was very big and her blood type was wrong. It was very sad and difficult to be around. We both had no baby's and I felt that was why we were placed together.

When the nurse came to check on us early the next morning she told me to make my bed. She showed me how I was to do it. Because I was unmarried and had no baby it was somehow understood that I was to make my own bed. I was instructed that this was to be done daily with perfect 'hospital corners', which the matron could inspect. I was told I could get breakfast at the table down the hallway opposite the nursery. I sat at the breakfast table feeling ashamed and miserable. The other ladies were going in and out of the nursery chatting about their babies. My baby was not spoken of and I didn't speak of him. After eating I got up quietly from the table and slipped into the nursery foyer where there was a big blackboard with the mothers names and the baby's birth weights. I saw my name and my baby's birth weight was 9lb. I was proud, as I knew this was a good



birth weight. The nurses didn't ask me in and kept the door to where the babies were closed. I went back to my bed. Somewhere in that time I was given a form to fill in where I had to put all my details and my baby's fathers details including full names and addresses, occupations, eye and hair colour.

Each day I ate all my meals at the table, the other ladies were very nice and understood that I didn't have my baby. I was feeling very sad and lonely and thinking I would book myself out and go home to see if there was something I could do to get my baby. About this time my milk 'came in', which I had not been expecting and a nurse arrived to bind my breasts (very) firmly with a big calico cloth held tightly with a big safety pin. This 'binder' was changed and rebound daily. I felt very strange and I remember asking if it would be ok to leave. I was told I would have to stay in hospital for seven days before I could sign the adoption papers. Those days were very sad. I had a visit from my partner once. He had no car so he hitch hiked all the way from Noosa. Unbeknown to me he was hit by a car on the way home and hurt his leg so he never visited me again. I found this out from a friend who came to visit later. He owned the Health Food shop in Noosa and had helped me survive by paying me for weekly baking of biscuits for his shop. He kindly gave me \$20 which was a lot of money then.

I remember hauling up the courage to stand in front of the big nursery window as I had seen visitors do and tried to work out which one of the babies on display was my baby. Out of about 20 tiny babies all dressed in pretty gowns and hand knitted cardigans I saw my baby he stood out because he was very olive like me and plainly dressed in a white hospital gown. I remember feeling sorry for him and wishing I had brought him in some nice clothes for hospital. The ladies later told me that the babies always have their own clothes for hospital in Queensland. I never felt able to look again. I was made to feel very conscious that he was not considered my baby and I was not to go near him. He was not brought to me and I was not called in to the nursery to feed him like the other mothers. I felt I would be in huge trouble if I was caught looking at him. It was very painful to be separated from him.

Finally after what seemed like an eternity the 7th day arrived and I got dressed to go and was summoned to the Matron's Office. The matron asked me in to her office and I sat down opposite her. There was no one else in the room. This was a terrible time and I felt numb with the experience of the previous 7 days. She handed me the papers to sign, which I did. She then explained that there was a '30 day revocation period'. Strangely enough I remember feeling liberated by the knowledge of the 30 day revocation period and left the hospital with a secret resolve that I would work out a way to get my baby back.

Looking back I am shocked and angry that during both my hospital stays, before and after my baby's birth and at the time of my signing the consent to adoption I was never told about the other options available at the time to help me keep my child as was required. I am also angry that the long term full implications of having my child adopted were not explained as was also required.

The regulations of the Child Welfare Act 17,1939 evolved in the early 1950's, clearly stated -



"To avoid any misunderstanding or any misunderstanding that the mother was misled or uninformed, District officers are instructed to explain fully to the mother, before taking consent, the facilities which are available to help her keep the child. These include homes licensed under the Child Welfare Act for the private care of children apart from natural parents, financial assistance to unmarried mothers under section 27 of the Child Welfare Act, admission to State control until the mother is in a position to care for her child and assistance to affiliate the child and obtain a maintenance order against the putative father, when all these aids have been rejected, the officer is expected to explain to the mother the full implications of the act of surrendering her child (this included warning her of the dire future regret if she considers adoption) Only when a mother has considered these, and still wishes to proceed with the surrender for adoption, should the consent be accepted"

The Child Welfare Act 17 under Unmarried Mothers - Allowances for Children. Dept. Social Welfare, 27 aid Maternity Allowances (report taken from 1968 benefit) also stated -

"Not all unmarried mothers wish to have their child adopted and in many cases have no family at hand to help with the care of the child. This embryo family group has an important mother child relationship that needs both support and nurture and the Department assists the mother by acting for her affiliation proceedings and by the granting of regular allowances once the mothers eligibility has been established" (this meant naming the father if possible) and went on to say - "The services of the social aid branch are also used in special cases to supply a layette, special foods and milk. Many unmarried mothers call upon the services of the Department to act for them in court to obtain an affiliation order. There is no charge for this service".

By being completely kept in the dark as to my many choices that were available and the dire emotional consequence of surrendering my child to adoption, which was well known at this time, I was purposely misled and uninformed. Through my signing the consent I had unknowingly taken part in the crime of my own child's abduction. I was under 18, not able to vote and alone, away from home and family, yet without any need for a witness or any sort of legal representation I was asked to sign a legally binding document that would separate me completely from knowing my own child for 26 years.

Sadly, as none of these available options were explained or offered to me, I arrived back home in Noosa to my share house, without my baby just as everyone was expecting. My new boyfriend was sadly never interested in helping me raise my child and I had no way of supporting us on my own. The following 30 days of the unexpected offer of the 'revocation period' dragged on with my excruciating secret inner searching for some way I could keep my baby. At the same time I was (unexpectedly) losing blood as part of the normal birthing process and I was desperately looking for work as my meagre savings had nearly been used. The only alternatives were telling my parents and this was never an option as I already knew they were completely unsupportive and horrified by my previous pregnancy. My only other alternative was to apply for a job in the country where I could look after a farmer's wife's children and possibly get



lodgings and be able to keep my baby. I was a very experienced babysitter and loved children. Sadly there just wasn't time. Over the next few weeks I felt I nearly went mad, constantly searching my mind for some way I could keep my baby. Finally the '30 day revocation period' was over and I had lost my baby.

I got a job but began bleeding again so heavily I had to give it up. A little while later when I had recovered I found a job because of my previous experience, as a chemist shop assistant. I got on with the pressing job of feeding and clothing myself as well as paying rent. I felt very old compared to girls of my age and had a deep longing for my baby that I never grew used to. Looking back I can see I numbed my pain with wild partying and drinking and moving to New Zealand because I needed to get away from the haunting sound of little babies crying when I was out shopping and wondering if it was my baby who was crying.

I finally returned from New Zealand in 1975 and got my life back together through the new found joy of working as an assistant teacher in a preschool. I found I was very good at this job and very comfortable being with children who I now realise were my son's age. I began to feel happy again and I met my lovely husband. We moved to the country to renovate an old farmhouse and begin having children. Once my children were born my secret deep longing for my lost son and the feeling of social isolation of feeling different from other women's experience of children inwardly became quite a burden. This burden became more difficult to carry as the years went by. The reality of what had happened naturally became clearer as my own children grew. The anger at my loss and my concern for my son's welfare became almost too painful to bear at times. The burden of my depression around the sad anniversary of our separation, my son's birthday and the sense of missing him around Mothers day and Christmas time became very difficult. I struggled to stay outwardly happy, enjoying these happy family festivities with my family while inwardly deeply missing my lost child. Understandably my husband and children would become angry at my periods of melancholy and distractedness. My mood could suddenly plummet when a movie or soap opera inadvertently showed an unmarried mother or stories of a mother child separation or even simply when the word 'adopted' was mentioned on the TV news or radio I could suddenly be transported back to missing my lost child. This was very isolating and painful as I was unable to stop how I was feeling.

I found resting and strictly avoiding getting tired was my best defence against this ongoing sadness and I could remain relatively stable for my family if I wasn't tired. I found this need for rest very restrictive socially and with work I could only manage part time with minimal hours, otherwise I would get teary at home. These minimal hours meant minimal pay and this had a frustratingly restrictive effect on our family budget. We had no choice but to 'make do' and I felt very responsible for our limited funds but had no way out. I needed to rest or I just didn't cope.



In 1991 when the adoption laws were finally changed I applied for information on my son's whereabouts hoping for the chance of reunion. Sadly for me my son placed a 'Veto' on my obtaining 'identifying information' about him. The Veto was an unexpected shock but at the same time was exciting evidence of my son being alive and making a decision for himself. This initial excitement naturally faded and was quickly replaced by a deep sense of not being wanted and a huge disappointment of not being able to meet him. I then had what I can only describe as a terrible turn. I could do nothing but scream at my family so I went to bed. With a few days of rest and the help of my husband's kind counselling I gradually recovered over the next few days. I realised I had what was once called a broken heart.

Later I understood the reason why I had an unusual need for rest. When I was in Mona Vale Hospital in 1995 for a broken leg I asked a hospital social worker for some medication for my ongoing sadness over my son because I was worried I might not cope when I went home. I felt the ongoing sadness with the broken leg on top might be too much when I got home. She explained that because I had a type of depression with 'a cause' there were no medications for this type of depression. She said the cause of my depression was 'unresolved grief' and I was stuck in the grieving process because in I had lost someone I loved. There was no way of finishing the grieving process because he was still alive but unknown to me. She advised the only way was to cope with 'unresolved grief' was to 'manage it' by resting which I had been already instinctively doing. Understanding what I was dealing with helped a lot. I continued to be careful not to get tired.

With the help of my lovely family and friends, my adoption support group and the occasional help of an informed counsellor (many counsellors had no understanding of adoption) I endured 7 long years of the Veto situation feeling helpless but steadily increasing my knowledge of the history of forced adoption practices. In July 1998 I finally decided to do something. I decided to take action and place a birthday message to my son in the Brisbane Courier Mail wishing him a happy birthday and saying that I was missing him. From my 'Non Identifying Information' I had requested and received when I first went on the 'Queensland Contact Register' way back in 1986, I was told my son had gone to live in a 'city area' so it was only a guess as Brisbane was the closest city to his birthplace in Nambour, Queensland. I resolved to place this birthday message every year as a statement to celebrate his birth rather than feel sad about his birthday and that way I would feel less of a victim. Under my sons Queensland Veto Regulations I was legally bound not to try and make any contact with my son. I felt that as the Queensland Government had illegally acted at my son's adoption I was entitled to ignore their regulations. I never anticipated what was to happen as a result of my son's very first birthday message. In August of that same year my darling son immediately removed the Veto on his identifying information when he read my message in the paper. His ex girlfriends mother had seen my message in the paper and contacted my son's adoptive mother. She had waited till he came back from his pro golf tour to tell him. He immediately removed his Veto and we excitedly sent each other letters and talked on the phone. It was so exciting yet at the same time terrifying when I finally met my beloved son in Brisbane the following October. We were so deeply familiar but

also strangers to each other. My life changed forever and as if by magic the burden of my sadness disappeared.

We have since been through many ups and downs and ridden what we call 'the emotional rollercoaster' that is exclusive to post adoption reunion. We both understand that adoption and therefore reunion are both very unnatural to the normal human experience. Sometimes we have to be very forgiving with each other. I feel so glad and grateful that we have survived when I know how fragile these things can be. This 'emotional rollercoaster' has been very difficult at times for my family, my son's adoptive family as well as a sometimes very difficult and complex mental and emotional challenge for both of us. We can never fill in our missing years. We have been reunited for over 12 years now and my son has a wife and children of his own. We have grown to love each other deeply and I feel so fortunate to know him and his wife and my precious grandchildren.