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SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Child migration

MONDAY, 26 MARCH 2001

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**SENATE
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

Monday, 26 March 2001

Members: Senator Crowley (*Chair*), Senator Knowles (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Bartlett, Evans, Gibbs and Tchen

Substitute members: Senator Murray for Senator Bartlett

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Brown, Calvert, Chapman, Coonan, Crane, Denman, Eggleston, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Forshaw, Gibson, Harradine, Harris, Lightfoot, Mackay, Mason, McGauran, O'Brien, Payne, Tierney, Watson and West

Senators in attendance: Senators Crowley, Gibbs, Knowles, Murray and Tchen

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

For inquiry into and report on:

Child migration to Australia under approved schemes during the twentieth century, with particular reference to the role and responsibilities of Australian governments and to the issues listed in the following paragraphs:

- (a) in relation to government and non-government institutions responsible for the care of child migrants:
 - (i) whether any unsafe, improper, or unlawful care or treatment of children occurred in such institutions, and
 - (ii) whether any serious breach of any relevant statutory obligation occurred during the course of the care of former child migrants;
- (b) the extent and operation of measures undertaken or required to assist former child migrants to reunite with their families and obtain independent advice and counselling services;
- (c) the effectiveness of efforts made during the operation of the child migration schemes or since by Australian governments and any other non-government bodies which were then responsible for child migration to:
 - (i) inform the children of the existence and whereabouts of their parents and/or siblings,
 - (ii) reunite or assist in the reunification of the child migrants with any of their relatives, and
 - (iii) provide counselling or any other services that were designed to reduce or limit trauma caused by the removal of these children from their country of birth and deportation to Australia;
- (d) the need for a formal acknowledgment and apology by Australian governments for the human suffering arising from the child migration schemes;
- (e) measures of reparation including, but not limited to, compensation and rehabilitation by the perpetrators; and
- (f) whether statutory or administrative limitations or barriers adversely affect those former child migrants who wish to pursue claims against individual perpetrators of abuse previously involved in their care.

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Committee met at 9.35 a.m.

COLESHILL, Mr Donald, Vice President, International Association of former Child Migrants and Their Families

HAIG, Mr Harold, Secretary, International Association of former Child Migrants and Their Families

JOHNSTON, Mr Norman, President, International Association of former Child Migrants and Their Families

McDAID, Mr Desmond, Committee Organiser, International Association of former Child Migrant and Their Families

CHAIR—Welcome. I declare open this public hearing of the Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into child migration. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, but should you wish to give your evidence, part of your evidence or answers to specific questions in camera you may ask to do so and the committee will give consideration to your request. We have before us your submission No. 129. Do you wish to make any alterations to that submission?

Mr Johnston—No.

CHAIR—Do you have any comment to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Johnston—I am a former child migrant.

CHAIR—I invite you to make an opening presentation, and then we will take questions.

Mr Johnston—Thank you. Madam Chair and Senators of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee, this is a very important and significant day for former child migrants and our families. We have waited 50 years, and some would say a lifetime, for this opportunity for justice. At last our voices, our pain and our suffering are on the public record. It only took a lifetime. Many of us—our friends we knew as little boys and girls—have not survived to share this day with us, but we do remember them today.

In the association's submission we have outlined the brutality, the lies, the cruelty and the violation of our basic rights to identity, to family life and to a childhood free of fear. These child migration schemes were a shameful episode in the history of this country. These policies placed young children in what can only be described as post-war concentration camps. What of those in authority who failed in their duty of care to protect this young group of vulnerable children—someone's son, someone's daughter, someone's brother, someone's sister? They lied to our mothers, took their children and for what? The damage is immeasurable—the loss, the loneliness unbearable. It has been said that this is war crimes without a war, and we concur.

We had taken from us our birthright, our culture, our sense of nationhood with no choice, just herded into boats, our number was up. This has to be the largest unlawful movement of children in the post-war years. In a so-called Western democracy, government sanctioned child abuse on

a massive scale. The federal government cared very little for us as children and care even less now, if that were possible.

For more than a decade they have known only too well of our urgent and basic needs, and of the awful unspeakable consequences of their neglect—and the violation of our human rights is ongoing today as we speak. In this year of federation we are truly a forgotten remnant of the Commonwealth—out of sight, out of mind: not worth a mention at the federation celebrations, not worth a place at CHOGM I guess.

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs—and I do hope they are here listening to our testimony today—are nothing short of heartless bureaucrats who, in our view, are no different to those very people who let us down as children. They too inflict further suffering today on us and our families. I do not find this easy to say, but we have reached a point of truth and reality. They must now face the music for their heartless indifference. Are you aware that the pittance of funding provided to the Child Migrants Trust is under threat? Indeed, I understand that the trust has been directed to stop seeing clients. Can you believe it? You have seen the need yourselves. What has changed for us?

You have evidence of recent corruption and collusion between church and state to protect evil people with evil motives and vested interests. The evidence of Dr Coldrey requires a full investigation, in our view. How many more paedophiles is the church hiding? Apologies are worthless without truth and honesty. We will not go away. We have been told we are not the flavour of the month—something we rather guessed by the constant indifference of a minister who would meet with the protector of paedophiles but refused to meet this association.

But, you know, we believe that this inquiry is long overdue. It will no doubt expose the devastating and long-term consequences for a country that leaves vulnerable children to the mercy of those who operate outside the law. It will expose the failure of the federal government to regulate and protect the needs of those at greatest risk of harm, and it will expose the need for a national child care policy that will prevent this child care catastrophe from ever happening again. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIR—Thank you. Does anybody else wish to make comments at this time? Okay.

Senator KNOWLES—I would just like to take up some of the comments that you have just made, as opposed to moving on later to your submission. Why do you think it has taken so long for this issue to come to the attention of the public generally and governments in particular? I mean, much anger seems to be directed—and it is understandable—to those in the Catholic church today, and I think we must be careful always not to blame today's generation for what happened yesterday in a very hostile way. The same applies to governments, state and federal: the governments of today, whatever their political persuasion, are blamed. Much water has flowed under the bridge since this shocking practice ceased—let alone since it started. Why do you think it is that it is only now that—when I say now, in the last decade—it has really come to light?

Mr Johnston—Thank you, Senator Knowles. This has not been an issue that we have recently undertaken. Many of us for decades prior to this made individual efforts to bring to the attention, of whoever we could get to listen, the plight of former child migrants. It was not easy,

it was very difficult for other people to believe and we understood that. We knew we were very difficult to believe with what happened to us. The odd person a couple of decades ago started to make some inroads into getting a little media coverage. It took a little bit at a time, culminating in Nottingham County Council becoming involved and receiving a letter from a former child migrant. It was just one of those one-off situations where suddenly we had someone who was prepared to listen. That someone came out here and uncovered the mess that you now see or have recently heard.

Every which way we turned we hit brick walls. We got no support; we did not have a willing ear to listen to what we had to say. The church was too powerful. Every avenue we took was blocked. I do not specifically refer all of what we have to say to the Catholic church. They were a big part of it, but there were other agencies and organisations involved in the child migration scheme who are all as culpable. Now we have finally got a voice, we have an organisation which you see before you. We have been looking for this type of support; we have been looking for this type of cohesion within our group and within our organisation to be able to present a united front to the government of the day. It has taken a long time; it has taken a lifetime. Now that we are here we want people to know what happened to us. We want to know why it happened and we want to know what can be done now to rectify whatever can be rectified, from today onwards.

Senator KNOWLES—I understand and appreciate that. What I fail to understand in some respects is this. Naturally most of the witnesses who have come before us in the last few weeks have been in their late 40s, 50s and 60s. It is generally perceived that many people become more proactive and vocal in their earlier years when they really get a passion. That, in this instance, does not seem to have happened. I am just fascinated as to why not. That, I think, has led to inactivity from governments—federal and state, Labor or Liberal. It does not matter what they are; all governments seemed to have just brought down the shutter. Why do you think there was a lack of activity earlier on when this may have been able to be redressed in some way? I do not think any form of redress will be adequate probably for the suffering that people have gone through, and it is also very hard to quantify. Do you think there is too much shame involved, too much secrecy involved, that people did not get together in those days to do what you are doing today by way of an association to bring this pressure to bear on federal and state governments.

Mr Johnston—I think that is very much a part of our history. We, as individuals, had a great deal of difficulty coming to terms with our lot. It was difficult for us to even talk to fellow former child migrants once we had been released from these institutions. We had to mature a lot more. We had to understand our situation ourselves. We had to come to grips and gain the courage and nerve that was so ruthlessly removed from us as children. We had to redevelop and re-find ourselves. Some of us still have not done that. Quite a few of us have to a great degree and some in fact you might say have excelled. I will give you one sample of what has caused a few of the obstacles that we have encountered.

This was down loaded from the Internet and it refers to a Brother Coldrey—I only know him as Dr Coldrey—so I will assume he is a Christian Brother. This was written last September; please remember that:

A Christian Brother who has extensively studied the history of child migration says he is baffled at plans for a Senate Inquiry into British child migration in Australia.

Br Barry Coldrey has researched child migration in Australia and the UK and has written a number of books on the issue.

He believe that following a UK Government inquiry, a partial inquiry in Western Australia and the extensive research and writing done by many people on the issue over 14 years there is nothing new to be uncovered.

'It's all there on the record now,' Br Coldrey said from his Melbourne office this week. 'I'm mystified as to what this new inquiry can find.'

Some 3,500 children were brought to Australia under the scheme in 1938.

And it goes on and says a few other little niceties about the Christian Brothers. From my reading of the transcript of Dr Coldrey's submission to this very committee, I think a lot more has been uncovered. This was written seven months ago, and that may give you a measure of the walls and the barriers that we faced in trying to gain recognition of who we are and start the healing process. This is not healing; this is telling us, and putting us down again. This is only seven months ago. I mentioned in my opening address that the hurt still continues, and there is a very fresh and a very recent example of that.

Senator KNOWLES—Yes. I suppose I want to see the energy used proactively and positively. It disturbs me when you use terms, as you did this morning, such as 'heartless bureaucrats' and so forth and so on, because I think we have to get away from the personal vilification of people. That is precisely what you have suffered, and I do not think anything is to be achieved probably by returning it with interest. I think what we have to do is work together to get a reasonable outcome. Bureaucrats cannot speak for themselves; they do not have a voice in that situation. That is why I suppose I asked the question. In light of all of that, in terms of the attitudinal side of it, when you also mentioned that the trust has been directed to stop seeing clients, I want to know when, by whom, effective from when, when were they told, who told them and when is that to be effected from.

Mr Johnston—We are probably better to leave it for the trust to raise the dates, times, names and places. I am sure it is an issue they will be bringing to this committee at their sitting following us. We have only just recently learned of it, and I understand it has come through the minister for immigration. Beyond that, I cannot say what the nitty-gritty details of it now. There are other aspects to it, and I feel sure the trust will enlighten the committee in much more detail than I can.

Senator KNOWLES—What I am trying to get at is this: in looking at the way in which we can progress things now, has the association given consideration to quantifying and qualifying the type of assistance that is required? If you were to be putting a submission to government, both federal and state, where would you see those responsibilities lying for federal responsibility, how much and for what purpose; and for state responsibility, how much, and for what purpose? Has the association given any consideration to that type of detail?

Mr Johnston—We have not gone into such details. We believe that is an area for the financial whiz kids to determine what should come from where. We believe there is a financial responsibility at all levels—federal and state—to resolve or put in place the measures that are required to assist the thousands of former child migrants that are in need.

You may have considered our language to be somewhat strong in our submission. We have to express how we feel. It is not easy to say things that really hurt us and still go on hurting us, but find other more pleasant words to get the picture across. We are not pinpointing any particular person. We are saying people were responsible for what happened to us—organisations, government, were responsible. We are not saying you were; we are saying governments. We are saying religious orders, state governments, federal government, British government—all played a part in why we are stuck with the legacy that we have. Much could have been done in the years gone by to have relieved this by simple checks that could have been done in every one of these institutions. We have heard and read the various agencies and state government departments that suggest they have been to see these institutions. But did they see the children? It does not sound like they did to me.

They inspected the buildings, the confines, and were quite happy to leave it at that. Our needs, our wants, were never something high on the agenda for any of these inspection teams that came around—that I can recall. And the annoying thing is that these inspection teams when they did come around gave plenty of notice, so we were able to be shunted out or dressed up or whatever the occasion might have been, and the place was cleaned specially for those visits. They were given plenty of warning. We are very angry people—very angry at what has been dished out to us in this life. We did not ask for it.

Senator KNOWLES—Mr Johnston, I suppose where I am heading is the future. We know the wrongs have been committed in the past. No matter what any of us would like, we cannot rewrite history—that is just impossible. What we want to look at is what could or should be done in the future. As we have discussed previously, there are a number of people who clearly choose, for whatever reason, not to come forward. There are a number of people who quite openly say that they positively benefited from the experience and there are many others of course who are feeling as strongly as you are today. What governments need to be able to do, federal and state and the institutions, is decide what levels of unmet need exist and how best to resolve that problem of unmet need. And that is where we would see your guidance in that area as being very specific. You can probably understand from a government point of view that, with respect to a compensation claim for example, how do you quantify a compensation claim of a direct cash payment to anyone, because you would then have to go through each and every single solitary case and find out what effect that had on people and so forth and so on.

The overwhelming level of evidence that has been provided to the committee is that it is assistance that is needed—whether that assistance be in travel, whether it be in accommodation, whether it be in tracing, whether it be in literacy, counselling; they are all the sorts of things that I want to focus on as to what we can do in the future. We cannot fix what has gone on in the past, but what we can do is fix what is going on in the future. How best do you see that being done and that being delivered fairly?

Mr Johnston—I would like to defer to my secretary, Mr Harold Haig, to bring you up to speed, hopefully, in some of those areas.

Mr Haig—In our recommendations, we have recommended the Child Migrants Trust as the organisation that the majority of child migrants would prefer to go to, for many different reasons. We believe that because of what child migrants have gone through they should have not the best but the very best service which is available, the very best counselling and family

reunion service which is available. Whoever provides the counselling needs to be independent. It needs to be a complete service which provides counselling before, during and after. It needs to be an organisation that child migrants can trust.

I understand what you are saying about governments of the past. We are not blaming these governments or this government for what happened. In a sense, what we are saying now in going forward is that they have a responsibility. The governments in the past, when child migrants came here, abdicated their responsibility and dumped it onto the states. When the present government responded to the UK House select committee inquiry, they took 13 months to put out their response and they gave absolutely nothing. This made child migrants feel like second-class citizens.

Senator KNOWLES—But where do we go from here?

Mr Haig—What we have suggested is that it is a federal and state government issue. I will just read it: what we have recommended is a federal-state funding package for a four-year period with a built-in review and evaluation.

Senator KNOWLES—Sorry, I missed that. What did you say?

Mr Haig—We recommend a federal-state funding package for a four-year period with a built-in review and evaluation—the federal government and the state government. It is a dual responsibility as far as we are concerned. There needs to be some security within that funding, and that is why we are saying a four-year period with an evaluation. We cannot give you figures and numbers and how much it is going to cost and how many social workers, for instance, the Child Migrants Trust needs. The Child Migrants Trust can provide that evidence to you.

If we look at current funding of \$855,000 over a period of 11 years, it is disgraceful. It provides one social worker in Western Australia and one social worker in Victoria. As the committee is aware, we are all getting older. Our families are getting older. Many mothers have died over the last 13 years, not knowing the truth—not knowing where their children are. We would like the Senate committee to actually ask the director of the Child Migrants Trust directly, ‘How many mothers have died over this period of time?’

Senator KNOWLES—I suppose that was the reason for my first question. Had this committee been taking place 14, 15 or 16 years ago, the outcomes way at the end in terms of reunification might have been very different from what they will be now.

Mr Haig—They would. With due respect to governments, initially you asked why this had not all been raised before 13 years ago. Well, quite simply, that was when the Child Migrants Trust was founded. Before that, the term ‘former child migrant’, did not exist. The child migration schemes, I would venture to say, the majority of people in both countries—and I would believe politicians—would not have heard of. They had been swept well and truly under the carpet. When you are a child you get with things. You take the suffering; you have got no where to go; there is no-one to listen to you. I am sure you have heard stories from former child migrants that when they had tried to complain about the treatment they have been bashed. There was nobody for us to go to. We were told we were orphans. When you are told that you are an orphan, you are alone, you are isolated, you have got no identity and no-one to go to. Until the

trust came on the scene and brought this business out and started reuniting families and giving child migrants back their identities, and giving back the courage to talk about it and to raise the issues—it has been so slow. The trust have informed the Australian government, for the last 13 years, what needed to be done, the urgency of the matter, what was needed; unfortunately, as far as we are concerned, the governments have not listened. They gave a pitiful amount of money.

If we look at the funding for the trust against what was provided for the indigenous stolen generation: after the *Bringing them home* report came out, there was a \$63 million package which included an independent counselling and family reunion service. Now, we do not have the figures to say how many there are in the stolen generation and how many we are. What we would like is parity of funding. We believe, without knowing the numbers, that the dollar figures show quite clearly that there is no parity of funding.

Senator MURRAY—I think the line of questioning by Senator Knowles is an extremely productive one, because it has been a problem we have faced as a committee: not just trying to understand why it happened but why nothing was done about it when it had happened. I think that in my own mind one of the problems is the difficulty we all have as human beings in facing up to horror. I mean, this is a horrifying tale. Speaking for myself, I am a person who did nine years of active war service and yet I have shed more tears in the weeks and months of this inquiry from the horror I have read and experienced at the hearings than I did in my war service. It is a very powerful and impactful experience for those who have to hear your story.

Returning to Senator Knowles's line of inquiry, in my mind I have broken the aspects—and not in any particular priority—of dealing with this into kind of four areas: legal, social, political and public. If we deal with the public side first, that is the media really. It is the expression of these things in media debate and it only emerges when the nature of the times is such that difficult topics can be written about, the media themselves are given the stories to write, and they have the interest to do so. For instance, the level of interest of the Australian media in this inquiry has been exceptionally low. What does that say about them? It probably says some nasty things, because the stories are there for them to hear. They are going through an extremely superficial phase when they would rather hang around outside a courtroom than attend to living history. That is the public side. Eventually the public side will become political. I will leave that for the moment and come back to that.

There is the legal side. As the committee knows, I have struggled to understand why there were not complaints by people as soon as they became adults, and requirements for the police to follow up actions which were against the law at the time—theft of wages and possessions; criminal assault of the most extreme kind; and sexual assault. There is a litany of unlawful acts and yet with a few exceptions that have been recounted to us—there was an odd exception in Adelaide where a lady recounted to us that she had followed up a rape case and there have been a few others—virtually no child migrant took up the cause at the time.

Dealing with the social side, to me that is the social welfare side. Right from the early days the evidence is that child migrants were in the social welfare system, were needing counselling. They had to be placed in employment and care. The system, the bureaucracy, knew about it. It was a feature of life then and it is a feature now that somehow, even though there were those who know about those things because they were told the stories, it does not get up to be expressed at a policy level. There is no evidence to us that the social welfare officers at the time

actually wrote memos and made applications to their ministers and said, 'We're on the top of an iceberg here, we are just seeing 10 per cent, but there must be another 90 per cent below the water.' Nothing. So politicians did not react.

Now we finally come to the questions Senator Knowles has asked: how do we turn a knowledge which we now have, irrefutable evidence we now have, into public policy? What should that public policy be addressed to? It obviously has to be addressed at the kind of areas we have been discussing. That is a political resolution. This Senate committee is the means by which the government will be advised of policy recommendations.

With that introduction, I want to ask you why you remain focused on a judicial inquiry. People have many views about judicial inquiries. One of my views—which may not be common but it is my view—is that judicial inquiry is most commonly used to apportion blame and to recommend punishment; whereas a political inquiry like this might do those things but it is primarily focused on what money can be spent to make things better—counselling, funding, reconnection, the kinds of things that Mr Haig spoke about that the Aboriginal people who went through the same experiences have received as a package. In other words, it is a productive package to the future. With that very long introduction I really wanted to ask any of you gentlemen to tell me why you still think a judicial inquiry is essential if this inquiry results in an outcome such as that which has occurred for the Aboriginal people.

Mr Johnston—It is our belief that we should have a judicial inquiry. We believe that there is a lot more to be uncovered yet about what happened to us and the greater numbers. We will not deny that there was an element of former child migrants that may have squeezed through the system relatively unscathed. Psychologically I do not think there were any that got through this system unscathed, but physically there may have been the odd one.

A lot of very nasty things were done to children. There were deaths in the organisations that, from our perspective, were not fully investigated at the time. There were horrendous abuses. There was the almost total lack of safety through most of these organisations. I can quote some examples that you would find difficult to believe with respect to safety aspects that were ignored and to children being put in very vulnerable positions where they could have lost their lives. There were many of those.

The judicial inquiry may also bring out of the woodwork those perpetrators that inflicted the worst of the pain on us, and bring them to account. They are still alive—not all of them—and they need to answer for what they did or what they caused or what they saw happen and did nothing about. At the same time I say to the committee that a judicial inquiry is warranted, I will also say that this inquiry is also warranted, because while a judicial inquiry was under way we would not like to believe that what we are trying to achieve through this Senate inquiry would come to a standstill. We would like to see, through this Senate inquiry, things put in place that will assist former child migrants in their efforts to rehabilitate, in their efforts to ease their pain and suffering, and also that of the families that were left behind in Great Britain. I do not know if I can take that further, Senator. We cannot get away from the belief that we have.

Senator MURRAY—Let me flesh it out a little. Broken Rites organisation put it very clearly to us, but they are not the only people who put it to us. They have said that this child migrant experience is part of a trilogy. The first part of the trilogy was the experience of indigenous

Australian-born children, which has been dealt with through the stolen generation report. This is the second part of the trilogy, and very common themes identify the experience of child migrants with those of indigenous Australian-born children—even I might say to the extent of the loss of identity for country. You often hear indigenous people talk about their country, being taken from their country. So even in that respect there is a parallel.

The third element of the trilogy outlined to us by *Broken Rites* is in fact the greatest number of children, and it is Australian-born non-indigenous children who were put in institutions. The question I would put to you is: because the committee will have to deal with this view as to whether we agree with you or not about a judicial inquiry, if there were to be a judicial inquiry, should it in fact be focused on child migrants or rather should it be focused on children in institutional care who experienced these common abuses?

Mr Johnston—May I ask our secretary to respond to that, thank you Senator?

Mr Haig—I would say, Senator, that it should concentrate on children. If there is to be a full judicial inquiry, it should cover the whole spectrum of not just child migrants. One of the many things that child migrants want to see is that this sort of thing never happens again; that children's rights are not abused; and that there is something put in place that ensures that this never happens again. That is just extremely important. I certainly believe that a full judicial inquiry should cover all children, if there is going to be one.

Senator MURRAY—There is another angle to examine: it has emerged in the media just over this weekend but it has been around for a while, and that is the present treatment of children in institutions. I have not looked in depth, so I will merely restate such as is appearing in the media. It is that a switch in social policy from non-institutional care to more foster and small placement care is still throwing up massive problems. Children today are deserted because of drug addicted parents, or because their parents cannot cope. Illegitimacy no longer seems to be a major cause, but all the other social causes of poverty or dysfunctional families are still throwing children out of families. These children are either themselves creating a problem for their carers, or their carers are creating problems for the children. Would you add to your call for a judicial inquiry the present circumstances of children who are not in safe and secure families?

Mr Haig—We would say yes, as an association. We are aware that judicial inquiries are very expensive. We would believe that they should cover—and we are talking about—the abuse of children. The association would be in full agreement that if there is to be a full judicial inquiry it should cover everything—present day children and child migrants—so that somewhere out of it all there is a national policy that governs the activities of people taking care of children.

Senator MURRAY—I have felt in this inquiry that we have almost been pulling on a piece of string. We keep discovering how long that string is, because it seems to me that the effects of abuse of children are so costly, not only to the children themselves but to the society. It is costly, in terms of making people dysfunctional, in continuing habits of violence, in continuing sexual assault situations and in continuing dysfunctionality such as alcohol or drug abuse. There are consequences of the abuse of children which perpetuate themselves in society. I am not implying that everybody who has been beaten becomes a beater. I am not meaning that, but I am saying that the evidence to us indicates that it carries on into other generations. I ask you again,

on my behalf, but I am really asking to the committee: is a judicial inquiry which, by its nature, is carried out by lawyers—usually retired judges—the right forum to deal with what is essentially a major social issue?

CHAIR—I think they have told us, have they not, Senator? Is there something more you would like to add to this question now?

Mr Johnston—It is very important, because we were all children once and we know what can happen to us. Our society today appears to be such that it does warrant—when one looks around—some firm legislation in place to protect children at all levels. If we can achieve that through this committee, we would probably be reasonably content with that. But at the same time we would not like to believe that because things happened to us in the past that is forgotten. We would like to see that particularly those that did what they did to us are brought to account, are brought to justice—thereby serving justice on us, the victims of these cruel people.

While today's society can cope with what is happening today—because we have better knowledge and understanding and there is better legislation in place than we had in our day—we cannot forget and will not forgive what happened to us. There was no need for it to have happened. It was allowed to happen, and now we are trying to seek justice from the government. That is the picture we are trying to give to the Senate. If all can be achieved through this committee, all well and fine. If there are aspects that cannot be achieved by this committee, we would like to see it addressed in a higher forum—if such a thing exists. I am not all that orientated towards the structure within these inquiries. But somewhere down the line, these animals—these beasts—that did what they did to us need to answer for it. They have to be accountable. We cannot leave them under the carpet, because while they are there, we cannot breathe; we cannot live; we cannot go on. These people are there. Their organisations are there. They know what went on. They are not prepared to declare what went on openly to anybody. In fact, they would prefer to join what is under the carpet. We want to clean the room out. We want child migrants to receive justice. If it takes a judicial inquiry, then we must have it. But at the same token, we very much appreciate the work that this Senate has done for us to date.

Senator MURRAY—Madam Chair, that was finally the answer I was searching for, because I think that at the heart of Mr Johnston's response is that anger and injustice demand blame and punishment—at least as part of this, which I do not think we can ignore. I want to conclude by thanking Madam Chair for actually giving me a bit of discretion with the manner of my remarks, because not a lot of it was questioning.

CHAIR—Mr McDaid, did you wish to add something?

Mr McDaid—When this point is finished. I have got something I would like to add to Senator Knowles's question.

Senator MURRAY—I will just conclude. I want to not only thank you for your submission but to thank you for your very clear exposure of three critical myths. I think that is very helpful. That is all I have, Madam Chair.

Mr McDaid—May I add to Harold's answer to Senator Knowles' question about what to do in the future. The things we are looking for are for the Child Migrants Trust to be properly structured and funded, a travel fund and, of course, reparation. But I would like to particularly point out about a travel fund that it is a thing to be funded separately, because the travel fund is linked to the counselling—so when we find someone's parents or family the professional people would know when they are ready to go back and connect it. There is also the ordinary side where people give them money just on the side. They may not have the same disciplines that everyone else has got. So if there is a travel fund, which there really should be, it must be separate from the reparation. I would just like to note that.

Senator KNOWLES—When you talk about reparation, you may care to explain—

Mr McDaid—I suppose compensation is probably another word. That is to make up for all sorts of disabilities—psychological, physiological, educational and such things. But my secretary will answer that question.

Senator KNOWLES—Are you suggesting that everyone should get the same amount or that decisions should be made on the amount representing the level of pain and suffering? I ask that in light that generally compensation is—

Mr McDaid—That is a very hard question, because: what is compensation? You can draw an arbitrary figure out; there is no real way of answering that. That will have to be left to a workforce by you people with the help of a professional group such as the Child Migrants Trust to structure that. I just do not have that broad knowledge to give a Senate inquiry this answer.

Senator KNOWLES—If we look at motor vehicle accidents and so forth, compensation is usually commensurate with the individual's pain and suffering, loss of income or whatever.

Mr McDaid—If a workforce can see that then that is the way it has to be.

Senator KNOWLES—This is slightly different and harder to quantify, because some do not want to come forward; some have varying experiences.

Mr McDaid—That is correct.

Senator KNOWLES—That is why from where I sit I look at things that can be usefully provided to give people a better quality of life in the future. I do not know who would be god to sit there and make that decision.

Mr McDaid—You just said an interesting thing about people who do not seem to need it. Some child migrants have done very well in life, but that does not mean—like me, you were not paedophile on; it does not mean that you were not taken away from your mother; it does not mean a lot of things. It does not mean that. It means you have probably done well for yourself in the material world. Society has yardsticks by which they measure us, but at the same time it very rarely, if ever, tells the full story by half. To answer your question, I really cannot, but there should be reparation of some sorts. I would like to note the point about the travel fund to be separate because of the professional side.

Senator GIBBS—We have heard an awful lot about unpaid wages that happened to a lot of the children when they were either working in the institutions or outside the institutions. What are your ideas on compensation for unpaid wages? How would we go about it? How would it be measured and who actually should pay? Should it be the Commonwealth alone, the religious institutions or both?

Mr Johnston—It is very difficult to determine who would ultimately pay the price of that. We see that it is a major problem for many former child migrants. They themselves do not know how they are best going to get reparation for these things that happened to them as forced labourers. Many of the people they worked for are no longer with us for example, particularly farmers and the like. Many of the people who were responsible for the money turned into the Child Welfare Department for safe keeping are no longer with us; those moneys have disappeared as well. Someone needs to be accountable for it, whether it is the public purse, state government or organisations that were part of the structure that the person worked for. We cannot even begin to believe how that is all going to be pulled together. We are only a committee that can tell you that these things happened. Many former child migrants have been deprived of incomes as young vulnerable people that were taken advantage of. They do deserve to have that money back. They do deserve to be compensated for it with interest. How we go about that is going to take, I believe, an inquiry of some sort: firstly to determine the numbers and then to quantify what reparation may be made available to them. It was through no fault of theirs that this happened to them; this was part of the system at the time: forced cheap labour, that is what we were.

Senator GIBBS—That is right. It has been suggested that maybe a tribunal be set up. Do you think that would work rather than an inquiry?

Mr Johnston—I could see payment for those that lost wages and were inadequately remunerated for work that they did being part of the reparation package that should be put in place. This is probably best conducted through a tribunal set up where each individual can come before the tribunal, be measured, tested, examined, questioned et cetera on the various things that happened to them. The team then assesses, on the basis of lack of education as mentioned earlier, loss of earnings as a result of limited education. These are all things that can in fact be individually answered at the time any reparation tribunal may sit on behalf of former child migrants. It can be encompassed in that one area.

Senator GIBBS—With regard to the education, a lot of the witnesses who came before us were poorly educated and some of them, well a lot of them actually, left the institutions illiterate, they could not read or write, so obviously there is a need to set up some sort of education process for these children. Do you have any thoughts on that—how we could go about that, who should fund it?

Mr Johnston—These children are now us: 60-plus in years of age and many—

Senator GIBBS—Yes, denied an education.

Mr Johnston—it is too late for many. Many cannot change.

Senator GIBBS—But surely it is not too late to learn to read and write. I mean, last week one of the gentleman came up to me and said that he could not read and write for a long time and his wife actually taught him. He now reads the paper, but he said it is not that good but obviously that makes an enormous difference in one's life if you can read a book or read the paper, that sort of thing. So there is still obviously a great need there. I mean, even though you are older learning to read and write is an essential part of life.

Mr Johnston—My explanation for too late is that this would have been lovely—we would have preferred this to have happened 30 years ago, but that is not to say—

Senator GIBBS—I know, but we were not here 30 years ago.

Mr Johnston—that there is not room for the learning process now. I believe that there are numbers that do wish to further their education or to become at least literate. We have people that are just not literate at all, they have no capacity to read or write. My secretary can probably give a bit more detail on that. Could I please pass to Harold?

Mr Haig—I would rather address that issue. You are quite right, Senator Gibbs. There are many child migrants who, through poor education, cannot read or write. But I think that that should be a part of the tribunal, reparation through a tribunal. With the tribunal, as far as compensation is concerned, I know, as you say, lots of people will have to go forward, everyone will have to be judged, but surely if you get the right people on a tribunal that can assess for instance for loss of family and country, loss of culture, that you can draw different levels, and as the people come before you, if the child migrants come before, they can be judged. I know that is a very simplification, but I think you can understand what I mean.

Within that, there can be reparation for loss of education, loss of wages, and economic loss because of poor education can be a part of that reparation that can be brought into it. I would think that that would be the way to handle it. And then it gives the child migrant a choice as to whether they actually want to go and get that and go to a TAFE or go wherever—it gives them a choice of whether they want to do that or how they want to do it, rather than saying, 'Let's set up something and direct them in this direction'—you know, give them a choice.

Senator GIBBS—Okay. That is a good idea. Who do you think should ultimately pay? Should it be the federal government or the federal government and the church—?

Mr Haig—I think it should be the federal government, the state government and the church or organisations—any of them.

Senator GIBBS—Who were involved.

Mr Haig—Any of those that were involved, because it goes across the board. You could say the church or the charitable organisations were responsible because they did not provide it; you could say the state and federal governments failed to find out that this was happening. They failed to inspect. They inspected buildings but they really did not try to find out what was happening with the children in those to find out whether they were getting the proper education or not. If I remember rightly, I think it was Mr Page from the immigration department who said that he just assumed that everyone got an education until they were 14. Senator Murray said that

one should not assume those things because we know they did not. They are all responsible. I believe the government has to work out how the balance is worked out. That is not for us to work out, but it is for the government to work out.

Senator GIBBS—Yes.

Mr Johnston—If I may say, that would also come under the duty of care at all levels.

Senator GIBBS—Yes. People failed to meet duty of care, so everybody is responsible. I have a quick question. I notice in your recommendation 8 that you say:

The deporting agencies records should be moved from their agencies to one central point. These records are often used as a means of control and further access to former Child Migrants.

In that last sentence, ‘control and further access to former Child Migrants’, could you elaborate on that a little bit?

Mr Johnston—Certainly. Many former child migrants are still searching for their identities, their past histories, their education standards and their health records. While these agencies that had the care of these children retain those records, these former child migrants have to go back to those agencies. It is a big problem for a child migrant to have to go back to an agency that perpetrated a lot of the misdeeds on them. It is very difficult, and when you do go back you want to get out of there as quickly as possible. But while they still hold the records they have you coming back every time. We do not want to do that. We do not want to have to do it. We want to be able to go somewhere independent, whether it is a government department or, from my perspective, the Child Migrants Trust, which has already a huge database on the child migrant issue. That remains to be sorted out. I do not want to, and I am sure most child migrants do not want to, have to go back to the agencies that caused us so much pain.

Mr Haig—Mr Johnston is right. If the agencies continue to hold the records, they continue to have some control over child migrants. This was recognised through the whole select committee, particularly by the late Audrey Wise, that not all of the agencies and not all of the churches and charitable organisations but some of them still want to continue to try to control—

Senator GIBBS—Could you give us the names of those, because many agencies have indicated to us that these days it is very easy for people to actually access their records. We really would be interested to know which agencies are making it difficult for people.

Mr Haig—I would think perhaps the Child Migrants Trust could answer that question better. If the records were all taken out of the control of all of the agencies and given to a central organisation, say, like the Child Migrants Trust, then there would be no control at all from the agencies; child migrants would not have to go back there and they would not be subjected to that control.

Mr McDaid—May I respond to that? The key word there is ‘control.’ Indeed, one of the new words in counselling these days is ‘secondary abuse.’ It is one of those new things that people recognise more and more. This is what we call secondary abuse. I will give you another example of it to make it relevant to why we are here. A few years ago, the Catholic Church got a

group of girls from St Joseph's Orphanage and Nazareth House in Geraldton. They took a trip to England called 'the sentimental journey'. This group of women, former child migrants, were told that they will be meeting parents and relations and so on. As it worked out, it was a fantastic public relations exercise—with the archbishop there seeing them, the public people on the other side. Very few met any relations, and some of the few that did the Child Migrants Trust is still fixing up. It is still going on today, so the key word in that situation is 'control' and secondary abuse is the real issue. And there is a perfect present day example of it, so the abuse is still going on. Thank you.

Mr Coleshill—Senator Gibbs, I think one of the things that sort of gets under everybody's skin regarding the agencies is that it was not until the British Health Commission had their inquiry and then went back and it was discussed in parliament that a very strong recommendation came out—and it was a very strong recommendation—that all these agencies go back to the children that they deported and now start to produce records and whatever. So you can imagine the embarrassment and the ill feeling and all those sorts of things when someone comes and knocks on your door, who has left you marooned for 50 years, and comes back and wants to start and give you some records. That is one of the things that people find very hard—that these people have sat on their personal records for so long, and the only reason they have come back now is because the health commission came and said, 'Look, if you have got these records then you had better go back and sort it out.' They were not doing it voluntarily; they were doing it because they were told to do it by the British government. I think that is the part that we all find very hard to come to grips with, and we believe that that is why they should be in a position, in a central agency, where everyone, if they are bona fide, has unparalleled access to their own records. Thank you.

CHAIR—We have got to conclude. I have got a couple of questions: one short and one perhaps longer. Do you believe all the child migrants should be automatically Australian citizens?

Mr Coleshill—Regarding citizenship, we believe that that should be automatic; it is just part and parcel of it. I mean, we all believed we were, and a lot of us found, much to our grief, we weren't. I am a pre-war man, and I found much to my sorrow that I was not an Australian. So we believe it is an automatic right that everyone should be a citizen, and that perhaps there could be an opt-out clause for people who do not believe, maybe for whatever reason they choose to give, opt out of being a citizen. That is their right I guess. I think we would certainly like to see an opt-out clause and that made retrospective. I think I speak for the association on that.

CHAIR—I certainly think it is a question I want to raise in other quarters about: what it means if you are a migrant but finish up not being a citizen of the country you are migrated to. Maybe that is a legal conundrum in the back of my head. Thank you for that. The other thing I wanted to ask you a bit about is your recommendation about a memorial or some kind of living history of what happened. Amongst other things, I think some of you have said, this morning: 'so that it will never happen again' or at least we could try to insist on that. Would you see this as some part of, say, the new National Museum or would you see it as an entirely separate memorial of some sort? Can you tell me a bit about what your thoughts are of this?

Mr Johnston—We see it as a centre of excellence whereby a history can be recorded and left there for the future to see; the lessons learnt, so to speak; the guidance to ensure that the sorts of things that happened in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s in regard to any form of migration scheme never ever happen again in the manner that they happened to us. There are no doubt going to be better ways of bringing children into this country that are going to be looked after the way they are deserved to be looked after. There is no doubt about that. But we have to be sure in our own mind that if we have served no other purpose we ensure that no future generation are ever subjected to anything close to what we were subjected to. That can take the form of a building. It can be a building equipped and adorned with memorabilia. It can be historical. It can be on tape played through a video set-up. Again, that is for the experts to determine, but we do believe we need a centre of excellence to ensure that it is recorded that, firstly, this history did happen in this country and, secondly, that it never gets another opportunity to manifest itself in the manner that it did. I think Mr McDaid might want to add a little to that, Madam Chair.

Mr McDaid—We are looking at something ourselves. We are going to do a bit of travelling—some other people and I—around different places in the world and just see what other people do, whether we do it by a voice where people walk in and can hear the tapes as they walk through, whether it is just a solid monument. We are thinking about doing something ourselves. But, of course, we would like the government to do it. It would be very nice if it were in the National Museum, in a national situation.

CHAIR—Where would you put it? I quite like the notion that it might be here, but available on the pressing of a button and coming out on video or whatever in other places. You would certainly think such a monument might need to be reflected in Western Australia. If you put it in camera, a lot of citizens in this country would say that they will not ever see it. So it is question of how you would make a national monument available to all the people.

Mr Haig—I guess if you put it in Western Australia the child migrants in Victoria would say, ‘Why don’t we have it here?’

CHAIR—Exactly.

Mr Haig—And the child migrants in New South Wales would say the same. I would think that because they were Commonwealth government schemes it really should be in the national capital of Canberra.

CHAIR—If you are going to have a look, I think one of the most shockingly moving monuments is the museum to children in Jerusalem. I do not know if you have had the opportunity to visit. Very briefly, it is an entirely black place that has one or many lights or candles—I’m not sure—but there are many mirrors, so it has many reflections. As you walk through a walk and you do not know whether you are walking over space or on the ground, you just follow the line with your hand on a guide. It is completely dark. There is nothing more than the litany of names of the children. If you have not been, I suggest anybody who does will be blown away as I was and can be just thinking about it.

Mr McDaid—That is a good concept.

CHAIR—It is an extremely good concept, because it is remembering the children. The other challenge for your memorial is that we have all seen the photos of the children leaving the UK or the children arriving in Fremantle. But much of the story that you want to tell us is not covered in those photos. That seems to me to be one of the things that I would love your further thoughts on. It is the passion with which you first opened today's session, Mr Johnston. That also needs to be recorded, doesn't it?

Mr Johnston—Yes, it does.

CHAIR—That we were not happy little vegemites who were moved from there to here—nice pictures on the boat. The boat trip might have been okay for most children. From accounts that we have received, there were some who had rough times on the boats, but most people quite enjoyed that. It was what was happening to some children in institutions before they left. Some had good experiences; some not. But it is also what happened to the children in the institutions here that seems to me a critical part of this migration process.

Mr Johnston—Yes. We were most unfortunate in that many of us could not get out of these institutions quickly enough. The likes of memorabilia we did not want to bring with us—the canes, the straps, the bruises. We wanted to leave them behind. The door was shut, and we did not want to have to go back. In hindsight, perhaps if we could have brought something with us, that would have been a big help for a national remembrance hall or whatever. That would help us today. But we do not have that. A lot of what we have to say now can only describe what was there. Perhaps that is the way we must go: voice-over scenarios and photos.

Mr Haig—It could be done in many ways, couldn't it? Some child migrants might want to write a poem, for instance. So I think it could be looked at in many different ways.

CHAIR—That is a very interesting point too. It might be that it needs to be some thing or some arrangement that allows all sorts of people to make their different contributions. We will certainly take note of your recommendation that there should be something. You are not the only people to have raised it with the committee, and what we have to do, of course, when we finish our report is make recommendations about what we believe, on the evidence from all of the witnesses, should be what the government might want to act on. It is not for us to decide. We make the recommendations, then the government will respond. A lot of people have suggested some kind of monument or memorial, so it might be something that you might like to keep working at, so that if and when there ever was the opportunity you would have the blueprints all ready to go, and who can tell the story better than you?

Mr Coleshill—Regarding the centre of remembrance, we all agree something should be done. But I think we have got to put the horse in front of the cart in as much as, first of all, we need to be recognised as a body by the government, and that it did happen, and whatever. And at this point in time, there has been no acknowledgment from the government. Senator Andrew Murray spoke about publicity and things like that, and I am sure that has to be a hit list somewhere about what happened to child migrants. Over the years I have been so much of it—there has been publicity, it never gets to the papers; there are press releases which never hit the deck. When you go home the next day you think, 'Why didn't they do it? Wasn't it interesting enough?' It has got to be interesting enough, but it just never makes it. I sometimes wonder if there is a hidden agenda, that maybe because this stuff is such an embarrassment to the federal

government or the state government it never seems to leak out. Even today, in Sydney when we were there, it is amazing the number of people who came up and said, 'Look, we really did not know this ever happened.' So it has never been allowed to get out. We do have a media which can tell the whole world everything overnight if it chooses to. But for some reason or other it never gets out, and I think that is the pity of it.

CHAIR—I note that you have made some comments. I would just like your final where-you-fall on an apology from government, not the only thing government might do. I note in your submission that you say, on balance, yes, despite the fact that a lot of people do not. Is that the opinion you put on record today?

Mr Johnston—Yes. There are numbers who suggest they would like an apology. There are numbers who would suggest an apology is not going to undo the damage. So those who suggest no have to be outweighed by those who wish an apology to be made, because that is their answer, the beginning of the healing process maybe for some, and we cannot deny them that. If that is what they need, then that is what they should get, I believe.

Mr McDaid—An apology on its own without any backup is a waste of time. An apology is a Pontius Pilate act and just a waste of time on its own.

Mr Haig—I think that is what a lot of members have said: 'Look, what is the use of an apology if nothing else is done?'

CHAIR—Thank you very much. You have made a very eloquent submission.

Senator TCHEN—Mr Johnston and gentleman, I am sorry I missed some of your discussion; I had to attend another committee. Having heard Senator Knowles' s initial questions to you, and some of your answers and also catching some of your responses to Senator Murray, I think we are probably talking about the same thing so I do not want to repeat those questions. Can I firstly ask you: is your organisation, although called international, basically an Australian organisation?

Mr Johnston—We are an international organisation, Senator. We have membership within the United States—

Senator TCHEN—But by and large you are Australian?

Mr Johnston—By and large Australian, predominantly Australian yes.

Senator TCHEN—I am on the right track in that case. I must say—I say this to you from a personal belief and indeed a conviction—that no-one who comes to this country as a migrant, whether they come voluntarily or by force, has not contributed to the development and improvement of this country. And certainly we have seen, and I would say, that the contribution they have made is greater in proportion to the hardship and difficulties they had to face. And over the course of this inquiry we have come across many child migrants who have demonstrated how they have overcome their personal difficulties and achieved great things. So I was wondering whether in your pursuit of justice—and I was looking at your aims and objectives—you are willing to also help promote amongst the communities the contributions

that former child migrants have made to this country, and as you know they have made contributions—a great deal.

Mr Johnston—The Maltese, did you say, Senator?

Senator TCHEN—No, your members, the child migrants have made great contributions to this country, and some of them have achieved, by conventional standards, high standing. My colleague Senator Murray is probably a very good example of it, but there are other examples. Some of them just simply achieve by being good citizens, and I think that is worth promoting as well. I was looking at your aims and objectives—basically you are focusing on bringing their plight to the community's notice. I was wondering whether your association might add to your objectives and also turn your attention and some of your commendable energy to helping the community understand the contributions they have made. In other words, what I am saying to you is: are you prepared to forgive?

Mr Johnston—Thank you Senator. You are right. There have been a great number of former child migrants that have contributed very constructively to this country's wealth.

Senator TCHEN—They all have, Mr Johnston, they all have.

Mr Johnston—And in so far as our ability to spread the word, so to speak, we are a self-funded organisation; we have not had to rely on any other support. All members are former child migrants or families. We try to live within a very tight budget which does not go very far. We might get one magazine out a year and it takes all the membership in that one hit. We do everything we can within our very limited resources and we do it well. We do get the word out, maybe not as wide as we would like to get it. We would love to be able to put mass circulations out and let the wider community know what we are doing—we just do not have the resources. It is not likely within our own infrastructure that we will ever have the resources to do the scale that we wish we were able to do it. Perhaps that could be an issue the Senate team may have a look at.

Senator TCHEN—But also in the things that you require the governments to do, could you also require the government to make some recognition or help the government to come to some sort of recognition of the contributions that you have made to the nation?

Mr Johnston—Yes. We were quite staggered that we rated no mention in federation. In the federation celebrations that have been on recently—in fact Channel 2 is still showing some of those highlights—and nowhere in any of the centenary celebrations have child migrants even so much as had their name mentioned. It is a shame, because we are a large number, a significant number, and we have contributed very structurally to this country. All other migrating people that arrived here and built this country are mentioned—and appropriately so—but not us; we do not rate up there with them, and that is very sad. We should have got mentioned there and we should be able to hold our head up proud. But that is just part of the 'keep them down' thing that has been happening to us all along. It is just part of it that 'no-one wants to know', or 'keep them where we can control them'.

CHAIR—We are way out of time. Last comment, Mr Haig?

Mr Haig—I just wanted to say that I think that the place of excellence and learning, and what you are talking about, I believe, could all come into that. That would be a place for the recognition of what child migrants have given to this country, culturally and economically.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your contribution today. You have pretty powerfully made the case on behalf of the child migrants. Thank you for that, again, on behalf of the committee. We can also say, in conclusion, that it was a former child migrant who discovered that at the migration museum in Adelaide there was no mention of the child migrants from Britain. That has now been remedied, and we went and saw the plaque that acknowledges that. It was very recently unveiled by Minister Brown in the South Australian government. Also there has been some contribution from the government—\$30,000 over three years—to assist with making the Child Migrants Trust accessible to people in South Australia. They are some small steps on the way. Thank you for your contribution today.

[11.08 a.m.]

BUSH, Ms Sue, Senior Administrator Australia, Child Migrants Trust

HUMPHREYS, Ms Margaret, International Director, Child Migrants Trust

THWAITES, Mr Ian, Senior Social Worker, Child Migrants Trust

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers all evidence to be heard in public, but should you wish to give your evidence, part of your evidence or answers to specific questions in camera, you may ask to do so and the committee would give consideration to your request. We have before it your submission, No. 132. Do you wish to make any alterations to that submission?

Ms Humphreys—No.

CHAIR—I invite you now to make an opening statement and then field questions?

Ms Humphreys—Thank you. Madam Chair. Really, what can I say? We follow such an impressive and moving degree of first-hand personal and painful testimony from so many former child migrants. Over the last few weeks I am sure we have all been saddened and at times angered by their evidence to this committee.

Nothing, but nothing, could ever more powerfully convey the child migrant experience than those who have endured it. The loneliness, fear, desperation for family identity and belonging are a burden most child migrants live with everyday of their lives. You have before you a very substantial submission, I think, prepared by the trust, which outlines our perspective at least on these barbaric schemes and their long-term consequences for so many.

In recent reports, the experiences of former child migrants have been variously described as ‘of the most exceptional depravity’, ‘barbaric’, ‘war crimes without a war’. Have governments met their responsibility to the victims—and I use that word advisedly—of this exceptional depravity with equally exceptional generosity and humility? I am sad to say I think not. Funding has been available, from both the British and the Australian government, but it has not been nearly enough.

You have heard evidence from many former child migrants. They were a uniquely vulnerable and defenceless group as children: easy prey for bullies, abusers and paedophiles. Until quite recently, many, as you have heard, were shamed into silence as adults by the abuse they experienced as children. It takes enormous courage for adult men and women who were sexually abused to give a full and detailed account of their terrible experiences. Consequently, many felt powerless against the vast resources of governments, churches and charities, and their depressingly familiar tactics, I am sad to say, to avoid doing the decent thing: passing the buck, pleading ignorance but not bothering to uncover the facts, mystifying the uninitiated with fine sounding rhetoric—often a smoke screen for the lack of any decisive action.

Child migration is riddled with contradictions. It is a world where basic assumptions are just turned upside down. We have orphans whose parents were very much alive when their children

were shipped overseas. We have schemes administered by churches and charities which were neither godly nor charitable. We have the war orphan propaganda, yet war orphans were specifically excluded from these schemes—specifically excluded. We have large isolated child-care institutions that, I am sad to say, for many—not all but many—were more suited to the needs of paedophiles than the care of our vulnerable children.

In this context, it is probably not surprising that progress has been painfully slow. In my view and in the view of my colleagues, there has been a profound failure of professional intelligence and imagination, and a perpetuation of those vested interests which allowed these schemes to operate until 1967. Despite almost 15 years of the trust informing governments—and I mean all governments, not just the Australian government; the British government as well—of the terrible human consequences of child migration, we still lack any real recognition. There is recognition but so much more needs to be done. Services are not just slim line; they are anorexic. Families could so easily be reunited but they will remain cruelly separated if the present levels of funding are to remain.

Finally, we firmly believe at the Child Migrants Trust that if the British and the Australian government were to work closely together I could certainly come before you in five years and say that every former child migrant in Australia knows who their family are and whom they belong to. Thank you.

CHAIR—Are there any other comments from Mr Thwaites or Ms Bush?

Mr Thwaites—No.

Senator MURRAY—I will leave most of the questioning to my colleagues. Throughout this inquiry, the Child Migrants Trust has been named as the body primarily responsible for advancing the cause of former child migrants in Australia—and elsewhere—and for getting government and public opinion mobilised for support for their cause. There is no other organisation that has probably had more access to the range of experiences that child migrants have expressed. Therefore, with that background, I ask you, Ms Humphreys and Mr Thwaites—and Mr Thwaites, I recognise that you have attended all of the hearings but you have also been present at many of the confidential hearings as support for people making submissions: has anything emerged from this inquiry which adds to your knowledge of what had gone before? Has there been anything which has surprised you or increased or altered your understanding of the issues we are faced with?

Ms Humphreys—In terms of the child migrants' experiences, there has been very little that I have heard in public or private sessions that is significantly different from my understanding from working with child migrants and their families for the past 14 years—although an observation is that the concentration in the evidence has been slanted towards the degree of abuse and humiliation that many suffered. I have noticed that. There was little opportunity at times for people to talk about their families, whether they have met them or not, because they were so heavily into talking about their experiences as children. But to answer your question, have I learned any more, I think not. But there has been information, particularly from Dr Barry Coldrey, which was enlightening.

Senator KNOWLES—In what way?

Ms Humphreys—When he talked with you about some of what I perceive to be negative processes which were occurring in the early nineties in Western Australia, I recall Dr Coldrey talking about how he arrived in Western Australia and what his role was at that time. I think that that, for me, was very revealing because, of course, the investigation into any abuse of children is a matter for the police. So I was rather alarmed in a sense that we had a knowledgeable person but an untrained person taking evidence from people who have been abused. I think that was probably new for me. Does that answer your question, Senator Murray?

Senator MURRAY—Yes. Mr Thwaites?

Mr Thwaites—Senator Murray, I would agree with the comments the director has made. I think the extent of the pain that we saw in the evidence of child migrants is the kind of experiences that workers with the trust see on a day-to-day basis. It was certainly a very difficult experience to have such a concentration of accounts and testimonies from people who were devastated, particularly afterwards. Sitting with people, again and again after the sessions had concluded when people left the room, much more came out.

CHAIR—What sorts of things, Mr Thwaites?

Mr Thwaites—I think further incidents of abuse. At times, there was even more distressing information than they conveyed to the committee. Sometimes people gave further accounts and further information about specific incidents, about specific perpetrators. I share the director's comments that the focus of people's testimony in this inquiry has been very much upon their experiences as a child rather than their experiences in meeting the families and the impact that that has made. There have been many times when you have had people before you when I certainly thought it was a great pity really that there had not been more time for you to hear something of the changes for them and for their families as a result of meeting their family and learning more about their identity.

CHAIR—What were those changes?

Mr Thwaites—The changes in their lives?

CHAIR—You just said it is a shame we did not hear some more about those changes. What were those changes?

Mr Thwaites—I think the integration of their experiences where certainly workers at the trust—and I will speak of my experience—have seen on many many hundreds of occasions child migrants presenting initially very unconfident and very fearful. To give you an example: I can think of a man who actually appeared before you. In his first contact with the trust he said, 'I am going to be 50 years old next week. I have nobody. I have just made my will. I am leaving everything to the lost dogs home, because in a way they are my kin.' The trust has worked with that man for three years. He has now met with his mother, and his brothers and sisters. He is planning to return to the UK. He has undertaken a whole range of changes in his life. His social network has developed. He is just a more confident integrated person. He is able to tell a story about his life. He still has a lot of difficulty in the chronology of events. He is still very confused. He still becomes very angry. He is still very hurt. The work with him will be long term, but the changes are now; they are immediate. I should say that, because I have worked

with his family in the UK as well, the changes in their lives are quite dramatic as well, because they knew they had a missing person.

Senator MURRAY—Ms Humphreys, your organisation is almost unique amongst those who have appeared as witnesses or have given us submissions in that you are the only organisation which shares with the committee a knowledge of many of the confidential submissions, because most people are obviously only aware of the public submissions which are available from the secretary's office. One of the things the committee can never know is the representativeness of what we have received. I ask: to your knowledge, have we received the most extreme or the most tragic or the most horrific or the most expressive submissions? Based on your case history, are there equivalent experiences and views of child migrants in your case history records who have not put in a submission? In other words, is what we are seeing representative, or is it the worst examples of what went on?

Ms Humphreys—I can only answer that on what I have seen and observed, and I certainly have not seen all the submissions, because, as you say, some are in private. But from what I have seen I think they are fairly representative—yes I do. I think the trust must never lose sight of—and I hope that we always convey this—that there are child migrants, and perhaps they have not come before this committee, who feel that their life in Australia as young children was not terrible. There are some—they are not in great number, but I have to say there are some, and are pleased to say so. But their need for knowing about their family and who they are is just as profound, and they still have needs in that area. But I do think from what I have seen that you have had a representative view, yes I do.

Senator MURRAY—My last question is this. The committee will concern itself with recommendations which result in a money component, but probably most of what we talk about will involve money. My belief is that at the top of the list of what people need is everything to do with their identity—records, reunification, connection, so a big package—and the other is the counselling area, the ability to continue to manage the problems that have arisen from their treatment. Is my assessment correct: that dealing with these two issues, whilst requiring specific programs, does not need vast amounts of money; it is several million, it is not tens of millions? Is that an accurate judgment?

Ms Humphreys—I think so. I think in our submission I have said it needs a substantial amount of money but I mean it is not phenomenal. It is not going to go on for ever, and I think an injection of a reasonable amount of money, as I said, would enable the trust at least to come before you in five years and to say that the job is done in this particular area. I am fairly confident of that.

Senator GIBBS—I am madly trying to find where you have offices. You have offices in Western Australia, Melbourne and New Zealand?

Ms Humphreys—No, the UK. We are not in New Zealand.

Senator GIBBS—When we were in Queensland last week, the representatives of the government were there, and the Queensland government has put \$2 million into resources, but it is only resources—offices to set up: would it help the trust if you had an office in Queensland? Do you think it would be necessary to have an office in Queensland?

Mr Thwaites—Senator Gibbs, the trust has raised the profile of the need for direct services in Queensland, particularly over the last three years, because our demand for service there is very high. At present we have more than 100 clients without even having an office in Queensland—we are servicing more than 100 people in Queensland—and it is an area where we have had quite a long waiting list for services. There is a desperate need for an office there.

I think in particular because of the Forde inquiry and the issues that came out of that in relation to Neerkol in particular the trust provides services to a significant number of people who have very intense counselling needs. So it is an area that we are particularly concerned about, and the trust actually opened the Forde inquiry. Margaret Humphreys and I gave evidence on the first day, and that was followed by many former child migrants in Brisbane. And there were some high hopes that from that particular inquiry—because it dealt head on with the issues of abuse in Queensland institutions—an outcome would be in place by now really where there would be services for former child migrants because it did appear that the need was recognised.

The Queensland government has made available \$2 million, I understand, from which the interest can be used to provide a range of benefits for people who have been in care in Queensland, but our discussions with the Forde Foundation have taken us nowhere in terms of being able to access those funds to set up an office. So, at the end of the day at this point in time, child migrants in Queensland are actually no better off in terms of services that they need.

Senator GIBBS—There is a new minister now—and there was nothing wrong with the old minister—and the new minister is a very compassionate person. Have you approached her at all and put these views to her?

Mr Thwaites—At this point we have not. I met with representatives of the state government in November last year to specifically find out how we might access the Forde Foundation funds, but we have not yet approached the new minister.

Senator GIBBS—It might be a good idea to do that because, from the fact that the government has outlaid \$2 million they obviously want to help, so maybe they need a little direction in what they do.

Mr Thwaites—My understanding was that there was a difficulty in the set-up of the foundation in that they are unable to fund organisations because of the way the trust is organised. It was suggested to us that numbers of former child migrants could perhaps approach the foundation for funds for counselling, and then those funds be used to fund this organisation. It seemed a rather convoluted way to go about it. We are hopeful there might be a solution, but there are some difficulties.

Senator GIBBS—Maybe the minister might allocate separate money rather than it coming out of the fund.

Mr Thwaites—We will do that, thank you.

Senator KNOWLES—Before we get into the nitty-gritty of your recommendations, could I ask you a little bit about your structure. On the side, I was hoping to save a bit of time by cross-

examining Senator Murray. I am interested in how many staff you have here and in the UK, where they are based, what outside people you resource, whether that is done pro bono—and maybe you would just like to give us a bit of a thumbnail sketch of people and the family tree in terms of the migrants trust, as opposed to anything else.

Ms Humphreys—I will try and answer that quite clearly from top to bottom, if you like. We have three trustees: two are founder trustees and they have been with the trust from the very beginning, so we have continuity. They are based in the UK. We have a trustee here in Australia, and we have a patron, as you probably know: Sir Ninian Stephen. Perhaps at this point it is useful to just add that our trustees are not there in name only. They are very hands-on trustees and have regular access to child migrants, whether here or in England, and the trustees have visited here on many occasions. I think it is very important to say that they are very involved in the organisation.

Senator KNOWLES—How many are there?

Ms Humphreys—Three, but there are plans to extend that, particularly in Australia as well. There is one director, one senior social worker, two social workers in Australia: one in Perth and one in Melbourne; an administrative officer, Sue Bush here, who is based at the Melbourne office and who has been with us a very long time; and a part-time administrator, which is a fairly new post, in Western Australia, which is funded by the state government there. In the UK we have a family researcher, a project evaluator and two full-time social workers, and two administrative officers—an office manager and an assistant.

Senator KNOWLES—Thank you for that.

CHAIR—Are the trustees remunerated at all?

Ms Humphreys—No, they are not.

CHAIR—How are they chosen?

Ms Humphreys—They are voluntary. Really by their skills, their expertise, their interest, particularly their interest in this issue.

CHAIR—What sort of expertise: financial or social?

Ms Humphreys—Yes, financial, social, legal and political. One of the trustees, the Hon. Joan Taylor, is a longstanding local politician—yes, those sorts of skills.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator KNOWLES—How long have you been trying to get increased funding from federal and state governments in Australia?

Ms Humphreys—It is almost continuous really.

Senator KNOWLES—Over the last 10 years?

Ms Humphreys—Yes, over a decade, but particularly in terms of increased funding and wanting to develop the trust further in Australia—offices in Queensland and Sydney—and in developing our services, particularly over the last four years. For the maintenance of funding, the requests are constant because, both in Australia and in the UK, we submit very regular reports to our funders. That is part of any reasonable accountability and for information to keep ministers up to date with what is occurring.

Senator KNOWLES—You were not here for the previous witnesses, so I would like to just go back through some of the questions that I was seeking their advice about, and that is the way in which you would see this funding being most beneficial. I notice your first recommendation is that you need ‘a secure and moderately substantial—and I like that phrase—funding—

Ms Humphreys—Carefully worded—it is all relative!

Senator KNOWLES—to develop and complete its specialist humanitarian family reunion service’. What I would like you to do for me, if you would be so kind, is to spell out what you mean by ‘to complete your specialist humanitarian family reunion service.’ In other words, what areas would that funding—the moderately substantial funding—cover? Then I will come to what you think the moderately substantial funding actually has.

Ms Humphreys—Perhaps both Ian Thwaites and I can answer that. We will carve it up. What you are asking me is: what do we want the money for? I think we have made it clear and it is obvious—and I will go over it—that it is for family reunifications and alongside that the counselling that is required to go with that. It is not just about finding families; it is about how we bring those families together and what is needed to do that to bring about good family relationships that are going to be meaningful and go on and develop. It is about finding families, reunification and the vital skilled counselling work that needs to go on both, not just at this end, but in the UK as well primarily.

Senator KNOWLES—To be more specific, do you have a wish list budget? If someone were to say to you today, ‘You have an amount of money to come your way which may cover your expectations and desires to fulfil your role as you would see fit’, how would you allocate those funds? I am not trying to be pedantic. I hope you understand. I really would like to know how you would see it in terms of a breakdown of staff, travel, accommodation, counselling and all of those essential components that go in to making the trust work effectively—and the number of years.

Ms Humphreys—Ian has been working on that, so he might like to answer that.

Mr Thwaites—Perhaps I should start by outlining very briefly the current situation. You already know that we have one social worker in Melbourne and one in Perth. Each of those social workers currently has caseloads in excess of 300 clients. We know that the main centres of need for our services, apart from Melbourne and Perth, are Sydney and Brisbane, so the development plan that we have would be to have four offices in Australia with social work staff at each of those.

Senator KNOWLES—Can I just interrupt you there? When we were in Adelaide, if you remember, there was much criticism in Adelaide that they had to rely on a social worker from Melbourne. Why are you excluding Adelaide in that equation?

Mr Thwaites—I can come to that, Senator Knowles. I was starting with the basics of where we would have offices and then if I could then move on to some of the regional visiting that we think would be sustainable to keep the amount moderate.

Senator KNOWLES—Moderately substantial?

Mr Thwaites—Moderately substantial—I stand corrected. We currently operate on a one-worker model, and that has many difficulties—having only one social worker apart from the large numbers of clients they are providing services to. It does not provide coverage for leave, for illness, and whenever a staff member leaves it throws the agency into crisis and hand-over becomes quite difficult. It also does not provide any capacity for choice, gender issues—if we have only got a male staff member at an office there may be a situation where it may be more appropriate to have a female staff member.

So we are quite committed to developing our service. If we have four officers, we have two social workers at each office and that would take account of leave coverage and gender preference, and just give us more flexibility about the service that we provide. So that adds up to eight social workers. The overriding need in Australia would be to have a senior worker based here, and I think one of those eight people would be a senior worker, based in one of the eastern states I expect. We would need full-time administrative support in each of those offices, and we would need to have—

Senator KNOWLES—One person?

Mr Thwaites—One person I think would be sufficient. We would welcome more.

Senator KNOWLES—Then it becomes more than moderately substantial.

Mr Thwaites—I would need to know what the definitions were. One and a half would probably be very helpful but we are looking at one administrative officer.

CHAIR—I wonder about your experience with one social worker, which sounds to me, apart from the load, an appalling arrangement when you get up and the only person you can talk to is yourself for the whole day and/or the administrative person in the office who has the same burden of being the only person. Maybe you can provide further information about whether it is optimal to have a one-person office manager.

Mr Thwaites—I think it probably is not. The context I am coming from is not having any. We have had no administrative support in Perth until last year. We have had an unfunded position in Melbourne that we have had to pump funds into from the UK to keep going. I am sure you are right. We would be looking to have a sufficient travel budget so that we could visit regional centres on a predictable regular basis that would also allow us to work in with other agencies in those centres as well.

Last month the Minister for Community Services in Adelaide announced a \$30,000 package over three years—\$10,000 a year—funding for the trust to enable us to provide just that—a visiting service. And whilst that is, by any standards, a very modest grant it will enable the trust to visit three times a year.

Senator KNOWLES—How much was that?

Mr Thwaites—Ten thousand a year over three years.

Senator KNOWLES—Ten thousand a year over three years for regional centres?

Mr Thwaites—No, that is the Adelaide part that has been announced.

Senator KNOWLES—Sorry.

Mr Thwaites—Should I go back over that?

Senator KNOWLES—Yes, if you would not mind.

Mr Thwaites—I have not given you a figure for what we would need for travel—

Senator KNOWLES—Fine, we will come back to that travel one and regional centres in a minute. What was the other one—\$10,000 over three years.

Mr Thwaites—I was returning to your question about Adelaide; that is the grant that has been offered by the South Australian government.

Senator KNOWLES—Regional centres—which regional centres would you include?

Mr Thwaites—Well, major regional centres in each of the states.

Senator KNOWLES—Where is the greatest area of demand?

Mr Thwaites—In Western Australia we would need to be going to Geraldton for example.

Senator KNOWLES—Rockhampton?

Mr Thwaites—We would be going to Rockhampton. We would look at going further north as well, probably Townsville.

Ms Humphreys—Tasmania.

CHAIR—That is a state.

Ms Humphreys—Yes. When we were talking about that I was not meaning it was a regional centre. We were concentrating on Adelaide.

CHAIR—On behalf of Tasmanians who would come and poke us in the nose later—

Ms Humphreys—We must not overlook Tasmania where there are certainly a substantial number of child migrants, and we try to visit there as regularly as possible. But those funds have to come from the UK, and we are presently from the UK supporting Australia this year to the amount of \$40,000.

Senator GIBBS—Forty thousand Australian dollars?

Ms Humphreys—Sorry, £40,000.

Senator GIBBS—With the rate of exchange that is good.

Ms Humphreys—Yes, it is very good, but unfortunately our funders in the United Kingdom and, particularly, of course, the British government, do not allow us to transfer money that they provide for services in the UK into Australia. So for money to be transferred from the UK to here to support services, that has to come from individual charitable donations.

Senator GIBBS—Really.

Senator KNOWLES—I just want to pursue this budget thing. What else? There is obviously a rent expense.

Mr Thwaites—Yes.

Senator KNOWLES—So would we be talking about accommodation for those four offices?

Mr Thwaites—Yes.

Senator KNOWLES—That is what you would consider essential for the trust to provide a service. Can I now move on to what you would consider is required in terms of the cost of the travel, accommodation and so forth associated with reunification? What would you see as the area of unmet need, I suppose, is what I am driving at with those whom you know are requiring assistance? What do you think is required in a monetary sense?

Ms Humphreys—I certainly think if we are talking about the unmet needs in the child migrant community here in Australia, over and above the service provision we have just looked at in terms of a travel fund there is quite certainly a need for a travel fund to be established here in Australia to help people and to assist them to actually get back to where their family is—whether it be in the UK or in America or wherever—for their meetings with their family. The British government, as you know, have put in quite a bit of money for family reunions, particularly with travel, over a period of three years. It had very specific criteria, and we can see right now the unmet need from that, that there is a considerable need for people to go back a second time. There is a need for people to go back and meet: if it is a cousin, it is very important. So the criteria are very important in looking at any government travel fund. So there is a need for a travel fund here in Australia to assist people to return to their families. Of that we have no doubt.

Senator KNOWLES—Would you be good enough to provide a supplementary submission to the committee—and I am sorry to ask you this because I know that you are strapped for resources—about what you would consider as an appropriate criterion?

Ms Humphreys—Certainly.

Senator KNOWLES—And also a pro forma budget for your operational costs, and also what you think the costs associated for the people affected would be in tandem with what is happening from the British end?

Ms Humphreys—Yes.

Senator KNOWLES—I know that is probably a pretty tall ask, but we are really getting to the sharp end of things at this stage of the committee hearings and clearly you are the best people qualified to offer the committee advice on such matters.

CHAIR—Can that be taken on notice?

Senator KNOWLES—Yes, I have made that clear that it is on notice.

Ms Humphreys—We would be happy to do that. We would be very happy to provide almost a business plan for how we wish to develop in Australia, and the unmet needs that you are talking about. When would you like it by?

Senator KNOWLES—To say as soon as possible is trite, but how long do you need?

CHAIR—Would it be possible before Easter? That gives you about three weeks?

Ms Humphreys—Yes.

CHAIR—That might be useful, because it would be helpful if we are putting questions to the UK government.

Ms Humphreys—Yes, absolutely.

Senator KNOWLES—That would be very helpful. I have one final question, because that will really answer most of my questions and we will then know where we are trying to head. How many outside counsellors do you currently use?

Ms Humphreys—Outside of the agency?

Senator KNOWLES—Yes.

Ms Humphreys—We very rarely use outside counsellors.

Mr Thwaites—We tend to use outside counsellors for specific situations. We particularly use them with clients in New Zealand where we do not have easy access to clients, and that will be

around conveying particularly sensitive pieces of news. In Australia, we try to find a way to either meet with the clients ourselves—either get to them or they will get to us. There are times when urgent information needs to be given to people, and the most important consideration is that that is done in a proper, professional and sensitive manner which would, in our view, be face to face on all occasions really. So on those occasions we may contract out a specific piece of work with a written briefing to another agency. We found many difficulties with that. We have found many difficulties around people's lack of understanding of overall issues, and I think, more importantly, the need for a relationship that takes in events before and after that particular information exchange, particularly if the information is about family being found and helping somebody to begin to move towards a reunion, the preparation and all that has to go before. So we do use outside counsellors. We often experience considerable difficulty with it in terms of the outcome.

Senator KNOWLES—One final thing just in terms of that budget. Could you also bear in mind the contribution that the churches make. We had evidence last week that the Catholic church, in particular, was continuing to contribute substantially to a number of those areas, and they gave a guarantee that, while they were seeking government assistance for the trust or whatever other reason, they were not seeking to abrogate their stated responsibility and commitment that they have given in terms of funding. So we have a number of levels of funding that are currently there. We need to look at the top-up thing to that existing base.

Ms Humphreys—Sure.

Senator TCHEN—Ms Humphreys, I would like to ask you some questions about the Maltese former child migrants. Before I do that, earlier Mr Johnston from the international association of former child migrants referred to some directive from the government that the trust is not to provide further services to child migrants. When questioned he said he actually does not know the background, but the trust might be able to give some further information. It sounds to me as if there may be other contexts which might be misinterpreted. Can you throw some light on that?

Ms Humphreys—Throw some light on that statement?

Senator TCHEN—Yes.

Ms Humphreys—I am not actually sure what Mr Johnston said. Are you talking about our present funding?

Senator TCHEN—Yes, within Australia. I am not quite sure of the context either. It was one of the references he made about the difficulties the child migrants face.

Ms Humphreys—This last year has been a particularly worrying year for the Child Migrants Trust in Australia—I mean particularly worrying, because our funders here, or the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, have really said, quite explicitly that our funding is under threat. I have in fact brought information—our reports to government and our recent correspondence—which I would quite like to table, if that is possible today, which really sets out the present situation in as much that our funding is certainly under threat. Even our present minimal level of funding is under threat. Indeed, I think at the very beginning of this current

funding year our funders were explicitly told that, at the end of the year, we should ensure that, basically, we had no clients at the end of this year.

CHAIR—Who told you that, Ms Humphreys?

Ms Humphreys—The correspondence is in there. Is it from the minister directly or from the first secretary?

Mr Thwaites—That particular comment was made at a meeting with the department of immigration in Melbourne following a consultation, as I understand it, with the first assistant secretary.

Senator TCHEN—I come from a multicultural background and I understand that the same comment has been made to many service providers in the multicultural areas. It is in the context that the departments in the settlement service believe that it is more appropriate to try to provide specialised skills within the mainstream services rather than try to develop specialised services outside the mainstream—in the multicultural area. I do not know whether this particular comment is because the department treats its former child migrant cases as part of the multicultural settlement funding model. If that is the case, I suppose the report of this committee will throw a different light on it.

The other issue I would like to mention is that a witness in Rockhampton commented to this committee that the child migrant may face similar problems as those of adoptees from different cultures. Do you have any comments on that? Do you see that perhaps your services might need to continue on and that some of your experience might be useful?

Ms Humphreys—Yes. I would like to clarify that I have understood it correctly—you had evidence from someone who was comparing the difficulties of child migrants now, in terms of identity and cultural background knowledge, with intercountry adoptions?

Senator TCHEN—Yes: possible future problems.

Ms Humphreys—I have heard that raised and the trust has, over many years, contributed to the debate—both in Australia and in England—on intercountry adoptions. There are many worrying issues related to intercountry adoptions and other matters relating to child care, actually. There is much to be learned from the child migrants' experiences. We must not lose sight of that. There is so much here for contemporary practice and policy. Of course it is a concern when children are being adopted from another culture or country. We really need to be very sensitive, at an early stage, to the provisions that we need to put in place for a long time—20 or 30 years on.

Senator TCHEN—Yes. I would like to come back to the former Maltese child migrants. The committee has received very little evidence, either about the Maltese children or from the Maltese children themselves: in fact, none. Do you have any knowledge about it? Could you perhaps share that knowledge with the committee—particularly whether you have experience in assisting them or whether they have unique problems and what form of assistance they might need.

Ms Humphreys—Thank you, Senator, for raising the issue of the Maltese. They certainly have been, in a sense, overlooked. Certainly in the British inquiry, not a lot of emphasis was given to that small but nevertheless significant group of men who left Malta and were placed largely in Western Australia. This group of people are slowly coming forward for services and help. Indeed, very recently a group of Maltese men and their wives and families came to one of our social gatherings in Perth. I saw that as the start of inviting them to approach the trust if they needed services and to join in some of the social occasions when child migrants get together.

Certainly, from the Maltese people that I have met here in Australia—and I have met quite a few—many came over to Perth with I think the consent or at least the knowledge of their parents. That is my understanding. Their experiences in some of the orphanages in Western Australia, I am told—and I was there when you were given evidence in Perth about their experience—was pretty appalling. They could not speak the language. There were enormous difficulties. Indeed that may well be why they have remained a small community that generally keeps in touch with themselves only in Western Australia. But I think that they are coming forward now. We had quite a memorable evening with them and their families. I am sure that they require services and indeed may well require the assistance of a travel fund.

Senator TCHEN—Ms Humphreys, when you provide those other written additional submissions, you might care to turn your attention to this issue as well.

Ms Humphreys—Certainly. We would be delighted to do that.

CHAIR—We have been told that early on—if not still, but please fill me in—when people contacted the Child Migrants Trust they were asked not to have contact with any other organisation. Is that accurate?

Ms Humphreys—It is not accurate. It is very inaccurate.

CHAIR—Where, do you suppose, they got that story from?

Ms Humphreys—I have brought today a folder which has correspondence in it from the Australian Child Migrant Foundation. I sense that it probably comes from there. I do not know. Many years ago, we discussed with child migrant groups how we could deal with this difficulty of agencies carrying out the same work. We have limited resources—all of us; not just the trust, but everyone else. Those resources are limited. They have to be used properly, to the best advantage that we can get out of them. On several occasions we were involved in very long, protracted searches for child migrants' families—their mothers and fathers. These searches can cost up to £1,000 and £1,500 for one family and then you find at the end of that search that there is actually another agency looking for that family as well, using precious resources. But not only that, there are other issues as well about privacy, about a mother perhaps being contacted twice, and all those casework issues. We thought how can we deal with that issue about really using resources properly? What can we do about that? So for a short period of time, we did talk to clients about one agency policy, if you like. If you are working with the Child Migrants Trust, would you ask then someone else to find your family at the same time—bearing in mind that time is a critical issue; it is desperate; every day counts. You can understand why people would do that. So we tried to bring some clarity around it. We saw very quickly that this

would not work. Quite frankly, it is the therapeutic relationship that is the most important. If you have developed with your client a relationship that is based on trust, it is that that has to work. It is that and that alone.

So, yes, we did put in place that—not to say people should not go to other people, I might add; that was not the intention—many years ago. It was short-lived. But why this is raised as a contemporary issue before this Senate one wonders. Why it was raised with the Health Select Committee members as a current issue and a problem one wonders. I thought that perhaps I should submit today our agency's correspondence with the foundation. I would ask that it be kept private and confidential. There are ministerial briefings in those papers which must remain confidential. I would ask for that assurance, otherwise I must not leave it.

CHAIR—That assurance is given, Ms Humphreys. We thank you very much for that. As we understand it, that difference between organisations is now pretty much gone; that people are much more cooperative. Is that the state of the play now? No, they have both frowned.

Ms Humphreys—It has been for the last seven or eight years. What do you do in these situations? It has been very difficult, and I am sure you all realise it has been a very difficult journey for everybody, but what do you do? You put procedures in place and you put protocols in place—they are all in place. I do not know of any agency that would come before you and say they are not in place. I am telling you they are in place from the trust point of view and they are working, and have been for a very long time.

CHAIR—What do you suppose is the reason most of the witnesses coming to talk to us in camera or on the public record about their experiences concentrated on what happened to them as children?

Ms Humphreys—What do I think that was about?

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Humphreys—I think it was because it happened to them here. I think when the Health Select Committee, the British MPs came here, they certainly spoke about that. But these were British MPs here in another country, and what could they do about that really? I think when people came before you, they were saying, 'This happened here in Australia and you are Australians, and I am an Australian and I am here, and I have been here a very long time, so I am going to tell you, and I have to tell you, and please do not ever ask me to tell it again, please.' I think that is what they were saying.

CHAIR—I understood that for most of the people. To reawaken these memories was a very painful and a very generous contribution that the witnesses have made to our inquiry. I was interested in you saying that maybe if there had been more time they would have talked about what happened since, particularly since they made contact with their families. So if you wanted to—in fact, I am sure sometimes the questions might have allowed that to happen if we had had the time. In fact, I am struck by the fact that all those witnesses wanted to tell us what happened when they were children.

Ms Humphreys—So were we.

CHAIR—You might care to comment on this. We just had some very powerful evidence before yours that no one listened, no-one heard, no-one wanted to believe it. And I get the sense, ‘And by God you will hear it now! Even though it costs us horribly to say it, this is our chance to put it on the public record.’ So I would just be interested if you would concur with that.

Ms Humphreys—Very much so. We would very much concur with that. I was astounded at times when people sat before you who had only just recently returned from meeting their families, and they had been very very good reunions—very warm, very welcoming and very emotional. Actually they had not been back here long, and I had thought that they were going to talk to you about their family reunions and why it had not happened 40 years ago, and how positive it had been. But, in fact, when they came before you they talked about the sadness, the cruelty and the abuse in the lives, and they could not get to the point which was about how things have been better over the last few years, or this is what this reunion has meant to me, because foremost, the pain and the degradation of the childhood came forward. The child re-emerged and it was ‘I want to tell you, and please listen.’ That really is what these hearings have been about. We have had these discussions ourselves about what we think happened. Yes, you have to know.

CHAIR—Can you actually tell us, on notice, how many migrants have contacted you, how many you have succeeded in providing or getting family reunions for, how many are still on the books and how many you have not been able to succeed with? That kind of number data would be very useful.

Ms Humphreys—Yes, absolutely.

CHAIR—It would answer a little bit further Senator Knowles’s question about moderately substantial funding: how many more years do you anticipate? Not wanting to put a limit on it, but I was just interested in whether you have got half way or whether you are only a quarter of the way. You suggest a research project in recommendation 9.

Ms Humphreys—Yes.

CHAIR—That is only the second or third time that we have had a recommendation for research. Who would you recommend do that?

Ms Humphreys—I put that in there because, after 14 years, you can imagine the kind of information—in fact, even in terms of our own work—that needs to be objectively looked at. So I think probably it needs to be linked to a university. I can say that the trust over the last 14 years has really kept its eye on the ball. What are we about? Family reunions. What are we about doing that? There were bigger things as well. I think over this last year we have been looking as well—still keeping our eye very much on that ball of what we are about, and what we are doing— at the fact that there are bigger things.

Over the last year, I have been having talks with a university in Nottingham and I hope to have talks with a university in Australia, and I would very much like to see in the next year an institute for child migrant studies. I am fairly sure, confident, that I can tell you that that is probably going to happen in Nottingham and I would very much like it to happen here in

Australia. Likewise, I have been looking very closely at a foundation to look at and explore ethical issues in social work, law, medicine and a whole range of things that come out of this work. We talk in the submission very heavily about secondary abuse. We really have to get our heads around that.

CHAIR—You put this as a recommendation. That would seem to me something else than talking to a university, because they of course can do this kind of research at any time. They will probably also say, ‘But we need more government funding.’ Do you want this research to be funded—it is a recommendation for funding for this research—whoever does it?

Ms Humphreys—Yes. I think the trust could contribute to that enormously. We want to see a proper research project.

CHAIR—The first International Congress on Child Migration has been planned for 2001. Will you be actively participating in that?

Ms Humphreys—Yes. We are organising that along with the international association. We have had a tremendous response to this worldwide. We certainly will be participating. We really want everyone else to participate as well.

CHAIR—What sort of support would you recommend that the Commonwealth government—

Ms Humphreys—We would like financial support for this, and we would like the Commonwealth government to attend and help other people to attend and make contributions. Perhaps we could give you something in writing about that as well.

CHAIR—Yes. Spell that out. That would be very useful. Thank you very much. Back to Maltese children: as I understand, they are not eligible for ISS funding?

Ms Humphreys—That is correct.

CHAIR—In fact, they have no funding available?

Ms Humphreys—Absolutely.

CHAIR—Unless perhaps through the Christian Brothers or some other organisation?

Ms Humphreys—Yes.

CHAIR—If this committee recommended that there be an Australian travel fund grant amount and if a government adopted that, should that travel money be separate from the UK travel money, separate from the Christian Brothers travel money, or should we start giving some thought to pooling the funding?

Ms Humphreys—I would like to think about that—

CHAIR—On notice.

Ms Humphreys—Because with any government money, there is the administrative costs of it. I think we are all interested in keeping those administrative costs down, but providing the money to where it needs to be. So perhaps I would like to think about that and perhaps we could also talk with the Health Select Committee in the UK about that as well.

Senator KNOWLES—That is why I specifically asked if all of those calls for funding can be put in together as opposed to being separated out.

Ms Humphreys—We are happy to address that.

CHAIR—So the criteria for eligibility for C-BERSS, for example, is extremely different from ISS. That is also an important point. Did you want to make a comment, Mr Thwaites?

Mr Thwaites—No.

CHAIR—There are more questions we would like to ask. But I appreciate that in about two minutes this committee has to be replaced by another one. We have gone a little over our time.

Senator MURRAY—There is one thing we have to ask: the international association today said that you have been instructed by the federal government to cease contacting clients. Is that correct?

Ms Humphreys—We have actually answered that, Senator Murray. I am actually leaving documents here—our recent correspondence with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Certainly, our funding this year is very much at risk. We were told by the end of this funding round to have no clients. I am actually tabling the correspondence and all our reports to government today.

CHAIR—We are very appreciative of that. On behalf of the committee I have given you the assurance that your request for all of those documents to be regarded as private and confidential will be respected. Thank you.

Committee adjourned at 12.14 p.m.