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Submission

ORIGINS VIC INC

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On Behalf of people separated by adoption in Victoria I respectfully request that the Senate call for a full investigation into why in 2003 the Bracks government notified members of Origins that an Inquiry into Past adoption Practices established as ALP policy from 1999 would not go ahead.

**HE SENATE INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONALISED CARE:**

*The Forgotten Australians* page 108 recommended that not only did Victoria need to hold an inquiry, there needed to be an inquiry in every State in Australia.

Therefore on behalf of ORGINS VIC INC I respectfully request that the members of this committee respect and support the fragility of Mothers and their children lost to adoption practices by calling for a National Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices so that the Truth of adoption may be publicly acknowledged

My name is Elizabeth Edwards and I am the Convener of a group called Origins Victoria Incorporated.

Origins a support group for families forced separation by past adoption practices to gain a consent, held its inauguration in 1998 at Parliament House Melbourne when over 200 hundred people signed a petition asking for a Parliamentary Inquiry into past practices in Adoption in Victoria.

Figures from the Department of Human Services show that 1 in 5 families in Victoria are affected by adoption in Victoria.

My submission will raise an awareness of the trauma and associated mental health affects a mother has had to endure alone after losing her child to adoption due to the practices used in the past to gain consent.

It will highlight her fight to reclaim her identity as her child's mother her voice, and her denied reality.

Further to this there are access and equity issues affecting the mental health of mothers already traumatised by the marginalisation originating from the separation from their children by past adoption practices.

I will also identify some successful outcomes of organisational support and will make recommendations for appropriate treatments and measures to enable healing for this group of silenced Victorian Women.

Through this group and interaction with other groups Origins have come to realise how severely mothers have been affected by the unnatural act of having to lose a child to adoption.

MOTHER will be used throughout this paper because this is her reclaimed identity. An identity that was denied us by Governments past and present, Adoption agencies and a Society which has enforced silence regarding adoption practices introduced to bring about others own beliefs in social engineering in order to create a reality for infertile couples. This has marginalised these women in such a way as to deny their identity as the mothers of their own children.

It is worth noting that in Victoria a Mother signed away the right to parent her child on the consent to adoption. There is no provision to sign away her reality as her baby's mother.

Forced denial of their maternity has imposed mental and psychological dissociation from the whole experience of what should be the most precious and enjoyable time in a mothers life, instead mothers and their baby's were forcibly separated by unethical and illegal adoption practices to provide a deemed more deserving married couple a "family of their own "

The life time mental trauma was imposed on mothers from the very beginning when at the actual birth, practices were adopted in most hospitals to prevent any bonding between the mother and her child as follows

1. Inappropriate use of drugs before and after the birth to induce a state of compliance to take the consent, Dangerous levels of nitrous oxide administered

The placement of pillows, on the girl's chest to prevent eye contact

Mother's hands shackled to the side of the bed during and post labour 2

Unbeknownst to the Mother, her file was marked BFA this would signify to staff that the baby was to be removed immediately before eye contact could occur because the held belief was that the baby and Mother would then bond. The professionals were ignorant of what a mother who had given birth knew, that is bonding had already taken place in utero.3

This happened mostly before she had expelled the placenta

This practice contravened the law as these mothers were to be treated no differently to any other mother who presented in labour. She was to make the decision to relinquish her baby only after delivery and without any duress being placed upon her the law did not specify the source of duress, clearly many professionals seemed to be oblivious of this, feeling justified in punishing unwed mothers for offending against the mores.

In 1961 Clark Vincent in his book titled *Unmarried Mothers* predicted that very scenario

" it is quite possible that, in the near future, unwed mothers will be "punished" by having their children taken from them right after birth. A policy like this would not be executed nor labelled explicitly as "punishment."4

The impact of these assaults has affected mothers in different ways. Some have resorted to total denial of the experience, never admitting to their children or in some cases even their husbands that they lost a child to adoption. Imagine this sentence of silence.

Denied the right to grieve the child many did not even see, Mothers were instructed to get on with their lives to forget about the baby, instead told that "one day they would wed and have a baby of their own." This did not happen 45% of mothers were rendered emotionally sterile, resulting in their never having a baby of their own.

#### END NOTES

1. Clothier Florence M.D.: 1943 *The Psychology of the Adopted Child* The National Committee for Mental Health Journal 2. *The on Mental Hygiene* New York
2. *Single Mother 4 Corners* 1969 Mike Willasee (Video)
3. Verrier Nancy : *The Primal Wound* p3
5. Vincent C: *Unwed Mothers and the Adoption Market; Psychological and Familial Factors; Marriage and living* 22p112-118 1960

These women living their lives in total disassociation from the subject are a time bomb waiting to go off. One Mother informed us she only fell short from jumping off the tallest building because her treating psychiatrist, Dr Geoffrey Rickarby made the connection between her mental condition, and the original experience of losing her child to adoption practice

**Dr G.A. Rickarby MB BS FRANZCP Member of the Faculty of Child Psychiatry RANZCP MANZAP Consultant Psychiatrist.** Graduated in medicine from Melbourne University

After commencing Psychiatry in London he completed his training in New South Wales.

Treating many women/families he inadvertently gained substantial insight and expertise to the psychological damage suffered and endured by Mothers and their Children separated by adoption.

He has delivered various papers dealing with these issues, however we will be focusing on the effects upon a Mother. He has sited the problems and they are listed as follows

### **Damage.**

A variety of measures are required depending on the nature of the damage leading to distress and the type of distress associated with the individuals response to such damage. A list of the varieties of damage follows:

### **Pathological Grief.**

Personality damage associated with the defences used against grief, against post traumatic stress phenomena and against depressive decompensation.

Personality damage associated with the isolation of the birth experience and the loss of the baby, where this is a secret and there is no significant other to share the feelings and unresolved issues associated with the loss.

### **Axis 1 Psychiatric Disorder**

#### **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.**

#### **Major Depression**

#### **Dissociative Disorder**

#### **Panic Disorder (and other anxiety disorders)**

#### **Dysphemia**

#### **Situational Stress Disorder (often associated with reunion)**

#### **Alcohol Dependent Disorder**

#### **Prescription Drug Dependent Disorder**

#### **There are other drug dependent disorders which are uncommon among these mothers.**

(please note that 4.7, 4.8, & 4.9 will be dealt with under section 7 below) (These will be added later, Ed)

#### **Personality damage associated with psychiatric illness as a sequel to loss of a baby to adoption.**

#### **Personality damage associated with long term Pathological Grief.**

#### **Aggravation and precipitation of a wide variety of physical illness which are related to stress.**

#### **Disorder and incapacity in human relationships.**

#### **Educational failure and poor employment status.**

#### **Failure of bonding to other babies.5**

This list refers only to common reactions involving large numbers of mothers **5**

End notes

Rickarby G.A. MB BS FRANZCP Member of the Faculty of Child Psychiatry RANZCP MANZAP Consultant Psychiatrist The New South Wales  
Parliamentary Standing committee on Social Issues Inquiry into past adoption Practices No...

The effects of Loss and grief have been well-documented 6

However those Mothers who have survived without this expertise continue to be haunted by the experience and to suffer trauma The negative impact of mothers suffering long term trauma has being largely overlooked because adoption is regarded by so many as a panacea.

Their symptoms are as follows

Of constant anxiety as to the well being of the child.

A state of anxiety source unknown

Over vigilance with parenting subsequent children

Emotional detachment from same

Lack of faith in their ability to parent

No sense of self

Unresolved anger

Unresolved grief because unlike a mother who loses a child to natural causes, they have been denied the right and support to grieve or given information as to where and the well being of their child

Infertility was imposed on 45% of mothers

Lack of ability to form substantial relationships

Lack of faith in their decisions and capability

Lack of trust in the fabric of society

Lack of understanding by the medical and health professionals of their mental State.

Anxiety in the lack of knowledge to the effects of Stilboestrol administered to prevent lactation this was done without informing the mother or gaining permission

End Notes

- 6 a) Clothier Florence ibid
- b) Condon J T; Psychological disability in women who relinquish a baby for adoption: Medical Journal of Australia
- c) Keppel and Winkler; Loss and Grief in Adoption.
- d) Logan Janette Birth mothers and their mental health: uncharted territory Br.J.Social; Wk.(19996)26,609-625

## **THE RIGHT TO KNOW**

Victorian mothers particularly are faced with a further rage to the original source of depression. Once again issue of inequality in obtaining identifying information to meet their long lost child. Is being ignored.

Mothers have been informed that on the eve of the legislative changes that allowed adoptive persons total access to information relating to the identity of their mother, male Parliamentarians made an agreement subject to Mothers being denied equal access because some of them feared being slapped with a paternity suit.

When those separated by adoption apply to Adoption Information Service (AIS) for information for an outreach to their child/mother an adoptive person is issued with all identifying information about their Mother. However a Mother is denied any identifying information of her child and furnished with non-identifying information of her child only.

A Mother is then faced with a mandatory interview with AIS, consequently she is forced to "trust" an agent employed by a government that in the past was complicit in her losing her baby to act as conduit. Sometimes it necessitates her returning to the same agency that took the consent to adoption. This is unhelpful because it triggers the core abuse.

In Victoria it is argued if a mother were granted equal rights that legislation it would necessitate a veto This is outdated thinking and lacks reasoning Origins argues this is a veto.

Other states operating with vetos are currently legislating for their abolition.

Another very good reason for invalidating the notion of a veto is the Family Law Act which gives the protection of a restraining /intervention order

Under the current system having already survived the betrayal by their own parents and society, many mothers applying to meet their child, and that child refuses to meet them they are denied not only the knowledge of their child's identity, they must also endure the agony rejection of the child they gave birth to, and lost, due to others practices. The wonder is they still contemplate living.

Limiting the retention period to access medical records has also been detrimental to mothers reclaiming their memory in order to heal.

Mothers were administered life threatening and mind altering drugs in order for social workers to gain a consent, but not previously mentioned here is the fact that a known carcinogenic drug DES was also administered to prevent lactation of the milk nature intended for her baby..

6. AIS Victorian Adoption Information Service  
B) NSW Adoption Information Act

Restrictions placed on FOI access of medical records prevent Victorian mother's knowledge of the amount of the dose and what drugs were administered to her. Therefore she is unable to ascertain the possible effects upon her and her subsequent children., this is a source of anxiety.

On the other hand her NSW sister is privy to all information. This includes Drug Sheets, Anti and post natal records, and even her child's nursery notes. She is also given record pertaining to her child's identity the identity because in 1992 NSW introduced an adoption information act, which provided mothers with information vital to recovering the memory they had blocked. The NSW Adoption Information Act 1992 allows all parties in adoption access to information

### Models which have worked successfully

As an ageing population Mothers lack the financial resources to pursue intensive and expensive treatments

It is imperative to provide different styles of support for them. Initially a mother needs to share her grief with those who empathise with her.

Later she will embark on a deeper healing when in a safe environment the impact of the past and her exposure to her reality, which was denied her for decades, will bring about a measure of healing for her.

However the most powerful means of all sides of the adoption triangle connecting to reality is by public acknowledgment of the past adoption practices.

Origins members first lobbied for an inquiry in Victoria as early as March 1997 the ALP sanctioned our application for an inquiry by making an inquiry part of the ALP Women's Policy 1999 and the Premier Mr Bracks endorsed this as ALP policy before coming to power.

In 2003 Origins Vic Inc were informed by the Bracks Government that an inquiry would not proceed.

This retrograde step saw Mr Bracks not only loose credibility but by choosing to be complicit with the perpetrators who carried out illegal crimes against mothers, the negative impact has been to inflame the core abuse.

Mothers faith in humankind has once more been vitiated and their children are no closer to understanding "*why we GAVE them away.*"

In October 1997 Origins Vic linked with a small group of Victorian Mothers who placed a submission relating the Church's involvement in taking babies from their mothers at the Bishops conference on "women and the Catholic Church".

Although they were not successful in having the issue addressed the participants were reduced to tears and afterward individuals implored forgiveness from mothers because "like the abuse suffered in indigenous cultures they knew about it! But they did not ask!"

In 1998 Origins NSW successfully lobbied for a parliamentary inquiry. This came to be known as **Releasing The Past :New South Wales Parliament on Social Issues Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices** it lasted almost three years and to which an excess of 300 submissions were placed and as the second largest Inquiry in the history of New South Wales. It provided a forum for mothers to publicly tell and have their experience commonly accepted.

It was during the **NSW Standing Committee Inquiry into Past adoption Practices** that Justice Chisholm testified that to restrict a mother her full access to her own baby was "technically kidnapping" 'to remove the baby and forbid a Mother her legal right to her baby could constitute abduction'.<sup>8</sup>

1965 Mary Lewis highlighted an unmarried mother's right to be free to choose to keep her baby or surrender it for adoption. After outlining the legal obligations of social workers she proceeded to inform the Welfare Profession that many of its agencies in this country *have punitive, illegal and harmful rules regarding the unmarried mothers inalienable right to physical contact, some refusing to allow her to see her baby.*

*"These misguided people should look more carefully into the situation"* she cautioned them.  
Fr Daveron also repeated her circumspection at a National Conference in 1972 c)

Origins NSW having established publicly that what they had been espousing for many years were further inspired in conjunction with Clan and LinkUp to organise the first National Mental health Conference for those Families affected by Separation

This took place at Liverpool hospital on the 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> October 2002

Accordingly Origins Victoria has embarked on holding mini mental health seminars in country Victoria to initiate some measure of healing and to raise awareness. The first seminar was held at Cobram 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> June 2003

Having found that young health care professionals were extremely receptive and respectful to what mothers were expounding, unlike the older generation or their contemporaries who have been subjected to an adoption bias this serves to reinforce the knowledge, that professionals need to accept the issues set out here if mothers are to regain their mental health and wellbeing <sup>9</sup>

Origins Vic Inc in conjunction with other groups is currently collaborating with The Mental Health Association Vic branch to organise the next National Mental health Conference to be held in Melbourne in October 2006.

**Adoption is a created reality for all involved in the process** and mothers constantly continue to struggle to break through the cocoon of this uninformed and imposed delusion.  
Adoption has been packaged as being a community service and in the past, the only solution to a perceived three sided social problem

End notes. 8 Releasing the Past: New South Wales Parliament Standing Committee Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices The Final report p104

b) The Australian Association of welfare Workers National conference at the Social worker Catholic Family welfare Bureau Sydney

c) Fr Daveron Decisions about adoption-uses and abuses of the system 2<sup>nd</sup> National Adoption Conference P121-12

9 Rachael Willis Psychologist (B.B.Sc, Hons-AACC. M.A.P.S presentation given at Cobram 2002



- The problem of an infertile couple was solved by adoption, providing them with a baby of their own.
- A baby born to an unwed mother was given a brand new set of parents who held a higher level of social acceptance and status than the baby's own Mother.
- The unwed mother was delivered of others perception of her '*unwanted pregnancy*'. She was told to put the past behind her and to be thankful that she was being given a new beginning.

She was instructed to go away and *forget* that she had a maternity and that one-day she would marry and *have a baby of her own*. Mothers did not forget their own baby, how could they? Unable to grieve they waited for a miracle to happen but the trauma was intensified with fear not understood paralysing them.

Some Mothers even expected to duplicate of 'the baby' which would be "her own"

Survival skills occurred on an unconscious level, living on automatic a Mother's only alternative was to disassociate from her first maternity, and her success necessitated her becoming more traumatised.

Compounding the problem was the necessity to develop coping mechanisms so that she would present to the world as being normal

Pressing was the urgent need to be accepted by others and marry so that she could have 'one of her own'. Very often this meant settling for *second best*.

Another issue that is detrimental to a mother's emotional well being is the negation of identity. Mothers never signed away their right to be their child's mother that would be impossible. In death a mother retains her identity as her children's mother even when her partner remarries and another parents her child.

The Adoption act deems mothers are designated as natural mothers 11 however the term "birth mother" has crept into the adoption arena's vocabulary. It's purpose is designed to distance a child from it's mother This terminology is not only insulting but it resonates and continues the original abuse by denying a mother the basic right to retain her identity.12

In 2002 when replying to an objection lodged by an Origins Mother to the Government legislative changes to terminology that determined all mothers who had carried and given birth to a baby to be officially referred to as a "BIRTH MOTHER" Human Rights Equal Opportunity officer, Pru Goward informed her that the reason for the change came about because adoptive parents groups have lodged an objection to mothers being termed natural mothers , they feel this suggests that they are unnatural mothers

Adoptive parents have the right to frame any mother's identity even when it overrides reality. 13

**Features of Origins Support Group** that ensures a high level of advocacy includes a meeting once a month which provides a forum where Mothers and adoptive persons stories are heard and revered and where anonymity is held to be fundamental, where they have the option of exercising a democratic right to participate or remain anonymous.

11 Victorian Adoption Act 1984

12 "Why BIRTHMOTHER MEANS BREEDER" by Dianne Turski

13 Pru Goward Human Rights and equal opportunity commission, Sex Discrimination Commissioner

As previously stated the basic right to grieve has been denied to mothers therefore they exchange telephone numbers and this assures ongoing support.

In many cases a member has requested one of the committee members to accompany them in situation that require support, this sometime means to personally advocate on their behalf.

Two members attend government-organised venues where adoption related information is exchanged **Adoption Information Service Forum (AIS)** and **VISCAFF** meet every three months. They also attend other related programs eg Single Teen Mother, meet with religious orders who during and post natal were involved with a mother.

They also attend meetings with government employees and politicians then report back to the group

Origins Vic publishes a newsletter bi-monthly, the website is listed below

However the most powerful means to healing remains that the government fulfil its election promise for an inquiry in order to acknowledge the holocaust of past adoption practices and the long term affects upon Mothers and their families.

Funding is desperately needed to educate the wider community, research is essential for facilitation of healing.

The consequences of what was packaged as being the solution to the dual problems of infertility and the government's desire for economic expediency remains unresolved

A social service benefit was legislated for in 1946 but women were not informed of this 14

. Experts advocating adoption espoused all single pregnant girls were "impoverished malnourished and of low intellect.15

Repercussion are generational, adoptive persons make up a large proportion of the statistics of dysfunctional and institutionalised people 16

Family separation has polarised mothers, emotionally imprisoning them and their families, keeping them hostage to both legal and illegal substances, gambling etc for some popping out a baby each year in anticipation of "making ones own"17

In 1958 just prior to the Adoption onslaught Dr Don Lawson held a senior and a well-respected position at the Royal Women's hospital in Melbourne.

Addressing the Medical Fraternity he established the adoption policies that would see the lambs being led to the slaughter for another three decades when he advised "that an obstetrician need not bother with the law when dealing with unwed mothers "

He went on to say "When in doubt don't is the general rule of thumb, however when it comes to adoption do" In saying this he revealed the level of contempt with which unwed Mothers and our precious babies were held, and subsequently treated.

However the law stated that a Mother was to be treated no differently to any other Mother, she was required to request adoption for her baby after delivery. The professionals had a moral and legal obligation to advise a Mother of the dire psychological effects, adoption would impose upon her newborn babe and herself.

This is another case of a eugenics program that amounted to a social experiment gone wrong. If it were not so why did the Australian government throughout two wars support the principle of supplying a "dependants allowance" to an "unmarried wife"?<sup>19</sup>

The cost of anaesthetizing the unwitting victims from this social experiment will continue to be born by society for generations to come unless governments initiate and facilitate programs for healing now.

Mothers have suffered for a lifetime, must the legacy be carried by subsequent generations? The truth must be told and history books rewritten before they can begin dealing with part 2 of this psychological decimation.

### **That is complications encountered post-contact**

14 1943 Social Security Act

b) Social Security Consolidation Act Part V11 Unemployment, Sickness and Special Benefit Instruction for the Guidance of Officers 1951 P49

c) The States Grants deserted Wives Act (attachment provided by June Smith research officer Origins Vic Inc)

15 a) Grunseit Ferrie: The Adoption of Infants and the Role of an Adoption Advisory Clinic in New South Wales: The Medical Journal of Australia April 1973 pp851-857

b) Council of Churches letters to Prime Minister: The Right Honourable R. G. Menzies P.M.

16. Keogh Tim; Forensic psychologist NSW Department Juvenile corrections; Paper mental health conference for family separation Liverpool 2002

17 A Mother

18 Lawson Don M.B, F.R.C.S, F.R.O.G (1960) The anxieties of pregnancy, Featherstone Memorial Lecture :The Medical Journal of Australian vol 11 July 1960

19 Document obtained from National Australian Archives MP508 Item No 247/701/220 9 pages whole file

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  4. **Vincent C:** Unwed Mothers and the Adoption Market; Psychological and Familial Factors; Marriage and living 22p112-118 1960
- Rickarby G.A.** MB BS FRANZCP Member of the Faculty of Child Psychiatry RANZCP MANZAP Consultant Psychiatrist The New South Wales Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into past adoption Practices 1950- 1998" No...
6. **Clothier Florence** *ibid*
    - b) **Condon J T;** Psychological disability in women who relinquish a baby for adoption: Medical Journal of Australia
    - c) **Keppel and Winkler;** "Loss and Grief in Adoption: 19...p
    - d) **Logan Janette** Birth mothers and their mental health: uncharted territory Br.J.Social; Wk.(19996)26,609-625
  7. **Anecdotal evidence** given at a AIS meeting in 2003 when the question was asked "what was the reason behind limiting access of information to adoptive persons here in Victoria.
  8. **Releasing the Past New South Wales Parliament, Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry** into Past Adoption Practices *The Final Report* p104
    - b) **Lewis Mary** The Australian Association of Welfare Workers National Conference at the Catholic Welfare Bureau Sydney 1965
    - c) **Fr Daveron** "Decisions about Adoption Uses and Abuses of the system 2<sup>nd</sup> National Adoption Conference P121-122
  - 9 **Rachael Willis** Psychologist (B.B.Sc, Hons-AACC. M.A.P.S presentation Cobram 2002
  - 11 **Victorian Adoption Act 1984**
  - 12 **Turski "Dianne** Why BIRTHMOTHER MEANS BREEDER"
  - 13 **Goward Pru** Human Rights and equal opportunity commission, , Sex Discrimination Commissioner.
  - 14 **Social Security Act 1943**
    - b) Social security Consolidation Act Part **V11** Unemployment, Sickness and Special benefit Instruction for the guidance of Officers 1951 p49
    - c) The States Grants Deserted Wives Act (attachment provided by June Smith)
  - 15 **Grunseit Ferrie:** The Adoption of Infants and the Role of an Adoption Advisory Clinic in New South Wales: The Medical Journal of Australia April 1973 pp851-857
    - b) **Council of Churches P.M.'s File No. 45/1/3** letters to Prime Minister The Right Honourable R.G Menzies.
  16. **Keogh Tim;** Forensic Psychologist NSW Department Juvenile Corrections; Paper delivered at The first National mental health conference for family separation Liverpool 2002
  - 17 **A Mother**
  - 18 **Lawson Don** M.B, F.R.C.S, F.R.O.G (1960) The anxieties of pregnancy, Featherstone Memorial Lecture :The Medical Journal of Australian vol 11 July 1960
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