

SUBMISSION NO. 93

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ACCEPTING CHILDREN EVERYWHERE

The Northern Tasmanian Inter-country Adoption Support Group

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The Secretary
Standing Committee on Family & Human Services
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

INQUIRY INTO ADOPTION OF CHILDREN FROM OVERSEAS

This group, from Launceston and North Eastern Tasmania represents applicants for intercountry adoption, and the parents of children adopted from overseas. The group has a history going back to the 1970s following the historical air lift of orphaned children from Vietnam, following the war in that country. One of our members came to Australia as part of that humanitarian exercise and was not expected to survive at the time. We have also participated in lobbying for the rights of parent applicants and children when our state government has amended state legislation and regulations.

The members of this group strongly believe that intercountry adoption provides an invaluable service to children who otherwise would not have a home and loving parents. It also provides them with opportunities which would not be available to them if they remained in an institution or home in their native country. A bonus for Australia is that these children grow up as valuable citizens and contribute substantially to Australian society. Australia needs to grow its population.

Inconsistencies between benefits and entitlements provided to families with their own birth children and those provided to families who have adopted from overseas include:

1. Fees & Charges

- a. State Governments charge fees to assess parent's suitability for adopting children for overseas.
- b. Applicants for intercountry adoption must pay all out of pocket expenses including medical examinations for themselves and the potential child, attendance to training sessions, Police checks, legal fees and any other fees requested.
- c. Applications for intercountry adoption must pay a considerable fee to the Department of Immigration to apply for a visa for the child.

Government fees are not imposed on families giving birth naturally. In most cases medical fees are subsidised by normal government benefits. It is the contention of this group that:

- i. State Government charges for applicants should be abolished
- ii. There should be no Visa application fees for a newly adopted child of Australian parents if the application has been approved by a State or Territory Government
- iii. A grant or subsidy should be available to assist applicants with their out of pocket expenses. At the very least these charges should be tax deductible.

2. Government Benefits

The Federal Government Baby Bonus is normally not available to Intercountry Adoptive parents because the normal age of children so adopted is in excess of 6 months and can be as old as 10 years

- i. The parents of State or Territory approved overseas adoptions should be eligible for a Baby Bonus equivalent which is not restricted because of the age of the child entering the country.

3. Parental Leave and Employment Benefits

Many adoptive parents find that they are not entitled to the same leave and benefits as the parents of birth children. This is a particular problem when adopting older children.

- i. It should be a requirement that all awards giving parental leave for the birth of a child should also provide equivalent leave to parents adopting a child from overseas regardless of the age of that child.

4. Delays in the Processing of Applications

The process of adoption is often delayed by a lack of sufficient workers to process applications. Delays can extend over many years.

- i. Steps should be taken to ensure that state Departments provide an adequate number of workers to facilitate a timely processing of genuine applications to adopt a child from overseas. If funding is an issue we recommend that a special Federal grant be available to the States to fund additional workers. The use of contract workers to supplement full time workers may also be an option.

The number of Intercountry Adoption placements in Australia each year is relatively small. The provision of financial assistance to parent applicants will be of great assistance and benefit to them. It is unlikely however to have any major impact on Federal or State Budgets.

This submission has been prepared following consultation with interested group members and has been personally reviewed and commented on by seven of those members. We advise that these members are unlikely to benefit from any future changes to legislation or support given, but have taken the time to contribute to this submission because of their belief in the value of Intercountry Adoption

We thank the committee for their time given to this issue

Yours faithfully

Geoff Powell