

## SUBMISSION NO. 60

AUTHORISED: 25-05-05 *Aditi*

To Bronwyn Bishop, Julia Irwin, Alan Cadman, Kate Ellis, Kay Elson, David Fawcett, Jennie George, Louise Markus, Harry Quick and Ken Ticehurst

### Regarding the Senate Inquiry into the Adoption of Children from Overseas.

(Please send confirmation of receipt)

We are currently thrilled to be in the very happy and exciting process of adopting our first child from China. As one of us experienced local adoption as a child and grew up happily with adoptive parents and siblings we see adoption as a positive way of building a family.

Our file is in China and we anticipate that we may be due for an allocation in October 2005, traveling to China (hopefully) in December 2005. We have been fortunate in that we live in Western Australia. We have found the staff at DCD to be helpful, prompt and professional in their contact with us. The time taken from attending the initial information session (several weeks after making our first telephone inquiry), followed by education sessions, application process, medical, departmental and police clearances, social worker assessment, approval and then home study preparation (including more medical tests and police clearances, birth and marriages certificates etc) through to sending our file to China took us 12 months. Other people in WA we have met have generally taken this long or slightly longer (10 to 18 months) and I believe that the speed of our application has been in part due to promptly completing and returning paperwork as requested so is a good representation of how quickly the process works in WA.

We feel that this is a reasonable timeframe, particularly as it is important for people to have time to carefully think through the decision that they are making, however it is our understanding that people in other states (most notably Queensland) sometimes people are required to wait months and even years to attend initial information/application sessions, often growing too old to meet the age criteria while they are waiting. We believe that all states should be able to completely process an application within 9 - 18 months.

WA accepts applications from single people. Some other states do not. We believe that all states should be open to applications from single people if they can meet the other criteria required of prospective adoptive parents. (Imagine if state laws prevented single people from having biological children!)

While it is undoubtedly easier to parent as a couple, we have found that the single applicants we have met to be generally very responsible with good support and backup from family and friends, on a good income and financially able to support themselves and their child/ren and have made a decision after long and careful consideration. Many other single women who wish to have a child simply choose a quicker/simpler/cheaper option, to fall pregnant through a casual sexual relationship, sometimes spending the next 18 years living off Government payments and child support.

Although we are still well below the age limits, we support WA's age limit criteria of 45 and 50 years maximum age **difference** between the age of the parents and the age of the child for a first adoption and a 5 year increase (50 and 55 years) for the second or subsequent adoptions. (Singles have age difference limits of 45 and then 50 years.) This helps prevent situations where a family cannot adopt a second child as the child has to be 2 years younger than the previous child or any other child in the family. The age difference, rather than a cut off also encourages the adoption of toddlers and older children who also need families. Other states have lower cut off age limits and no increase in age limit for the second child. Lower cut off ages are particularly significant for couples where, for example, there is a 10 year age difference (e.g in a state with a cut off age of 45 years, a couple with a woman aged 36 and husband aged 46 could not adopt, although there are many women in their 30's and 40's having biological children.)

There are some minor differences between states in the application and screening process (e.g. some states require people to have x-ray examinations and be fingerprinted whereas WA does not) and differences in which countries children are adopted from (i.e. departments in some states only appear to deal with specific countries.)

One of the biggest concerns in the adoptive community is the Federal Government's continuing refusal to pay the Maternity Payment to adoptive families despite lobbying from individuals and adoptive groups.

The total adoption related costs incurred by us will be somewhere between \$20 000 and \$25 000 by the time our baby joins our family. This is before we have spent any money on a cot, pram, carseat, clothes, highchair, nappies, change table, toys, books etc!

When we have made a choice which has saved the government the cost of having a baby delivered in hospital (and associated care during pregnancy) and we have saved the taxpayer the cost of undertaking subsidized fertility treatment, it hurts and offends us that we are discriminated against because our adopted child (through no fault of the child's or our own) will very likely be aged over 6 months when she comes into our care.

In addition some states require at least one parent to stay home full time with the child for at least either 6 months or 12 months. This is not required in WA. While I agree that it is important for parents to spend time bonding with their new child, there should be some flexibility, for example for both parents to work part time and share care or for the ability to work part time. (Imagine the outcry if all biological parents were told that they had to stay home full time for 12 months!) Not being able to return to work at least part time adds a further financial burden to the already huge cost that would be a little easier to bear if the \$3000 maternity payment were made available to all families with newly adopted children.

Although this does not relate to the terms of reference I would like to add that I have also been told by one adoptive parent involved in a local adoption (where the child would have met the 6 month old cut off criteria) that they were unable to claim the

maternity payment as the foster parent had already made a claim! Undoubtedly foster parents do a fabulous job, however it seems unfair that a foster parent who is already financially compensated for the costs associated with caring for the baby temporarily and probably already owns a cot/pram/carseat etc is able to claim the \$3000 maternity payment whereas the child's parents aren't entitled to this assistance.

The costs associated with inter country adoption mean that people on low to moderate incomes are generally financially unable to pursue this option in building a family. Most adoptive parents I have met are from middle class, middle to high income professional backgrounds and even these people need to resort to borrowing money (in our case drawing money against our home loan) to finance part of their adoption costs.

While it is unreasonable to expect the Australian Government to cover our legal, translation and courier costs, overseas legal and government fees, orphanage donation, flights and travel expenses it would be a positive step if State and Territory fees could be kept to a minimum. There are currently huge differences in costs, I'm sure some of the other submissions will include and accurate comparison of figures, however I believe that NSW has state fees close of \$9700, compared to here in WA where we paid an application fee and assessment fee of \$1750.

We believe that there should be limits imposed on fees charged by states/territories and a reduction or waiver of the Federal Government's \$1245 DIMIA immigration fee as well as some other form of assistance such as tax deductibility of adoption related costs (after all if we paid for medical treatment over a certain limit for fertility treatment/pregnancy/childbirth we could claim a this on our tax return).

For further detailed information on the adoption application process and costs in WA please see

<http://community.wa.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/157F9D33-77FF-4C6E-B5E7-4B275C502955/0/IntercountryAdoptionGuideChina.pdf>

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission and most importantly we ask that you act in some way to make a difference to ensure fairness between states and equal treatment of both biological and adopted children!

Mark and Melanie Boulton

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