

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am outraged that the government is even considering to make homebirth illegal in Australia.

My first baby was born in hospital where I was treated terribly. I am young and healthy yet I was treated as though I was a ticking time bomb, they were just waiting for something to go wrong with unnecessary ultrasounds and excessive testing, long waits for appointments and rough palpitations & rude treatment by countless staff.

Then once I was actually in labour things got worse- drips inserted without consulting me, drugs (synthetic oxytocin I presume- I was never told) administered with no mention of the risk to my baby or why I needed them, unsupportive staff, restricted movement because I had to be monitored because of the fore mentioned drugs, painful and rough vaginal examinations & a very traumatic one where my cervix was stretched against my will. I was then pressured into using nitrous oxide despite my wishes for a natural birth (which seems to be against hospital policy considering their excessive use of synthetic oxytocics). It was an experience I can only describe as hellish. Eventually I requested an epidural (which I still suffer back pain from 5 years later) which took 2 hours to arrive. The anaesthetist then went on to chat about the book he was writing (apparently that's what he took so long) over my head whilst I was going through all of this. Absolutely no care or humanity afforded to me whatsoever. I may as well have been a lump of meat he was working on.

I was somehow still able to deliver my baby vaginally, though his heart rate was concerning (a side effect of the drugs no doubt).

Once he was born his cord was cut promptly and he was taken away to be cleaned. I wanted to hold him and breastfeed him, but wasn't allowed until we were both clean and he had been weighed and measured which seemed to take forever. By the time he was given to me I was passing out with exhaustion after my 16 hour labour and all of the drugs. (there is a period of alertness after mother and baby after birth, however this was missed)

When I woke up a few hours later I was alone- my son had been taken to intensive care, he wasn't breathing properly (I believe, a side effect of the drugs and our separation). He was a very ill baby and all my hopes for a natural birth were dashed, I wasn't even allowed to hold him for another few days and my husband and I were devastated. I was not able to rest in the maternity ward because of visitors (not mine!) and I was pretty much left alone, with very little support to express milk and ultimately learn to breastfeed.

After his birth I suffered PTSD and PND. I had flashbacks of my time in hospital and was anxious to understand what had gone wrong. I was very traumatised and disillusioned by it all. How could I trust midwives and doctors again after I found out what drugs I had been given and the side-effects which harmed my baby?

It took me a long time to come to terms with what happened, and I still feel traumatised by it.

My second baby was born at home with an independent midwife. It truly is the gold standard of care. My antenatal visits were relaxed and in my home. I was given information to process and understand before any tests were administered. I was consulted about everything and my wishes were adhered to with respect. When I came down with gastro on a Sunday afternoon I was able to ring my midwife for advice and get the care I needed immediately.

When I went into labour I was relaxed and confident. I rang my midwife and things progressed well. My husband set up the birth pool and I continued to labour naturally (sometimes noisily). I felt safe. My midwife came and monitored the heartbeat with a hand held doppler. She set up her oxygen tank and the drugs she carries. The baby was born. I delivered her myself and held her first. We got to have skin-to skin

contact which is very important for bonding and regulating heartbeat and temperature. I rubbed her vernix into her skin (it has anti-microbial properties which boosts baby's immune system) instead of having it wiped off. My midwife checked my perineum and after baby had a breastfeed and I was ready, we weighed and measured her and wrapped her up. I was checked over and tucked into bed. It was an ecstatic, empowering and beautiful experience.

It was possible only with my wonderful independent midwife. I would not qualify for a homebirth through the public system, despite the fact that I am a happy, healthy homebirther.

I hope you can understand why I and my informed & educated homebirthing sisters are outraged at being forced back into a maternity system which has betrayed us. I hate the thought of my wonderfully skilled midwife being put out of work or witch-hunted.

It is my body and I chose homebirth because it meant I retained my body autonomy. It is not for the government to say what I can or cannot do with my body during birth any more than it can during sex.

It's my body
my birth
my choice
my basic human right
and we will not let you take that from us

Sincerely outraged,
Michelle Fulcher