

**SUBMISSION ON INQUIRY INTO  
ADOPTION OF CHILDREN FROM OVERSEAS**

We would like to comment on the inconsistencies between state and territory approval processes for overseas adoption.

1. Last year in Queensland's new Expression of Interest phase for overseas adoption, 583 applications were received by the closing date in November 2004.

At a seminar in September 2004, we were informed another 100 couples were already on the book which means almost 700 couples are looking to adopt one or more children from overseas as soon as possible.

The Department of Child Safety (Queensland) has informed us that 204 couples of the 583 have so far been invited to establish eligibility and attend education sessions.

The 204 couples include in the Department's own words, those couples with cultural links, second timers and some couples from two other categories i.e. past experience in parenting and first timers. They admit it is a very difficult task getting through the bulk of the Expression of Interest list which makes it very difficult for the 379 couples still waiting to be contacted by the Department to start the process.

2. Figures provided by the Department of Child Safety in September, 2004 show that Queensland is historically not getting its fair share of allocations based on population percentages.

In 2001 – 2002, Queensland only received 23 of 279 allocations (children for adoption from overseas).

In 2002 – 2003, the Queensland share was 29 out of 263. For example, adding both years together, Queensland was allocated two children from China out of a total of 85 and one child from Philippines out of a total of 30 allocations to Australia.

We understand the total number of allocations in Queensland increased to 49 in 2003 – 2004 but in the previous two years, Queensland has only received 10% of allocations which is a major factor in the waiting time for couples in Queensland. Almost 20% of Australia's population resides in Queensland.

In this submission, we question why Queensland has historically received less allocations compared to its percentage of population but also ask if Federal and State authorities are taking all steps to facilitate the adoption of more children from overseas.

Is a more national approach necessary in negotiations with overseas countries?

3. Figures on overseas adoptions indicate there are no adoptions in Queensland at present from European countries and only Ethiopia from Africa.

There has been a lot of publicity about children being adopted from Eastern European countries such as Lithuania and Romania but no placements of these children have been made in Queensland in the past three years.

There were nine placements in Australia from Columbia in 2001 – 2002 but none to Queensland in the past three years. Can agreements be made with more countries from Eastern Europe, South America and Africa where we understand there are a number of children in orphanages? Perhaps more children could also be made available from Asia.

4. The March, 2005, International Adoptive Families of Queensland Newsletter stated numbers of the Townsville and Hinterland Supports Group highlighted to the Minister for Child Safety Mr. Mike Reynolds, “the inequitable ratio of couples wanting to adopt children from overseas countries to the number of children allocated through the State program..... about 95 per cent of these couples will be found eligible, but the significant shortfall in the numbers of children results in incredible waiting lists.”

Mr. Reynolds told the meeting his department was already looking to establish links between countries like South Africa and Chile, and Queensland in an effort

to increase the number of children allocated through the Queensland program to around 100 annually. However, he stated that the move to increase numbers was hindered nationally by the fact that adoption programs were handled by the Attorney General (federally) as opposed to Inter-country Adoption Program. Members argued at the meeting (as reported in the March magazine) “that many countries currently involved in the inter-country program had more children available for adoption but were unaware Queensland had eligible couples waiting.”

We commend Mr. Reynolds for his moves in the past 12 months to give more hope to many Queensland families longing to have children but as indicated in this submission, the number of couples and children don't add up.

5. Governments have expressed concern about a decreasing birth rate in Australia and there is talk of increasing immigration numbers.

But what about taking advantage of an excellent resource; thousands of Australian married couples with a loving family environment who are keen to adopt from overseas? Children adopted into an Australian family will find it relatively easy to feel part of the Australian multi-cultural way of life.

While the major support mechanism for children adopted from overseas is in the extended family situation, there are a number of adoption support groups who

promote links with children from the same countries and their parent and families in Australia.

More Australian families would apply for overseas adoption if the waiting period was shorter and the paperwork was less.

6. In summary, we are one of 583 couples in Queensland who applied in 2004 for placement of a child from overseas. As at April 18, 2005 we have not yet been invited to establish eligibility and attend education sessions.

We believe more can be done to increase the number of children available. This is one way a rich country like Australia can help countries/children less fortunate than ourselves.

Adopting children from overseas is the best way to re-address the declining birth rate in Australia.

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