



Adoptee Rights
Australia

**Adoptee Rights Australia (ARA) Inc.
Submission to the Senate Environment
and Communications References
Committee**

Media Diversity Inquiry

11th December 2020

ARA Inc.

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Adoptee Rights Australia (ARA) Inc. thanks the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee for the opportunity to make a submission to their inquiry into Media Diversity in Australia.

About Adoptee Rights Australia

Adoptee Rights Australia (ARA) Inc was established in 2018 by adopted persons to give a national voice to the lived experience of adoption, in response to the need for a national organisation to advocate for the rights of adoptees in Australia.

Legislation for adoption has existed in Australia for around one hundred years, with numerous influences, amendments, and variations to the Adoption Acts throughout the decades and between jurisdictions. In this time, more than 250,000 Australians have had their identities extinguished and their lives changed forever by adoption. Adoptee Rights Australia advocates for reform in adoption legislation, policy and services in all Government jurisdictions in Australia, so that the human rights and wellbeing of adopted persons are restored, protected and promoted.

Bias in reporting and coverage of adoption

Adoptee Rights Australia wishes to draw attention to a strong pro-adoption bias in reporting in the Murdoch press around the issue of adoption.

“As adoptees we see mainstream media constantly air programs of the "Fairy-tale Adoption Story" from the adoptive parents’ perspective with a complete lack of balance. The lived experience of adoptees and negative impact on their lives is swept under the carpet - our voices were always meant to be silenced, that is the legislation of Adoption. We are fighting a very powerful adoption & fertility industry. This is also the case with Donor Conceived people, who we are increasingly hearing from, the next wave so to speak,” Adoptee Rights Australia President, Peter Capomolla Moore.

Peter Capomolla Moore’s story of the late discovery of his adoption at 59 years of age has been featured by several news outlets. Last June, after a day spent filming with ‘The Project’ team, Peter’s almost completed story was inexplicably pulled from final production. The reason given was that the direction came from above and the report was “not balanced”.

Besides the adoptee par-for-the-course reunion story, the only difference was that in this story for 'The Project' Peter also highlighted some of the unique and little-known issues adopted people face, like having two birth certificates, and not being able to legally use their true, original birth certificate. Peter talked about the increasing uptake of discharges of adoption and the growing movement of adopted people speaking out about negative consequences of adoption.

Powerful adoption lobby group with strong links to Rupert Murdoch

Adoption has experienced a resurgence in Australia in recent years, due to the lobbying of the organisation AdoptChange, which was founded in 2008 by celebrity wife, Deborra-Lee Furness. After not being able to adopt easily in Australia, Deborra-Lee Furness and her husband, actor Hugh Jackman, went to the US, where they were able to share a hotel room with a young mother-to-be for several weeks, attend the birth, cut the cord, hold this mother's newborn before she did, and adopt him immediately – thus avoiding the “red tape and bureaucracy” (along with United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requirements) which currently make that sort of behaviour impossible in Australia.

The close ties of Deborra-Lee Furness and Hugh Jackman to Rupert Murdoch are well known and publicly available. They share countless photo moments which can be easily searched in Google images. Hugh is godfather to Rupert's daughters, Chloe and Grace. Nicole Kidman - another high profile Australian celebrity adopter and surrogate user - is co-godparent. Of course, knowing someone very well does not mean they will manipulate public sentiment for you, and the fact that adoption is a billion-dollar industry in the US also does not mean there is an automatic connection. But what *is* clear is that the prevalence of positive adoption messages in the Murdoch media are in stark contrast to the views of most adoption stakeholders - except for a small, powerful group headed by AdoptChange.

The promotion of adoption is not supported by most stakeholders

In 2018 there was a Federal Inquiry which was named the 'Inquiry into Local Adoption' and came about partly due to AdoptChange lobbying. This was not an inquiry into adoption itself, which Adoptee Rights Australia continues to call for. This inquiry jumped that step, treating supposed good outcomes from adoption as a given, on no evidence-base. Instead, it

asked how to get rid of the supposedly inconsequential “barriers” preventing adoption in Australia.

Yet over 80% of the 110 submissions to the Local Adoption inquiry were not in favour of adoption or had serious concerns about its increase.

Late this year, there was also a state-based inquiry in Queensland into a Bill intended to prioritise adoption over long-term guardianship. Over 90% of the 39 submissions to this inquiry were against the Bill.

The impact of widespread pro adoption propaganda

Despite such high numbers of submissions questioning the use of adoption, recommendations of the Committees in both inquiries reached the opposite conclusion. That the outcomes of both inquiries went so completely against the tide of the submissions just speaks further to the explanation that there is an alarming amount of power and vested interest behind the scenes, and/or of the susceptibility of politicians to the positive stereotype of adoption propagated and cultivated in the Murdoch media.

Deborra-Lee Furness has the might of Hugh Jackman’s celebrity influence to open many doors for her, and everyone has the right to lobby in a legal manner for what they want to change. But public opinion should not be so obviously manipulated by constant and unbalanced propaganda in a supposedly free press in the service of the agendas of the powerful.

Adoptee Rights Australia has long been calling for data collection and further research on the long-term outcomes for adopted people (who have been shown to be at significantly higher risk of suicide and attempted suicide, mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness and imprisonment as a population group) to inform decision making on adoption in Australia. The continued promotion by the Murdoch press of the myth that adoption is a positive and straightforward “win-win” for both the childless and the adoptee is misinformation that causes long-term damage.

Call for a Murdoch Royal Commission

Adoptee Rights Australia urges the Senate Environment and Communications Reference Committee to recommend a Murdoch Royal Commission which includes - among a broad

and numerous list of concerns - the comprehensive examination of the influence of the Murdoch press on adoption in Australia.