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11 December 2000

The Committee Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs References Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir

**Re: Inquiry into Child Migration**

Please find attached a submission for this Inquiry.

Yours faithfully,

Josette Mathers (Mrs.)  
Province Archivist and  
PHIND Administrator

# **SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

## **INQUIRY INTO CHILD MIGRATION**

### **ACCESSIBILITY OF RECORDS**

One of the major problems identified by many former child migrants is the difficulty they encounter in obtaining records which may assist them to locate their families of birth, or help to document their early years in Australia.

The Catholic religious orders and diocesan agencies involved in Child Migration have funded and developed PHIND, the Personal History Index, which assists former child migrants from the UK and Malta to Catholic Homes in Australia to locate information about themselves. Further details on PHIND can be found on the website at [www.iinet.net.au/~cbprov/phind.htm](http://www.iinet.net.au/~cbprov/phind.htm)

During the research for this index, the following barriers for former child migrants to access information or obtain documents were noted:

1. The National Archives of Australia holds immigration documentation on most post-World War II child migrants. This normally consists of the “selection” documents, and some instances may include
  - original birth certificates, or extracts of birth,
  - baptismal certificates
  - Documents of Identity (for Maltese child migrants) with passport size photographs,
  - school reports from UK and
  - other documents of a personal nature, not created for the purpose of their migration.

Because these documents have been accessioned as Archives, former child migrants are only able to obtain photocopies, and not the originals.

#### **Possible solution:**

- That the National Archives of Australia be requested to review its policy in this regard so that former child migrants can obtain the original documentation which belongs to them (ie not created as a Commonwealth record), and that a photocopy be left on the archival file.
2. National Archives holds files on the Homes which took child migrants. In some instances these files are not located in the State in which the Home was situated, for example there are files held in Canberra which relate to Catholic Homes in WA. These files often contain items such as Inspection Reports which are a written record of visits by Immigration, Child Welfare and Education representatives to the Home, and which contain much background information of interest to former child migrants. In order for these files to be viewed, the former child migrant has to either visit the office in person, or pay for the file to be photocopied – at a cost of 50c per

page. There are two issues involved – one is the inaccessibility to information because of distance; and the second is the cost factor.

**Possible solutions:**

- That State and National Archives be encouraged to reproduce the documents relating to child migration policy and Homes, either by microfilm or digitisation. A digital image could be made available on the Internet (for example, as many papers relating to John Curtin are now available through the website of the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library). Microfilms would need to be copied and distributed to all State and National Archives office.
- That the cost of photocopying be reduced or removed for ex-residents of Institutions, whether child migrants or Australian-born, so that cost does not prevent them completing their story of their early years in Australia.

Josette Mathers  
PHIND Administrator and  
Province Archivist  
Christian Brothers Holy Spirit Province

11 December 2000