

ACCEPTING CHILDREN EVERYWHERE

(The Northern Tasmanian Inter-country Adoption Support Group)

Submission No. 236
Supplementary to submission no. 93

AUTHORISED:

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for

Submission Presented in Person
To the Commonwealth Parliamentary
Inquiry into Intercountry Adoption
Hobart – 16 September 2005

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**Northern Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Group
Submission to
Commonwealth Parliamentary Inquiry into Intercountry
Adoption Sept 2005**

This group forwarded a letter dated 16 April 2005 but would like to emphasise or add the following:

- 1. Australian involvement in Intercountry adoption is significantly beneficial to Australia**
- 2. Tasmania being a small state is disadvantaged because of the limited resources available to its State Adoption and Information Service. Lack of funding and human resources.**
- 3. The intercountry adoption application process places parents in a significantly disadvantaged financial position compared to parents giving birth naturally and parents seeking fertility treatment including IVF. (IVF is a form of treatment with a very low success rate compared to Intercountry adoption)**
- 4. Australian children originally adopted from overseas can be disadvantaged in many ways because of community ignorance and a failure of government departments' systems to recognise becoming a citizen through this process.**

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Australian involvement in Intercountry adoption is significantly beneficial to Australia

Intercountry Adoption makes a valuable human contribution to the lives of needy children in overseas countries.

At government level no country will admit that it cannot look after its own children and will not officially accept the existence of its own children being sent overseas for adoption. Within many countries there exists non-government organisations and even government organisations whose officers accept that allowing children to be adopted by loving parents overseas is a far better alternative than a child being institutionalised or even existing in a situation where there is no love and no resources to care for that child. Approved adoption programs function behind the scenes and are not highly promoted. It was international publicity about the adoption of its children overseas, during the Seoul Olympic Games, which embarrassed the South Korean government and made it introduce, both, reducing quotas on children going overseas and commence a program to encourage local adoption. While this is a good thing many countries having the same international pride are not wealthy enough to find, from within, loving homes for their abandoned children. (The purpose of this submission is not to explain the need of every child to have its own loving parents)

Australia can make a valuable human contribution to the needs of abandoned overseas children by having positive yet discreet active programs with approved overseas countries. This is consistent with the United Nation "Declaration on the Rights of the Child" which accommodates Intercountry adoption of a home with loving parents cannot be found in the child's country of birth.

Intercountry Adoption contributes to Australian Government policy and future social needs by effectively increasing the Australian birth rate.

It is acknowledged that Australia like, other developed countries, is lacking the population growth that is needed to sustain the needs of society in maintaining a sufficient working population to both provided the services that the total population needs to sustain present standards of living and to generate the income and taxes needed to sustain our social welfare structure as the population ages.

Intercountry adoption provides new immigrants to Australia through parents paying fees to the government. In addition these parents provide a one to one training of the new immigrants to integrate into Australian culture and to become valuable citizens' contributing to Australian society. It takes one or more generations before immigrant children truly reflect Australian accents and culture but with adopted children it happens as they grow up.

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Tasmania being a small state is disadvantaged because of the limited resources available to its State Adoption and Information Service.

The Tasmanian Adoption and Information Service receives the minimum of funding because of its size and the fact that the department of Human Services must first direct funding to the needs of local children and families in crisis.

We do acknowledge that Tasmanian applicants may not experience the delays in waiting for assessment that applicants have in other states but, because of its size. Tasmania is, however, reliant on participating in programs developed by other states or established programs which already acknowledge Tasmania as a reliable recipient of its relinquished children. Other states have been able to develop new programs following the allocation of Departmental staff to negotiate new programs. More frequently new programs have been introduced by Australian citizens who have worked overseas and established a trust with approved overseas agencies and introduced the new program to Australian authorities who have chosen to approve it.

Tasmania's disadvantaged position could be improved by the availability of additional Federal funding possibly from within the immigration budget to:

- Fund social workers to process applications without there being a long waiting period.
- Fund a worker to develop and coordinate new Intercountry adoption programs with a selected overseas country or countries. This could be accompanied with the development of a "sister city" type yet discreet relationship to facilitate both cultural exchange. We note, however, that it is against protocols to associate the provision of overseas aid with Intercountry adoption as this can be linked to "bribery or the buying of children"
- Fund needed additional administrative structures for the Tasmanian Adoption and Information Service

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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.
- d. There is a further cost in applying for a Citizenship Certificate and Court costs.

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:

- a. State Government charges for applicants should be abolished
- b. 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
- c. 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 has recently been amended to increase its availability for children from the original 6 months to 5 years. This has been a help to Intercountry Adoptive parents. Children however can be adopted at an age in excess of five years.

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. Spending time with newly adopted children is equally as important as spending time with newly born children and is a very important part of the initial bonding process.

It should be a requirement that all awards and enterprise agreements 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.

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Immigration Application

Parents applying to sponsor an adopted child into the country are confronted by a form which is complex and includes excessive questions.

A purpose designed form should be introduced to simplify the application to sponsor an adopted child.

Orientation and adjustment

Some parents have reported difficulty in accessing funding for "English as a second language" and have also found difficulty in negotiation the correct level of entry into the education system. It can be an advantage for a child adopted from overseas to enter school at a much lower grade than his age would imply, for example an 8 year old having a period of time in prep, before he or she progresses to higher grades, to compensate for early learning experiences they have missed out on. This naturally can place pressure on teachers who would benefit from a dedicated teachers aid.

Funding should be available to make it easier for schools to provide English as a second language for older children for an extended period if needed. In the case of educationally disadvantaged older children funding should be accessible to provide a teachers aid to facilitate the transition from their initial "educational equivalent age" to placement in the grade relevant to their chronological age.

Ongoing Issues

Before The Hague Convention children adopted into Australia were given an Australian Birth certificate, in the tradition of adoption, which gave them the identical status of children born into that family. Government departments, in particular Centrelink & the Electoral Office, lack the administrative ability to acknowledge that the Australian Birth Certificate is sufficient evidence of their Australian citizenship.

All government departments should built into their administrative systems the capacity to acknowledge the entry to Australia by adoption so that these Australians as adults do not have to continually fight to have their Australian Citizenship acknowledged.