

HUNTLY

**Submission no. 343**  
AUTHORISED: 23/5/07 *ML*

ML Huntly

STANDING COMMITTEE
24 APR 2007
ON HEALTH AND AGEING

Parliament of Australia

House of Representatives

House Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

23 April 2007

Attention: Secretary of the Committee

**By Facsimile: 02 6277 4844**

Dear Secretary,

**INQUIRY INTO BREASTFEEDING**

I wish to make the following submission regarding the above inquiry. In the interests of clarity I have identified the particular terms of reference to which my comments refer:

**Terms of Reference**

- a. The extent of the health benefits of breastfeeding; and
- d. Initiatives to encourage breastfeeding.

HUNTLY

I submit that the committee must firstly ensure that the Australian community is subject to a balanced and transparent discussion regarding the issues of health benefits and the promotion of breastfeeding.

It has been disappointing at times to realise that the various interest groups, whilst stating that they represent the community interest, fail to disclose all relevant information.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association ("ABA") does an excellent job of encouraging women to breastfeed their infants. There can be little expert opinion, if any, that does not support the view that breast milk is clearly the best food for most infants.

Further, it is trite to suggest that the legislature must aim to safeguard the standards of formula production and labelling. However, it is also a mistake to focus only on the manufacturers of formula without close scrutiny of the message broadcast by proponents of breastfeeding.

Much of the ABA literature states that the ABA is *Australia's leading source of breastfeeding information and support*. It is therefore very disappointing not to find any notable reference in the literature produced by ABA about medical conditions that deny women the opportunity to breastfeed.

I would dearly have loved to have breastfed my infant (now 4-year old) son, but was unable to do so.

More than twenty years ago I was diagnosed with a life-threatening condition which has since been treated by medication. Unfortunately the medication passes into breast milk and is toxic to infants. The committee may be aware that there are a number of medical conditions – either congenital or acquired by women – treated by medications which are toxic to infants.

ABA's failure to clearly state that breastfeeding may not be possible for various reasons, including certain medical conditions of the mother, undermines ABA's reputation as the leading authority.

HUNTLY

Further, and importantly, this failure results in the additional stigmatisation of women who struggle on a daily basis with a variety of adverse medical conditions.

As stated above, I would dearly have loved to breastfeed my newborn son. It was a blow to realise that it was not possible to do so. It was an additional blow when I became aware that others readily formed the view I simply could not be bothered to breastfeed my son.

I respectfully submit that the committee must make findings that:

1. There are circumstances that preclude breastfeeding, and
2. The publicly funded proponents of breastfeeding must clearly outline those circumstances, both in promotional materials and at any educational seminars.

Yours faithfully



Marion Huntly