This submission to the Senate Inquiry into the *Commonwealth's contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices* is made on behalf of the *Australian Journal of Adoption*. The *Australian Journal of Adoption* is an independent online journal for people affected by adoption. It is hosted by the National Library of Australia.

The most recent edition of the journal, Volume 2, Number 3 (2010), was dedicated to the apology, *Removal of Children from Unmarried Mothers – Apology*, made by the Western Australian Government, on 19 October 2010, in Perth. It was recommended by a registered author/reader that this edition of the journal be submitted to the Senate Inquiry. The authors of the personal stories agreed.

This submission consists of the editorial, six individual stories, the official Hansard transcript of the apology from the WA Parliament and the speech made by Ms Meredith Hunter, the Greens Leader, in the ACT Legislative Assembly, on 27 October 2010, where she called for an apology to women affected by forced adoptions. These papers collectively provide details of the unfair treatment single mothers received, including their life-long anguish, pain and suffering they endured after being coerced, manipulated or unprepared in relinquishing their babies when both mother and child were at their most vulnerable. In addition, the stories outline why these unmarried mothers were propelled into action; the leaders, and collaborative support, behind the call for the apology; the long process to achieve this historic apology; and the importance of the event, and the apology itself, to the women and their families.

The order of the submitted papers is:

1. Editorial – by Thomas Graham

2. Why did the Western Australian Government apologise to mothers, fathers and children torn apart by adoption? – by Christine Cole

3. The importance of the Western Australian apology to mothers and fathers brutally separated from their infant – by Sue Macdonald

4. Why would you come all the way from Queensland to hear this apology? – by Janice Kashin

5. A pathway to healing – by Carmel Ward

6. The fulfilment of a dream – by Barbara Maison

7. The times are a-changin' – by Evelyn Robinson

8. Hansard transcript *Removal of Children From Unmarried Mothers – Apology*, Western Australian Assembly, Tuesday 19 October 2010

9. The speech made by Ms Meredith Hunter, the Greens Leader in the ACT Legislative Assembly, on the 27 October 2010, when she put forward a motion calling for an apology to women affected by forced adoptions.

Editorial

Tuesday 19th October 2010 will long be remembered by unmarried mothers who had their babies taken away from them. On this day they finally received an apology. The Western Australian Parliament is the first parliament in the country to formally apologise to mothers affected by past adoption practices – and by all accounts the first parliament in the world to do so.

This edition of the *Australian Journal of Adoption* focuses on this significant event outlining the people instrumental in getting this State Parliament to make an apology. Sue Macdonald, David Templeman, Christine Cole and many others, including several support groups, never gave up the fight. They, and others present in Perth on this momentous day, reflect on their journey, the event and what the apology means to them and their children.

The apology is a defining moment in Australian adoption history with the acknowledgment that past adoption practices, covering the 1940s and 1980s were wrong, brutal, and in many cases, illegal. The apology is long overdue and other parliaments, departments or agencies need to consider their roles in this matter and follow the example set by the West Australian Parliament and the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, who last year, acknowledged the hurt, suffering and ill treatment single women received. They should also acknowledge the need for ongoing counselling for these mothers, their children and their families.

The apology has spurred others to action. Within ten days Meredith Hunter, the Greens Leader in the ACT, put forward a motion in the ACT Legislative Assembly calling for an apology to women affected by forced adoptions. The motion was successfully passed including the call for a national inquiry. (Ms Hunter's speech and the successful amended motion are included in this edition.)

Within two weeks the Senate in the Federal Parliament supported an Australian Greens motion, proposed by Senator Rachel Siewert, for the Community Affairs Reference Committee, to examine the Commonwealth Government's role in forced adoption polices from the late 1940s to the 1980s. Submissions have been called and close on 28 February 2011.

The Australian government, together with the state and territory governments, have also agreed to commission The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) to undertake a joint national research project to study the experiences of people affected by past adoption practices, including the support and service needs of people affected by these practices. The study demonstrates the intent of all jurisdictions to understand the pain and grief associated with past adoption practices. AIFS will report back to ministers in all jurisdictions in 2012.

The AIFS had previously conducted a review for the Australian government of

research literature about past adoption and the impact on those affected. This review found a stronger evidence base is needed to better understand the extent of past adoption practices, the number who were affected and the long-term effects. (This review compiled by Dr Daryl Higgins is available in *Australian Journal of Adoption* Vol 2, No 2.)

The Australian Catholic University is investigating the experiences of single mothers who gave birth at the Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne between 1945 and1975. They would like to interview women who were single at the time they gave birth to a child who was subsequently adopted.

Past adoption practices are under scrutiny. Credit is due to the unmarried mothers who have fought long and hard for their voices to be heard to win one formal government apology. They deserve more.

Those who still wish to add their voices can do so by forwarding their stories to me.

Thomas Graham
Journal Manager

Why Did the Western Australian Government Apologise to Mothers, Fathers and Children Torn Apart by Adoption?

Christine Cole

In 1994 the grief and pain was more than I could manage. I contacted a support group: Mothers for Contact. A group that, as it names suggests, had been instrumental in working to open up files previously closed so no mother and her stolen child would ever get the opportunity to meet. I met with these women and for the first time heard stories reminiscent of my own. For the first time I realised there were thousands of others: just like me, no longer was I the only one, who at sixteen was deposited at a hospital to be drugged, humiliated, shamed and then have my baby forcibly taken without ever having a chance to view my beautiful baby's face. Never to have gazed into her eyes, touched her velvety skin, or felt her warm embrace.

Like many young mothers of the era I believed these 'professionals' had a right to take my daughter in the cruellest of possible ways. Being unmarried and pregnant seemed to give those working with unwed mothers' carte blanche to treat us less than animals. Degraded and dehumanised an invisible incubator, there to serve one purpose to provide an infant for people we never met.

I had been admitted to The Women Hospital at Crown Street via the social work department. No single mother was admitted unless she first saw a social worker. That way, like lambs to the slaughter our baby's were earmarked for adoption. Unbeknownst to me my file was marked by a social worker with a secret code. The file was marked whether or not the mother indicated she wanted her baby adopted. The file was usually marked with terms such as BFA: baby for adoption, or UB-: Unmarried baby for adoption. Marking the files in this manner guided the maternity staff in the method of treatment the unwed mother would receive months later when giving birth. The Head Social Worker in a sworn affidavit (1994)[1] explained the practice: The mother was to be drugged; she was to have a pillow placed in front of her face so she could not view her baby at the birth, and her infant was to be immediately 'whisked' away so the mother's maternal instinct would not be aroused. The mother traumatised by her inability to finish the birthing process would be less likely to put up a fight. Some readers may not be aware but extreme trauma often causes such disassociation of the person's mind they can be silenced by the event for decades. The trauma of that unfinished birthing process will forever run through every cell in my body. They say the body never forgets, even though the mind tries to block the trauma out, my body will never forget the daughter I gave birth too.

Usually within 24 hours of giving birth, mothers were transferred by an ambulance, without prior notice or permission, to an annex of the hospital, Lady Wakehurst, miles away from her baby. Her clothes were locked up, she had no access to money, was not allowed visitors and on the fifth day, the minimum time possible to gain a consent the mother was informed she had to sign in order to be discharged from the hospital. No consent was ever supposed to be taken prior to the fifth day, no consent was supposed to be taken under duress or coercion and it only stands to reason that if a person is heavily drugged no contract should ever have be entered into. All of these

1 P Roberts, 'Statement of Pamela Thorne, nee Roberts, 30 September, 1994' in the matter of *Judith Marie McHutchison v State of New South Wales* no. 13428 of 1993

practices were substantiated at the New South Wales Inquiry into Past Practices in Adoption.

Mothers were isolated, nurses were forbidden to talk to us, in case they felt any empathy and gave in and allowed us a glimpse of our newborns. The instinctual part of the brain that deals with: birth, feeding one's infant, protecting our young, death, does not comprehend something as artificial has having your live healthy baby taken, sight unseen, to be given to strangers you will never meet. Kidnap is the only way that part of your brain understands the phenomena that happened to me and the thousands of other mothers, infants and fathers. The number of Australian citizens affected by the government's past removalist policies is huge. If you work it out there were over 200,000 babies taken, 400,000 mothers and fathers, subsequent brothers and sisters, assorted relatives who only found out about their stolen granddaughter, niece or nephew years later, the stolen children, now adults who went on to have their children, our grandchildren. Possibly one to two million Australians have been impacted by a social engineering policy that failed miserably and created immeasurable suffering for more than a million Australians.

How did the trauma affect me in the subsequent years? I remember searching for my daughter, firstly in prams, then later scouring the faces of girls around the same age. Forever, searching. I am told that is what happens when one's child is kidnapped there is no closure, just the constant grief, anger and searching. My subsequent children suffered, they had a mother full of grief and trauma. A mother that lived in absolute fear that one of my sons would be stolen. I had always wanted a large family, but with each pregnancy such pain would rise up and rather than enjoy my pregnancy I would collapse in grief. Another child never makes up for the one lost. Maybe if my daughter had died, there would have been some closure, but she was not dead, she was out there, somewhere, but with whom and how was she being treated? Indeed, what if she had died and nobody bothered to inform me?

You may ask: "How did this happen in Australia? How did this happen over so many decades? Why has no-one ever been made accountable for such atrocities being committed against mothers, fathers and their children?" The one simple answer is the Federal government through its state counterparts was the 'guiding hand' behind it. Royal Commissions, Inquiries, Human Right's Commissions had all uncovered the atrocities committed on mothers and their infants over decades, but no-one has ever been made accountable. The same practices, not allowing mothers to view their infants at the birth, drugging them, marking their files with secret codes, injecting them with drugs immediately after the birth so they could not feed their infants, not allowing mothers to leave hospitals until they signed adoption consents, did not happen in one hospital or in one State, it happened to thousands upon thousands of women right across Australia. State Welfare Ministers were aware of the practices and they were aware they were illegal, but they did nothing to stop them. The broader Australian community was lied to and kept in the dark of the reality of what was happening to vulnerable young pregnant mothers and their infants inside hospitals and mother and baby Homes.

Researching various State Hansards and Annual Reports of Child Welfare Departments reveals a collusion and conspiracy between various Federal and State Departments intent on ridding Australia of what the elite of these institutions deemed racial inferiors, mothers and their 'illegitimate' infants. Part Indigenous mothers were placed under white laws as they were not considered Aboriginal, but as racially

inferior as their unwed white sisters.

Driven by my unending pain I was compelled to find answers. I have researched the phenomenon I have labelled the white stolen generation for 16 years. The last four years in even greater depth as I have made it the focus of a PhD. So the following is what I have uncovered and why such a Nazi style social engineering exercise was able to develop and flourish in Australia. The propaganda around adoption is such that most people on hearing the word immediately think: 'unwanted baby' 'saved by altruistic childless couples'. There is no thought of the pain of the mother, the dislocation of the infant from its family of birth. In fact what the public does hear via various media is complaints that there are not more baby's available to supply the constant demand for infants by adults. It's declared a 'crisis'. My suggestion: why don't you solve the crisis and hand over your infant to some stranger!

Imagine the decades of propaganda it took to make the broader Australian community believe/accept that thousands upon thousands of normal Australian mothers committed such an unnatural act as to willingly give away their newborns to strangers they had never met, and then freely sign a document that did not permit them to ever meet or be given any information about their newly born infant again. Who created this propaganda campaign and why?

To give you an insight into the nightmarish situation as the one described above, that has become accepted as normal by the general populace, imagine if you will, someone climbed through your window one night and took your sleeping baby, and it was gone forever. Then imagine those around you told you to get on with your life, after all the kidnapper could probably give your child a better life than you. And then one day you find the kidnapper and you're told, oh just move on with your life your child now has a new family and he or she doesn't want to know you anymore! After all if you had really loved your child you wouldn't have allowed him or her to be kidnapped in the first place. That is the reality of adoption as practiced for most of the 20th century. So to understand how such an unnatural act became so normalised in the Australian psyche I will do my best to offer an explanation.

Firstly I need to explain eugenics. Eugenics was a pseudo-science that was accepted by most of the intellectuals in Australia, Britain and the United States in the late 19th early 20th century. It was the 'art of better breeding'. Scientific principles would be applied to human reproduction so that we would develop into a racially superior society. There was a belief that only the fit should reproduce, whilst the unfit should be eliminated. Increasing production of the fit would solve social problems such as immorality, delinquency and in decades to come crime would cease to exist. There were various forms of eugenics. Positive eugenics was getting the 'fit' to increase their numbers: encouraging fertility by financial means, baby bonus, tax exemptions, or providing them with other people's children. Negative eugenics was implementing measures to decrease the population of the 'unfit': such as, segregation and sterilisation. Environmental eugenics: transferring infants whose genes may be less than perfect to a better environment where "the best could be made of their poor genes". This could also be described as an assimilation policy. The racially inferior would be absorbed into the white, middle class, and hence disappear.

Overview

In the late 19th early 20th century there was huge concern both for the falling birth rate and the quality of the citizens the country was producing. Ex nuptial or 'illegitimate' children were considered racially inferior and there was a eugenic agenda to reduce their numbers.[2] Eugenicists saw illegitimacy as a threat to the family, morals and society itself. At the same time there was a pronatalist push to populate Australia. The combination of a eugenic and pronatalist agenda resulted in a social engineering experiment where thousands of newborns were transferred from their single mothers to state approved, childless married couples.

Darwin's theory of evolution was applied to population, with notions of the survival of the fittest and that evolution was linear and if we did not keep the race 'pure' it would lead to 'racial suicide'.[3] Importantly, Sir Charles Mackellar, highly influential environmental eugenicist, politician, President of the Child Welfare Department, Commissioner on the Decline of the Birth Rate, staunchly believed that environment could bring out the best in genes and could stop the transmission of the acquired characteristics of 'vicious' parents.[4]

Britain played an influential role in Australia's social engineering experiment. It wanted a colony of vigorous, strong vital individuals it could call on in times of war. 'Good white stock' could only be produced by the progeny of legally sanctioned marriages: the fit. The unwed mother, after having her baby taken, was considered rehabilitated, decades later this would be described on the bottom of her medical files as: 'socially cleared'. She was no longer the mother of an 'illegitimate' child and as such could return to the workforce. In time she would marry, become assimilated into a normal nuclear family, under the control of her respectable working class husband and 'go on to have children of her own one day.' Childless couples would be normalised by having children. Other people's, but not to worry, these children would be cut off from the contamination of their past history, re-issued new birth certificates and would be as if born to the substitute parents. Positive eugenics: the middle class was marginally expanded by the transference of thousands of infants to a 'more wholesome environment' with 'real mothers and fathers.'

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2 Leonard Darwin (1918) cited in Reekie: 1998, pp. 79-80 stated: "illegitimate children are inferior in civic worth. Reducing their number could only improve the race"

3 Gillespie, P. 1991, *The Price Of Health : Australian Governments and Medical Politics 1910-1966*, Studies in Australia History Series Editors: Alan Gilbert and Peter Spearitt, Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, p. 33, 35 : 1991, p. 33, 35; Edith Waterworth, Unmarried Mothers The Women's View Letter to the Editor *The Mercury* Hobart April 10, 1931, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article29904099 - Mrs. Waterworth (a eugenicist) was the President of the Tasmanian Council of Maternal and Child Welfare see: Problem of the Young Unmarried Mothers A Conference, *The Mercury*, Hobart, September 10, 1938, p. 15, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article25552104

4 Mackellar, C. (1904). *Annual Report Child Relief Department* at p. 24; Mackellar, C. & Welsh. (1917). Mental Deficiency: A Medico-Sociological Study of Feeble-Mindedness Sydney: W. A. Gullick, Government Printer, p. 31 (book donated to UWS library by NSW Dept of Community Services).

Child Welfare Departments around Australia vigorously promoted adoption because they saw it as a service to the state. It saved money and stopped the spread of illegitimacy by removing the child and placing it into a 'wholesome' environment. There was no concern for the feelings of the mother and no research on the long term effect on the infants removed.[5] The media campaign was run via radio and newspaper articles and the 'catchcry' was that babies "given up" for adoption were unwanted[6] and were given away after all means of assistance to keep the child was offered and the full psychological impact of surrender was explained to the mother. It was always publicly stated that it was the mothers who decided.[7] The Child Welfare Departments and social controllers/social workers therefore used the media to promote adoption, stigmatise single motherhood and continue to remind the public that the infants were 'unwanted' when they knew that to be blatantly untrue.[8] The adoption industry was duplicitous. Social work literature that guided social work practice stated that mothers were not autonomous and the mother was too 'immature to make her own decision'.[9] The literature informed social workers that it was they who would be the deciders.[10]

The promotion of adoption led to infertile couples believing they had an inherent right to be provided with infants.[11] As the demand for children far outstripped supply more draconian legislation was introduced to diminish the rights of natural parents even further in an effort to make more children available. There was still a concern in the adoption industry about the intelligence of mothers and social workers who took over control of the "problem of the unwed mother"[12] by the late 1930s defined it in more Freudian terminology, which underpinned their profession's epistemology. Unwed motherhood was now considered to be a result of unconscious conflicts that caused the neurotic woman to defy social norms and become pregnant without being first married. It was social workers', armed with their case work theory, intention to reform/rehabilitate[13] unwed mothers (by removing their infants) whilst at the same time 'curing' the infertility of married couples by giving them the 'taken/stolen' infants.[14]

5 *Proceedings of seminar held on 3rd and 4th November*, Melb: Victorian Council of Social Service
6 Perkins, K Power of the law protects the fatherless *Daily Telegraph* 27/1/1967; Dupre, A. Unwanted Babies and their New Parents *The Sun* 28/11/1973; Gilbert, C. (1968). 'These children need parents (But adoption's a slow business)' 500 unwanted babies in Background *Sunday Telegraph* Feb 18, 1968, p. 41
7 Perkins, K Power of the law protects the fatherless *Daily Telegraph* 31/1/1967; Kennett, J. (1970) The losers in the baby boom: For some mothers an agony of mind and heart lies ahead *Sunday Telegraph,* 12 December; Staff Reporter The unmarried mother's problem should she Surrender her Baby? *The Australian Women's Weekly* September 8, 1954, p. 28
8 Kerr, R. (2005). *The State and Child Welfare in Western Australia 1907-1949* Unpublished Thesis Curtin University ,
9 M McLelland, *Proceedings of a seminar: adoption services in New South Wales',* Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare, 3rd February, 1967, p. 42. Since it was the mother, who was the legal guardian of her child, and only the mother that was to make any decision with respect to relinquishment, what Mary McLelland is advocating: (that social workers either make the decision or help a mother to a decision), is clearly unethical and unlawful; JH Reid, 'Principles, values and assumptions underlying adoption practice', *Social Work*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1957
10 Cole, C. (2008). Releasing the Past: Mothers' stories of their stolen babies Sydney: Sasko Veljanov
11 McLelland Report (1976).
12 Staff Correspondent (1950). The Problem of the Unwed Mother, *The Sunday Herald* June 28, 1953, p.12, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18504211
13 Parker, I. (1927). *Fit and Proper A Study of Legal Adoption in Massachusetts Boston* Mass.: The Church Home Society for the Care of Children of the Protestant Episcopal ChurchParker, p. 54
14 Marshall, A. (1984). *Review of Adoption Policy and Practice NSW Report*, December NSW Dept. of Youth and Community Services

The adoption legislation introduced around Australia was implemented to protect the rights of adoptive parents and to facilitate the adoption process. This resulted in an ever increasing number of applicants applying to state governments for infants.[15] For most of 20th century the supply of infants did not meet demand, and by the 1960s the wait was approximately four years for a girl and three and a half for boy.[16] Hence enormous pressure was exerted on state governments to find more children. A review of Hansard in Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales indicates that adoption legislation was never formulated to protect the rights of the child or the natural parents but to keep the numbers of adoptable children up and to save the state money. During the 20th century any loop holes by which natural parents could reclaim their children were met with even tougher legislation to close that loop hole.[17]

Secrecy was never introduced to protect single mothers or their infants but to protect the identity of the adoptive parents. Before the legislation introduced in the 1960s adoptive parents had the name, address and occupation of the adopted child's mother. After the introduction of the new legislation they still had her name on the top of the Adoption Order.[18]

After reciprocal legislation was introduced in 1948 it became routine to traffic mothers across borders and place them in unmarried mothers Homes.[19] This effectively isolated, and cut women off, from any support they might have had from their partner, friends or supportive relatives. The young women had their identities hidden which made it near impossible for them to be found and assisted. None of this was done at the insistence of mothers, who were powerless and as far as policy makers went: invisible.

In the 1950s the state Child Welfare Departments began a second wave of promoting adoption and stigmatising single mothers,[20] as did social workers.[21] Sterility clinics were operating in hospitals and there was a belief that if a woman adopted a child she would be more likely to go on and have children of her own. Adoption therefore had the added bonus of being a fertility device and in this way it

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15 Import Babies *The Argus* Melbourne March 29, 1947, p. 18; Babies for Adoption in Demand The *The Mercury* Hobart, January 26, 1949, p. 21, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article26495765 ; More babies wanted for adoption Advertiser and Register South Australia, July 25, 1931, p. 18, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article35674843 ; Should Unwed Mother Give Up Her Child *Sydney Morning Herald* July 15, 1953, p. 9 http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18388329

16 Playing God with a Child's Life Insight Report on Adoption *Daily Mirror,* 17 October, 1967; Berryman, N. So you want to adopt a baby *Sunday Herald* 8/4/1979

17 Adoption of Children: Matter before Cabinet, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Oct 2, 1953, p. 3, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18391156 ; Appeal by mother in baby case almost certain *Sydney Morning Herald September*, September 24,1953, p. 6, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18379333 ; Fate of adopted child: Need for uniform laws *The Courier Mail*, Brisbane, April 20, 1934, p. 14, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1191370; Girls fight for baby goes on *The Argus*, Melbourne, February 6, 1954, p. 6, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article26589409

18 Glennis Dees A paper written and submitted to the Minister for Community Welfare Services, Victoria 24 January, 1983

19 Kerr, R. (2005). *The State and Child Welfare in Western Australia 1907-1949* Unpublished Thesis Curtin University Hon R. J. Hamer Adoption Children Bill, (1964) Vic Hansard, vol 274, p. 3648; Staff Correspondent (1950). The Problem of the Unwed Mother, *The Sunday Herald* June 28, 1953, p.12, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18504211

20 Government to consider Report on unwed mother, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 13, 1954, p.4 http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18439860 ; NSW Unwed Mothers Report Soon: A Report on the Problem of the Unwed Mother (Committee made up of adoption social, medical & welfare workers *Sydney Morning Herald* August 7, 1954, p. 13, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18429216

21 Should Unwed Mother Give Up Her Child *Sydney Morning Herald* July 15, 1953, p. 9 http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18388329

was used in a way that has been termed positive eugenics: increasing the production of children by the section of the population decreed fit.[22]

Disregard for the rights of natural mothers and their infants was evident in a practice labelled 'breast-feeding adoptions" or "rapid adoptions". A married mother who gave birth to a stillborn was given the healthy newborn of an unmarried mother to nurse. It would be unthinkable that the unmarried mother would ever be given the opportunity to revoke her consent after the occurrence of this practice. It also makes a lie of any notion of a proper consent being given by the unmarried mother, assuming as it must that consent was given prior or straight after the birth. It was during this time period that many mothers were deceived by being told their babies had died at or soon after their birth.

Dr John Bowlby in 1950 was commissioned by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to do a study on a mother's relationship with her children and its effect on their mental health. The WHO's concern with the mental health of children stemmed from its belief in a linkage between a child's emotional well-being and their later ability to become industrious citizens. In Bowlby's subsequent Report (1951)[23] he confounded single motherhood with earlier ideas of mental deficiency and the more modern 1950 social work/Freudian psychoanalytical theory that Tavistock Clinic adhered too. Bowlby's Report was politically expedient for several reasons. It was used by western governments to push women, who had been working, as part of the war effort back into their homes. Childless women though would need extra encouragement. Bowlby's 'scientific' findings were therefore useful to support a social engineering experiment that was already in operation in Australia. Removing children from undesirable parents (single mothers) and eliminating their influence via coercive social control methods, such as 'closed secret adoption' and placing them in the homes of the childless to encourage those women back into their homes.

There was and still is much confusion about what mothers' rights were, not only by mothers' themselves but those working in the industry. The internal policy was not to allow mothers to see there infants, to drug and to force them to sign consents the public policy promoted via the media was that mothers were the ones who made the decision.[24] There is only one mention that I am aware of in the public domain, a newspaper article, that stated mothers did not see their babies at birth,[25] most of the publicity focused on 'unwanted' babies and desperate couples who were willing to open their hearts and homes to the desperate plight of these unfortunate babies. [26]

Since it was illegal not to allow mothers' access to their infants it was justified by asserting that mothers would be less distressed if they did not see their infants. There was no medical or social research that supported that assumption, in fact the

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22 McHutchison, J. (1984). *Adoption in NSW an Historical Perspective* p. 14 citing *Progress* (a quarterly publication of) the NSW Public Service Board (1964). 3(2), p. 17

23 Bowlby, J. (1951) *Maternal Care and Mental Health*. Word Health Organisation Monograph, Series No 2, World Health Organisation, Geneva New York

24 Perkins, K Power of the law protects the fatherless *Daily Telegraph* 31/1/1967; Kennett, J. (1970) The losers in the baby boom: For some mothers an agony of mind and heart lies ahead Sunday *Telegraph*, 12 December; Staff Correspondent (1950). The Problem of the Unwed Mother, *The Sunday Herald* June 28, 1953, p.12, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18504211

25 *Sunday Truth,* Ward I Crowded: Unwed mothers: A special ward, set aside at the Brisbane Women's Hospital for unmarried mothers October 24, 1965

26 Perkins, K Power of the law protects the fatherless *Daily Telegraph* 27/1/1967; Dupre, A. Unwanted Babies and their New Parents *The Sun* 28/11/1973; Gilbert, C. (1968). 'These children need parents (But adoption's a slow business)' 500 unwanted babies in Background *Sunday Telegraph* Feb 18, 1968, p. 41

research that was available stated that mothers would not be in a fit state to make any decision about the long term interests of the baby too soon after the trauma of giving birth.[27] It was known that not allowing mothers to see their babies was traumatic and could physically damage the infant. It was known that mothers suffered if they did not see their babies and their long term psychological well being was impaired by being coerced into relinquishment and/ or not seeing their infants to finish the birthing process and make the baby a 'real person'.

The internal policy was therefore punitive, illegal and one of denying mothers access to their babies to facilitate adoptions.[28] The external policy was that mothers' should be given every assistance to keep their babies and only if they insisted on adoption was it to proceed and only as a last resort. The public was duped, and the illegal and unethical treatment of mothers' and their infants was consistent across Australia both in public and private hospitals as well as in religious and government institutions such as unwed mother and infant Homes.[29]

Adoption was a Commonwealth project and this was certainly evident in the creation of the new *Adoption Act*s implemented throughout Australia during the 1960s. It must be said though that these *Acts* did not appear in a vacuum. The fundamental ideology that it was in the best interests of the child to be removed from its single mother had been national policy from the 1920s. The implementation of the *Acts* only strengthened the state's ability to further its agenda and gave those working in the adoption industry a stronger more 'legalistic' foundation on which to base the expanded role it now needed to satisfy the increasing demand of middle class white couples for babies.

By 1971 there were more babies taken than available adoptive parents to rear them, hence it was a buyer's market and adopters could pick and choose from the many babies available. A situation then arose that babies were discriminated on hair colour or nose shape if not appealing, or those who were of mixed race or had minor health defects. Many babies languished in institutions for years.[30] Needless to say, a costly exercise for the government and social engineering experiment that had gone horribly wrong.

In the same year, 1971, because of the difficulty in placing infants labelled: deferred adoptions, the government encouraged that "Every effort should be made by a good adoption agency to find adoptive homes for "hard to place" babies, special recruitment schemes through magazine, radio and television publicity being used to boost the supply of such homes from time to time, providing Departmental approval is granted."[31]

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27 Fanning, M. (1950). Should we Deprive an Unmarried Mother of her baby's love, *The Argus*, Melbourne, July 18, p. 8. http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article22913146

28 Emerson, D. (2010) Former Driver recalls heartbreak of baby lift *The Western Australian*, March 10, p. 17

29 Staff Correspondent (1950). The Problem of the Unwed Mother, *The Sunday Herald* June 28, 1953, p.12, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18504211 ; discusses women coming from interstate and overseas, hidden in the maternity home, used for labour, and when one young woman gets married the couple are told their baby died. The hospital where the mothers deliver is connected to the unwed mother's home. The mother is expected to make a decision before entering the home and is not given the same access to her baby as married mothers.

30 Berryman, N. So you want to adopt a baby *Sunday Herald* 8/4/1979

31 The Australian Association of Social Workers, New South Wales (1971). Manual of Adoption Practices in New South Wales, p. 13 ; Playing God with a Child's Life Insight Report on Adoption *Daily Mirror*, 17 October, 1967: Because of the shift in supply beginning, older children not preferred, and "recruiting parents who are by no means ideal"

After the new adoption legislation was implemented the numbers of babies taken increased so that by 1972 there were nearly 10,000 babies taken from mothers around the country. The methods used to remove the infants were the same in all states and territories. By this time most hospitals had internal policies that facilitated adoption by such means as not allowing mothers' access to the infants at the birth, drugging and forcing them to sign consents before allowed to leave hospitals.[32]

In July 1973 the Whitlam government introduced the Supporting Mothers' Pension which was widely publicised and overcome to a large extent the connivance of social workers to withhold information about Benefits available prior to 1973, which were not so widely known. In 1982 a Circular[33] was sent round by the Health Commission to all hospitals advising them that not allowing single mothers the same rights as their married counterparts to access their infants was illegal and should cease immediately. The Circular signalled the end of what had been a holocaust for single mothers and their infants throughout most of the 20th century.

32 Gair, S. & Croker, F. 'Missing Voices About a Foreign Place: Exploring midwifery practice with midwives who cared for single mothers and their babies in Queensland (1960-1990)' *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies* 10(2), p.60; Farrar, T 1997. 'What We Did to Those Poor Girls! The Hospital Culture that Promoted Adoption.' In *Proceedings of the Sixth Australian Adoption Conference*, 116-127. Sydney; P Roberts, 'Statement of Pamela Thorne, nee Roberts, 30 September, 1994' in the matter of Judith Marie McHutchison v State of New South Wales no. 13428 of 1993; Final Report No. 22 (2000). *Releasing The Past: Adoption Practices 1950-1998*, pp. 94-95; Cunningham, A. (1996). *Background Paper for the Minister of Community and Health Service On Issues relating to Historical Adoption Practices in Tasmania*, 4 December; Joint Select Committee, (1999). *Adoption and Related Services 1950-1988*, Parliament of Tasmania

33 Health Commission of New South Wales, *Circular No: 82/297*, issued 1 September 1982

The Importance of the Western Australian Apology to Mothers and Fathers brutally separated from their infants

Sue Macdonald

I first met David Templeman MP at a mental health information weekend about two years ago. What struck me about this gentleman, and he is a gentleman in every sense of the word, was the way that he talked about his little boy and the expected arrival of his baby twins later that year. His countenance softened as he gently spoke of his children. Tears brimmed in the corners of his eyes. They came straight from his heart and my own tears gathered, as my heart responded to his obvious love for his children. I felt the missing and the love for my first born daughter Sharon and my twin grand daughters, Chloe and Jade. Little did I know that day, David and I would share a journey spanning nearly two years. This incredible journey would involve us being instrumental in an historical apology in the WA Parliament. It would be the first apology in Australia to mothers, fathers and children who were separated by forced adoption.

The phone rang several weeks later on a beautiful Autumnal day. It was a lady from the Adoption Research Council in WA. Apparently, the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital had issued a formal apology to Queensland Mothers for the barbaric and unlawful way they had treated unmarried mothers who gave birth in their hospital. Chris Cole from an organization called the Apology Alliance, had contacted Channel Seven in the Eastern States, who then contacted their Australia-wide Seven network. They were looking for mothers from other States, who had their face covered whilst giving birth and had their children unlawfully taken from them immediately. The Council knew that this happened to me in 1968 and asked if I would be interviewed along with another mum who experienced this in 1982. We both agreed, interviewed for hours, telling our stories which were then edited to six minutes for the evening news bulletin. It's amazing what you can say in such a short period of time and how emotional and overwhelming the loss still affects us today. We called upon the Government to apologize for the hurt and suffering caused to so many.

The WA Minister for Health, Dr. Kim Hames was interviewed for a response and he said that women who where victims of these practices deserved an apology. During this period, I had joined a support group for mothers and their children in Perth. Two of those mothers stormed King Edward Memorial Hospital and Mercy Care, formerly Saint Anne's Maternity Hospital, demanding an apology. Mercy Care, on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy, who attended unmarried mothers in those decades, sent Margaret van Kepple to interview these mothers. The support group I attended was eventually contacted by King Edward Memorial Hospital and a consultation process began concerning an apology. After the initial consultation, the whole matter went deathly quiet and we heard nothing further for months. Mercy Care, however, issued personal apologies to our two mothers while King Edward remained silent.

Whilst attending the group, I heard of the tragic suicide of one of the mothers, who was involved in litigation with the Catholic Church over these practices and whose reunion with her taken child was devastatingly unsuccessful. The stress, pressure and pain were too much. She ended her life and her two further children were left without a mother.

All the old feelings of grief, frustration, betrayal and anger consumed me for several days. I knew I had to do something to bring this out into the open. I could not live with the shame of past adoptions any longer, knowing that at any moment around Australia, one of these Mums or one of their children would take that fatal step to end their pain. A burning sense of injustice and a promise to my daughter years ago to write our personal story, sent me with a fierce determination to the keyboard of my computer. Several hours and many tears later I finished the story. I picked up the phone and made an appointment with David Templeman. Instinctively, I knew that he possessed the compassion, emotional wisdom and a heart that would listen and care.

I will never forget that day in his office. There I was, feeling so vulnerable and exposed. The shame still hung heavily on my shoulders as I told him my story. As I shared the moment in the story, when they violently severed my child from my body and took her away, I broke down and sobbed. Slowly I gathered myself together and I realized that he was crying too. Two hearts joined together at that moment and we began a journey to fight for justice, public acknowledgement and recognition of a great and terrible wrong.

Over this time I had become acquainted with Christine Cole, convener of the Apology Alliance. I describe Chris as a spiritual human being with a true, kind and generous heart. I am honoured to call her my friend. She also happens to be a walking encyclopaedia on the subject of historical adoption. Chris selflessly and endlessly supplied research, sharing her knowledge with David and myself. As David and I became more informed on the subject, via the spirit and knowledge of this wonderful woman, two hearts became three hearts and in so doing, connected us to the collective heart of many brave and beautiful mothers around the country.

David made an appointment with Senator Louise Pratt and took me to see her in Perth. I supplied her with all the information that Chris had passed on and also a copy of Chris's book she co wrote and co edited - *Releasing the Past (Mothers Stories of their Stolen Babies)*. This book came about as a result of the NSW Inquiry into Past Adoption Practices and was funded by that States Department of Community Services. Louise offered her support.

The silence remained deafening from the Government and King Edward. David raised the subject in Question Time in the Parliament – again, there was little response. By this time, the year was nearly over and David became a proud, new father of twins. It was a busy time for him, Parliament for the year drew to a close and would not resume until February. David contacted me in the New Year saying that he had an opportunity to speak on any subject with the opening of Parliament and asked if he could encompass my story in a speech to the house concerning our issue. Something inside me knew this was meant to be, I knew I had to agree, as I told my daughter long ago, I would one day write our story. Our story would not end up a best seller or gathering dust on a book shelf or tucked away in a bottom draw. Our story would forever, be placed on the public record in the Parliament's Hansard. Our story would become the catalyst leading to an historical and deeply significant moment in our State's evolution. The first apology to the mothers, fathers and the children separated by barbaric, cruel and unlawful past adoption practices. I can think of no other place more powerful or more permanent to serve as a reminder of the pain and suffering of mothers, fathers and their children.

A Life Changing Day – David takes my story before the Parliament (Wednesday 24th February 2010 – Western Australian Parliament Hansard record available)

I awoke this day from a shocking nights sleep with the same gut wrenching feelings of terror and loss that I experienced the day that my mother took me on a bus up Hay Street, Perth to face the Welfare Department.

Today, I was to travel on a bus, up that same street, to go to Parliament House and present my story through David Templeman MP to the Parliament of Western Australia. The panic was rising, I couldn't breathe, swallow, my mouth was bone dry and I felt faint and sick. The body remembers and never forgets the impact of trauma. I fell to the kitchen floor as I allowed these emotions their full expression and I sobbed to the point of dry reaching. I allowed full expression with loving attention to the emotions of the young, terrified 16 year old girl who has been a part of me for 41 years. Back then she was silenced, humiliated, abused and shamed, today she was given permission to speak. David was to give her that voice.

As I walked up the steps, I didn't think that my knees would support me and the hole in my gut reminded me of that past time, when I got on a bus to travel up Hay Street. My gut was empty and aching that day too, for the week before, my beautiful baby had been taken away as soon as she was born, earmarked without my permission for adoption.

The smiling face and warm hug of Carmel from ARMS gave me a much needed injection of courage. A camera man was there to take footage outside the House. Other mothers arrived. Brave and beautiful women who have for nearly thirty years, tirelessly supported and fought for the truth to be told.

The media filmed us walking together up the steps and holding the banner that was hand stitched by members of ARMS Western Australia. The faces of young teenage mothers stared out from the banner (the fallen) together with the much fought for photos of their lost and treasured babies. A profound moment of acknowledgement washed through me as I felt the emotions beneath every stitch, devotedly put in place by now aged but loving hands. I could imagine the tenderness as the women sowed, years of pent up tenderness for their children aching for expression working its way painstakingly through the banner.
There was a delay in the House as a motion from question time had to be debated then David escorted us into the House. As we listened to the banter that seemed never to end, I was aware of my body tightening. By the time that the vote was carried and David stood up my body was frozen rigid and Stewart and Carmel took my shaking hands.

I was conscious of Members leaving the House after the debate and I thought - nobody is even going to listen. David commenced and the Members were busy, involving themselves in background conversations and looking at papers - not paying much attention at all.

Within minutes everything came to a stand still. You could hear a pin drop as David spoke for us and with us. David broke down at one particular point in my statement and the members turned to face him. They were glued to every word. Several Members were starting to display emotional responses. David finished my statement and delivered a very powerful, heartfelt and inspiring speech to the House. It was so far reaching in its affect, that Members of the Government crossed the floor to shake his

hand, as well as Members of the Labor Party. I finally relaxed my grip which had put poor Carmel's hand to sleep. But she did not flinch. She endured this discomfort until I let go.

Troy Buswell (a real bloke), approached us in the Gallery. With tears in his eyes he stated that his father had died when he was eight and that he had two sons. He could not imagine losing a child and a father almost at the same time. He was astounded that over 200,000 Australian women across the country experienced the same horror as I had experienced. We were excited and empowered. As we walked out of the door, we met Dr. Kim Hames. For the first time in my life, I looked a doctor in the eye, held his gaze, firmly gripped his hand and assertively said "and I am Sue." (I always deal with Doctors awkwardly, through a lens of confusing, painful feelings.)

All manner of invisible forces were set in motion that day. Daniel Emerson, a journalist with the *West Australian* ran the story. He contacted me and after long discussions with Chris Cole and I, armed with the historical facts supplied by Chris, he bravely exposed past adoption practices as unlawful and barbaric in the next edition of the *West Australian*. Dr. Kim Hames went on radio and several mothers did radio interviews. Eric Ripper, Leader of the Opposition called upon the Premier to apologize in the Parliament and the Government, placed in a position of public scrutiny, complied, and agreed to apologize. David kept up pressure, reminding them to consult with the mothers and Daniel was constantly nipping at their heels.

I wrote to Dr. Kim Hames' advisor, introducing myself and commending them on the historical significance and re-enforcing the vital necessity of an apology to begin the healing. I became party to limited consultation over the months that followed and was invited to attend the formal media release on the steps of Parliament House to announce the date of the apology. I was to be present to answer a few questions. The Government's comments in the press had somewhat downplayed the issue with diluted explanations and excuses. I seized the opportunity to speak at the media conference saying I would make a statement. I was told I had to keep it to a few hundred words and I worked for weeks with Chris's help, honing this very important statement. It was designed to shock with the truth and draw attention to one of the darkest periods in our nation's history. I managed to reduce it down to 700 words; 700 words I could now recite like a parrot having edited it so many times. In the end I thought it doesn't matter if it takes more time, this was our one opportunity for Australia to hear the truth.

The day arrived and I was sick with fear but quietly determined. I lost count of the media that were present, there were wall to wall reporters, cameras and microphones occupying a third of the huge entrance to Parliament House. Dr. Kim Hames spoke and I wanted to disappear for what I was about to read, denounced almost everything he said. My turn came and with David Templeman on one side of me, my daughter Kirsty on the other and a band of supporters behind me – I spoke:

In Parliament this year, Mr. Templeman exposed the truth about past adoption practices. He spoke of the horror in our nation's hospitals and of the barbaric, government sanctioned policy and practices – that tore babies from their unwed mothers at birth. The Greens called it "institutionalized baby theft" and other MP's have declared - it was a Nazi-style social cleansing exercise and a blatant abuse of human rights.

Past governments wanted ex-nuptial children adopted. It cut welfare costs and they

believed only married couples were fit to raise children, so Welfare Departments advertised these babies as "unwanted". The "unwanted baby" story became the central theme of welfare propaganda. Society believed mothers CHOSE to give their babies away. They did not!!!

In reality women were preyed upon, traumatized and denied both their civil and human rights. Single, unsupported mothers were treated like breeders, denigrated, dehumanized and de-babied. Removal of babies was systematic, with government, religious and non-religious organizations colluding, in what has now been labelled the adoption industry. Adoption workers acted with impunity. The Act was treated with contempt.

In the Australian Medical Journal 1960, a leading obstetrician urged his colleagues not to worry about breaking the law, when taking babies from unwed mothers - he stated: "The last thing an obstetrician might concern himself [with] – "is the law in regard to adoption."

Mothers were emotionally, physically and psychologically, de-humanized and de-railed.

They were isolated from family support and heavily sedated with mind altering drugs. They were demeaned, shamed and threatened. Some were tethered or hand-cuffed to beds and physically assaulted. To prevent eye contact and bonding, their faces were covered as they gave birth. Terrified babies were whisked away and their mothers' screams for them fell on deaf ears. Some mums were told their babies had died, only to have them turn up decades later and some babies not quite perfect enough for adoption, were left in institutions.

This litany of horror finally stopped in 1982, but it wasn't out of compassion for mothers, it was out of the fear of reprisal - a Health Commission circular warned hospitals of litigation.

Ten years on, Justice Chisolm of the Law Reform Commission officially exposed these practices as illegal. He later testified to a NSW inquiry using these legal terms:

Duress …… kidnapping….. false imprisonment…..fraud…..Tort of Deceit.

In testimony to the same Inquiry (psychiatrist) Dr. Geoff Rickarby said:

> It was a well oiled system … there was organization and conspiracy at every turn… They were drugged and traumatized then made to sign consents. Young women were in an incredibly powerless position, dealing with a linked series of people, who had marked them out in what was, *frankly – conspir-a-torial activity to abduct their babies….*
> *All of the things—the separation from their families, the baby being taken, their faces covered - the power difference was built up over months….. the young woman was put into a powerless, shamed position…. then the drugs were added on top …*
> *All this was done to the sole legal guardian of the baby, BEFORE the Adoption Act could [come into effect]…. [BEFORE] the consent was signed.*

At a 1994 adoption conference, Mothers openly wept when a social worker said:

….I apologize for my neglect, my acts of coercion, and my failure as someone with a moral, ethical, legal and paid duty to care…..

Another worker wrote:

I was… part of a profession that obviously failed so many women and their children both by acts of commission and omission …… failing to challenge a system that inflicted so much pain.

Law Reform Commission lawyer, Cathleen Sherry wrote:

…..their experiences revealed systemic violations of human rights. The treatment…….. from doctors, social workers, charitable organizations and government departments violated their right to be free from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, free from discrimination, free from arbitrary interference with the family, as well as their right to be entitled to special protection as mothers.

The Australian Government admitted in 2005 that past adoption practices had led to another stolen generation.

Our Government is the first Government in Australia to publicly acknowledge the injustice of these practices and we are deeply grateful for their desire to reconcile a great wrong.

To other Governments in Australia and their stakeholders – HANG YOUR HEADS IN SHAME!

We have lived our lives, feeling our maternities were medically butchered. We feel this violation and the loss of our children - in every cell of our being. The trauma is so deep, so complex, that over 40% of us never had another child. Children have suffered, believing their own mothers callously gave them away. Hearts have been shattered; lives have been taken - isn't it time you all publicly apologized for the actions of your predecessors and cleaned up the mess they left behind.

Shaking in my boots, I gathered myself together and answered a few questions. The media release concluded. I had fought my fear for weeks, fear of exposure, ridicule and being judged. These fears invaded my daily thoughts and intruded on my sleep. The nightmares had returned with a vengeance. However, the flame of injustice still burned fiercely, it stared down and confronted my fears. The desire to fight and expose the injustice perpetrated against thousands of long suffering, silenced women and the love for my daughter, carried me over the line that day. It was worth it, we hit the news big time – locally, nationally and internationally. The eyes of the world were upon us.

The six weeks between the press release and the actual apology on the 19th October, are a bit blurred. They were filled with last minute consultations and media interviews. Chris and I became a formidable team, taking part in a lot of productive media interviews before the apology and post apology, to help promote the need for national recognition.

The week of the apology, I was filmed for an episode of ABC's *Can We Help You*, which goes to air on the 26th of November 2010. As part of the filming, the crew actually took

me to parliament on apology day. David and I were concerned about the motion for the apology for I knew that it would be well scrutinized and worded within a legal framework. However, I had taken the government's suggestion to frame the apology within a bi-partisan format, which would involve all Members of the Parliament.

As the Premier read the motion and opened it up for discussion, I felt the atmospheric disappointment as he spoke his guarded words. However, this disappointment was short lived. As each Member rose to speak, many speaking from their own personal tragedy through past adoption practices, the apology blossomed and the healing began. It unfurled like the petals of a beautiful flower. The rain of truth of the members bi-partisan words encouraged it to grow and it reached its true beauty and potential. As the depth of the words started accurately to reflect the depth of the pain, the depth of the cruelty, the depth of the injustice and the depth of the suffering you could hear the tears and the sobbing. The mothers, their children and their families were hearing the words of acknowledgement and validation they have needed to hear for so long. Words they have deserved to hear but have been despicably denied just as they were despicably denied the right to stay together as a family.

Sometimes in life, souls come together to achieve a common purpose, as we all did on that day. In these moments we meet and touch one another at a profound and deep level. There are no words to describe this type of human experience when we set out to achieve and then actualize and satisfy a desperate, long denied need.

SORRY is such a powerful, healing word when genuinely felt and honestly conveyed.

Why would you come all the way from Queensland to hear this apology?

Janice Kashin

It was a question from the ABC journalist, on the steps of the magnificent West Australian Parliamentary building. History is being made today. I want to be part of that history. I was one of the women who negotiated the apology from the Chief Executive Officer, Professor Ian Jones of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. I know first hand the effect that apology had on women who hadn't even given birth there. I expect this apology will have a similar effect. It will free thousands of women from the stigma of "not having been quite good enough" to parent their own babies. It will give them a sense of freedom at last. They will be equal.

In my mind, the parliamentary building, the place where laws governing the wellbeing of a country's (or State's) citizens are enacted and because of the sacred trust voters pass on to those who represent them the onus is on those elected to get it right. This was the first elected parliament in Australia to say:

"We got it wrong. We apologise."

Why would I not want to be there for such a profound moment?

I had been invited to come by Judith, a Western Australia mother, whose daughter was taken from her by the Sisters of Mercy. I did a painting for her book that was going to be launched on the 19th October. *The Transfiguration of Judith of Albany,* I had called the painting. It depicted Judith's trauma at not being allowed to feed her crying baby. I had spoken to Judith on many occasions abut the images that were evolving out of my reading of her story. I wanted to be there for the launching of her book, and to finally meet her and the other special women, Sue and Marilyn, whose efforts had brought this apology to be an accomplished fact.

There is electricity that hovers over people who are anticipating a great event. It is a positive energy that uplifts them all. It comes from expectations, joy, camaraderie, oneness, and the Tsunami feeling of "today's the day". Those who had put in the effort of lobbying the elected, were about to experience the fruition of their efforts. Those who had engaged in efforts of denigration were about to be vanquished. Those 'for' an apology to the mothers' whose babies were stolen were about to have their persistence and determination rewarded.

"Do you think you will shed tears today?"

Another TV reporter asked me.

"I don't know. I had a good sleep last night, but then again, I have packed 10 tissues in my had bag. I am ready for anything."

I expected many would shed tears. Many mothers had arrived with their taken daughters and had arrived early to acquaint themselves with those who had worked tirelessly on behalf of all. I spoke to Dr. Kim Hames before we all went in:

He said:

> "Yes, I spoke to Professor Jones about the apology the Hospital made to the Queensland women. I wanted to know how he found things afterward and of course the content of his apology."

I replied:

> "It was a process – monthly consultations, until we reached a wording that was acceptable to both."

In the Parliament

By the time I got to the top floor there were only a couple of seats remaining. I took the seat next to Kate who I knew from earlier conferences. Downstairs the back section of the Public Gallery was already filled. People were spilling out into an annex that had TV coverage of the event. Doing a quick head count I estimated 300 guests. Once the House began to address the business of the afternoon I held my breath. I literally didn't want to miss a word. It was like being at Runnymede when King John was forced to sign the Magna Carta. Or being at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington in 1963, when Martin Luther King gave his famous 'I have a dream' speech. I can only imagine how electric the air would have been back then, when the marginalised were acknowledged, when hope stirred and victory for the first time appeared on the horizon. This was my civil rights movement, for I was part of a marginalised and oppressed group. This was part of my 'dream' coming true. Whilst giving birth I had been shackled, shackled so I couldn't run off with my baby, now I was starting to feel that old leather shackle letting go of its decades hold over me.

The Premier was about to say the parliament had got it wrong many years ago and they were sorry for betraying the trust of young unmarried pregnant women.

I was able to stay fairly detached until the pollies began to tell of their own tragic experiences of taken babies, lost relatives, fractured families. Then I realised that the law makers were truly one with all the mothers who had lost babies, they too had their own tragedies. This parliamentary building contained repentant lawmakers well aware of the sacred duty they had to bring down laws that enabled those without a voice to be represented by the laws. And this was my moment for shedding tears.

Nobody spoke against the apology. A far cry from the Queensland Parliament, in 1991, when the disgraceful Section 39 was appended to the new Queensland laws, and thereby prolonged the anguish of Queensland women whose babies were taken from them.

Nobody spoke against the apology. A far cry from the New South Wales Inquiry into Past Practices (1998-2000) that contained recommendations for an apology to mothers and babies who were unlawfully separated. To this date no apology has been forthcoming from NSW.

The only sour note in the whole procedure of receiving the apology happened when one elected representative reminded those whose babies were well looked after by their substitute parents, that they could be grateful. As though if somebody steals

your car for 20 years you should be grateful because the thief had your car serviced regularly! The fact that you had no car for 20 years was overlooked completely by this man.

The afternoon tea was something to behold! Satayed chicken legs, cakes, exotic biscuits ….. The Queensland parliamentary caters might benefit from sharing an afternoon tea with their West Australian counterparts!

A tsunami occurred in Perth on 19th October, 2010. And we mothers have our catamarans perched on top of the main wave and will be riding them all the way to Canberra.

And why am I so positive?

Because a shift occurred in the hearts and minds of all who watched the TV coverage of the apology delivered by Premier Colin Barnett, Deputy Premier Dr. Kim Hames, David Templeman MP and others. Hotel employees, cab drivers, airline hostesses, airline passengers – all wish to acknowledge the stories within their own families of their stolen family members. And those who simply read the newspaper coverage have an empathy that didn't exist before – patrons in a Brisbane café addressed their own pain and burst into tears. Another woman with her husband, and her little girl, looked at me at least six times and smiled, beamed even. They don't talk to you, but you know they now have permission to talk to others. The pain in the Australian psyche is now being addressed, and the addressing won't stop until the last mother and child have been heard and acknowledged with respect.

A Pathway to Healing

Carmel Ward

After 40 years, you'd think that the pain and grief from the loss of my son would have diminished. It is like the tide, the memories and pain recede when pushed back; and then at the least provocation they come rushing forward again.

I was in one of my 'tide's out' phases, but was aware through the media that there were plans for an Adoption Apology to be given in the WA Parliament. My antennae is always up, a heightened sensitivity to all things about adoption. I quietly applauded the work of the other women, but was too emotionally exhausted to join in the lobbying. My parents had both died in the preceding 11 months; and maybe it was because of their passing that I felt that it would be OK to break the silence, to articulate the previously unspoken parts of my story and of my loss and grief. I realised then that I shouldn't be just an observer to the apology.

I spoke to my sister-in-law who is the Member for Midland, Michelle Roberts; I asked her about what was planned and if she would be participating in the debate, she said, "I can if you would like me to, can you write some notes for me". I asked if they would be prepared for the crowd that would surely gather, she said, "Do you think so?", my response was "I know so!". She spoke to her Parliamentary colleagues and confirmed the arrangements and that she would be speaking.

On the morning of the 19th October, I wondered if I had done the right thing, worried that there could be fall-out from allowing my name to be used, and my son's original and adopted names and date of birth. I knew that the tide would be coming back in with a surge, but this time there was the opportunity for it to carry me forward.

The atmosphere in the Parliament precinct was 'electric'. I didn't join the other mothers gathered outside. My husband Ray met me and we were registered as visitors at Parliament House and allowed to enter the public gallery early. I didn't mind sitting through Question Time, it was worth it to secure seats in the gallery. The Public Gallery filled quickly; they were mostly women. There were only a few men present, like Ray to lend their support. I tried to smile and reassure women near me who looked nervous. Maybe it was their first visit to the Parliament; maybe they too were anxious about the emotional wave that surely would follow.

As the proceedings got underway, the tension in the gallery increased significantly. We were all intently listening to every word, our hearts thumping, our eyes moist. Then as Michelle spoke my breath was taken away and my tears freely flowing. She too cried, for me and for all the other women and children. I was very proud of Michelle and truly grateful for her willingness to tell part of my story and to acknowledge the loss, grief and long term suffering we Mothers have endured.

During the proceedings, a child cried in the corridor outside the public gallery. There was a collective turn of heads towards the sound. It was like the echo from the past of the cries of the children who had been taken from us all those years ago. Very

poignant, very real, very heart wrenching.

The Speaker of the House showed great tolerance on the day, he allowed us to applaud each speaker and give a rousing cheer when the motion was declared to be carried. Applause is rarely heard in that place.

As if that wasn't enough emotion on the day, my cousin and I found each other in the same place for the same reason. She had seen me across the gallery, seen my tears as Michelle spoke, but I didn't see her until we were out in the corridor. She lost her only son to adoption, 6 months prior to my experience. She had another child, a daughter. I didn't have any other children. We cried tears of consolation and shared grief about family secrets. Our sons have declined contact.

Never underestimate the power of an apology. The WA Adoption Apology was authentic, it was spoken with great compassion acknowledging the flawed policies and practices of the past, the speeches contained references to real personal experiences; it recognised the suffering of the women and the children.

For me, this apology was a capstone on the apologies given to me by my mother, and the father of my son. Sadly, my father and I were not fully reconciled before he died, but at least I was able to find the courage some years ago to tell both Mum and Dad about the impact that the loss of my son had on my life. Early this year, before my father died, in a short window of time when he was lucid, I wanted to make my peace with him. I was shocked that the words which came out of my mouth were, "I'm sorry if I have been a disappointment to you". Where did that come from? He had a quizzical look on his face for a brief moment; he then disappeared into that vague place again. It was the stark realisation for me that for a significant part of my life I have been 'love hungry', trying to gain my father's approval; being twice as good to be only half as good.

Since the apology, when the opportunity arises, I openly acknowledge that I am a Mother. I have been able to have authentic conversations with family, friends and work colleagues. Nothing can undo the past, but this apology is a pathway to healing.

The Fulfilment of a Dream

Barbara Maison

"… help you in dealing with the pain and the anguish that you have handled and carried for so many years. Thank you Mr Speaker."

The Premier of Western Australia Colin Barnett's words ended, and for a few seconds the silence in the beautiful high-ceilinged chamber was total, apart from stifled sobs - when suddenly, jubilant applause burst from both the Speaker's Gallery and overhead in the Public Gallery surrounding the floor of the chamber, seemingly never-ending, building in volume, so incredible ….. almost fantastic!

I sat numbly in the Speaker's Gallery almost in disbelief realising it *had* happened – finally – after all these years! It was 4:03 pm on Tuesday, October 19th, 2010, history had been made and we were actually present to witness such a truly momentous occasion – the first of its kind in any state or territory of Australia, and I'm told, the world!

Slowly we looked at each other and rose to our feet as one, the murmurs and embraces started and tear-choked voices found themselves again after the almost reverent silence of the past hour as we had listened, interrupted only by intermittent applause for the wonderful words of recognition and bi-partisan support from the speakers of the Western Australian Parliament.

We moved together into the Aboriginal People's Gallery where the Parliament had arranged a delicious afternoon tea; mothers, fathers, adoptees, children, friends and relatives mingled with the politicians who joined us in our celebration. Excited chatter filled the air as the points of the apology were discussed and repeated over again in wonderment and incredulity: the precious words still ringing in our ears.

I stood back, coffee in hand, watching, listening, taking it all in – a sight I'd never imagined – seeing so many who had come to be part of this historic day, the tense anticipation gone, their faces now lit up with smiles as they mingled, as politicians listened to their stories.

Since the mid '90s in the Eastern States of Australia, some politicians had listened and sympathised, even made promises, but without support of their peers let our voices fade away – our pain remained unresolved. The dozen or so support groups that gave many the will to survive their grief, to keep on battling to be heard were tiring, mothers ageing and dying, until a visionary, Christine Cole - who had been instrumental in getting the support of NSW parliamentarian, Pat Rogan MP to call for an inquiry into adoption in that state which produced many recommendations but unfortunately were not implemented by the government – realised that an alliance of unified voices of groups COULD make difference!

Christine Cole established the Apology Alliance after former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's memorable apology to the Stolen Generation in February 2008. The Alliance consisted of support groups and individuals from all around Australia: psychiatrists, psychologists, doctors, lawyers, politicians, academics, journalists and playwrights.

Most were affected by past Australian government removalist policies, many just emphatic, having heard first hand a mothers' distress and having observed the ugly fallout of a social engineering experiment that failed horribly – but all were supportive that an aging group of Australian citizens would finally see justice done and receive an apology as part of a restorative justice process. Janice Kashin, the Alliance's resident artist produced the 'Declaration of Profound Loss', published in *the The Australian* in November 2008, officially acknowledging the Alliance was here to stay and a force to be reckoned with.

A West Australian group 'Mothers for Justice' whose convenors Sue, Judith and Marilyn *(mice who roared?)* gained the support of David Templeman MLA, the Labor member for Mandurah. David's empathy led him to Dr. Kim Hames, the Liberal Deputy Premier of WA, and from their collaboration grew the nucleus of an achievement that mothers, fathers, children and families separated by past practices of adoption never suspected would ever occur in their lifetime. The Alliance went into overtime, supported Mothers for Justice, and began to support the mothers push for a Western Australian apology.

Initially ALAS Queensland, gained an apology from Professor Ian Jones, of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Queensland. Channel 7 was contacted to record this momentous occasion. Alliance members galvanised and alerted Channel 7 in their various States; a wild fire erupted and the news of the apology spread around Australia. A local issue had taken on national importance. After all this was the first time we had been officially acknowledged in a sincere and profound way for the government sanctioned theft of our children

After two parliamentary and Senate Inquiries, our hopes had been dashed. We never expected to live to see an apology for the past violations of our human and civil rights. Many mothers had disappeared into the background, hearts broken. They had bared their souls to three Inquiries only to be disregarded and dispensed with once again. Many mothers had said: "No more", I cannot keep speaking about his awful truth only to be ignored yet again. But, the winds of change were a blowing!

Wonderful and committed people, who supported our cause, seemed to materialise out of nowhere. Daniel Emerson, a journalist contacted Christine Cole, who furnished him with research she had been gathering since 1994. Daniel spoke with Western Australian mothers and was deeply moved by their experiences. He was angry at an injustice that had for so long been covered up, but most of all he was moved by the women themselves. He ran stories in *The West Australian*, probed politicians with his questions, and made sure Dr. Kim Hames honoured his promised apology.

At first, it was a whisper, then a possibility – mothers all over Australia held their collective breath in anticipation - then it became a promise. In August 2010, the West Australian government announced that an official parliamentary apology would be made acknowledging that past governments and their agencies had acted unlawfully, unjustly and inhumanely, in separating mothers from their babies!

A certainty, that at least one state government in Australia - the very first, and possibly world-wide in a society where the practice of systematically removing babies from their unsupported mothers was common - would courageously say 'sorry'. Then the Greens came on board. A new party, no skeletons in their cupboard, they

called what happened to us what it was: state sanctioned baby theft. David Templeman MP, the ardent supporter of Sue, this principled man who will go down in history as being the driving force behind the first apology given by any State; to mothers who had been robbed of their babies.

SORRY: A small word, with sincerity, a precious glorious word!

The day's events had started around midday on the front steps of Parliament House where groups of women gathered to introduce themselves to the names and voices, previously only known to each other on the internet or phone.

Television crews arrived with cameras, soundmen, and reporters recording an interview with Sue, strongly supported by her daughters, together with her two close friends and allies who had worked so hard, for so long to bring this day to fruition. Then they filmed two pairs of reunited mothers and daughters, hugging, holding each other under the colonnade at the front of Parliament House: a precious memento for them.

At 1:00 pm, we walked to a Rotunda in the park behind Parliament House. The welcoming West Australian groups, Jigsaw and ARMs, greeted us with baskets of rosemary, banners and balloons. People mingled to find familiar faces and speak their names, relaxed in identifying with the camaraderie of that cruel, unique bond, only fully comprehended by those who have experienced our particular pain and grief; the separation from loved ones, that merciless "not knowing" grief.

From there we moved together to pause in the Sunken Garden in the Parliament House grounds, for a welcome and speeches by an adoptee and two mothers, with a call for remembrance to those mothers and children who could not join us, for reasons of distance and/or death. Flowers, tiny bouquets and significant items were placed in the gardens, balloons were released and flew freely, like a giant butterfly soaring up into the blue sky in memory of our lost children, finalised this part of our journey in the search for healing.

As we entered the chamber and galleries the mood was quiet and full of anticipation as we sat listening to the remainder of question time, waiting almost in disbelief, for this wondrous moment to arrive. Many more witnesses had attended than anticipated, so were seated in the Aboriginal People's meeting room which had a TV screen to view the Apology.

Screens positioned in the Speakers' Gallery enabled us to sit enthralled, absorbing every word of the speeches and also to view the faces of the parliamentarians from both sides of the house, who were united in speaking those all-important, much longed-for words of acknowledgement and recognition of our need for healing.

As many interstate venues ageing mothers who wished to attend but for various reasons could not, due to ill health or been unable to afford the luxury of travel, arrangements were made to view this historic event via web-mail streaming - a wondrous means of being able to be involved and joined through cyberspace despite being thousands of kilometres from their sisters-in-grief.

Congratulations, Western Australia!

Congratulations, Dr. Kim Hames and David Templeman, MLA, supported by Premier Colin Barnett, for standing up to the opposition ingrained in Australian society to recognise publicly the grief suffered by all participants of our stolen generation.

The very first state or territory in Australia to admit that *'the previous parliaments and governments were directly responsible for the application of processes that harshly and cruelly impacted on unmarried mothers whose children were stolen for adoption.'*

Let us hope that this will create a precedent so that all states and territories together with the Federal Government of Australia will follow suit. That they will also admit the truth, so necessary for us as mothers, and that our children know, '*we did **not** give our much-wanted, much-loved and so inconsolably-grieved-for babies so carelessly away!'*

Finally, congratulations to all who have supported the dream - your long hard, often emotionally draining efforts made this very precious day come true - one I never ever dreamed would eventuate in my lifetime, where I could sit in such exalted surroundings and hear those precious words now sealed in my soul forever.

The dark clouds have lifted - my bereft heart is lighter today!

Thank you all.

Christine Cole concludes this compilation:

West Australian has led the way, hundreds of women travelled from all over Australia to hear those very precious words: “I am sorry”. I received lots of emails from mothers and their adult children who had taken the journey, and many expressed similar sentiments: “I feel like a great weight has been lifted from my shoulders”; “I feel a part of the broader Australian community, I don’t feel so alone”; “I don’t feel that awful sense of disconnection, I feel like someone cares, I haven’t felt like that for years.”

Why is the act of contrition so important? If one has been a victim of trauma they also carry shame, guilt and blame. It is a very heavy load to carry and one that can only be alleviated if the perpetrator takes responsibility for the damage they have inflicted on the victim. The only way we as traumatised individuals can truly move on and begin our healing process is when there is a sincere acknowledgment that a wrong has been done and a genuine apology given. An apology is a gift, a gift to the recipient as well as the giver. It allows both to move forward. It gives one the opportunity to say “I am deeply and sincerely sorry.” It gives the one injured the opportunity if they so choose to say “I forgive you”. Prime Minister Rudd so eloquently apologised to the Indigenous stolen generation, for the brutal separation of children from their mothers, fathers and families. 17% of the Indigenous stolen generation were taken from their mothers from the same hospitals, by the same people, under the same laws as we had our children stolen. There is a white stolen generation in Australia, it needs to be acknowledged and apologised for; we were Australia’s most vulnerable citizens: pregnant women, mothers and infants but instead of being offered special protection we were left at the mercy of a rapacious adoption industry that was initiated and promoted by the Federal government and its practices and policies enacted via state run institutions, whether religious, or non-religious. Laws were enacted that, rather than protect our rights, eliminated them. Some say why should we apologise for something that happened years ago and for which I wasn’t a part? But neither did you intervene and stop it, and if a country is going to take credit for its past glories it must be mature enough to take collective responsibility for its past injustices as *“every time history repeats itself, the price of the lesson goes up.”* (Anonymous)

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The Times They Are A-Changin'

Evelyn Robinson

Who would have thought that a mother who had been separated from her child by adoption would be sitting in a Parliament building, with other mothers, who had also experienced adoption separation, looking and listening, as politicians wept while describing our loss and grief?

In 1970, when my son, Stephen, was born and adopted, I dreamt that one day he would sit by my side. Little did I imagine that, on the 19th of October 2010, in Western Australia, we would stand side by side and applaud as the Premier of Western Australia apologised for the past adoption policies and practices which separated so many mothers from their children. This was the first apology of its kind in the world and I am so happy that Stephen and I were able to be there together. It certainly was a memorable occasion.

The first government apology in Australia was the federal apology to the Stolen Generations in February, 2008. This was a momentous event for all Australians and the country virtually came to a standstill, to allow everyone to view the apology live on television. I was not able to be present in Parliament for that apology, but I was present for the apology to the Forgotten Australians and the British Child Migrants, which took place in Canberra, in November, 2009. I know from talking to the people who were there how moved they were that their issues were being recognised and that the government had decided to say 'sorry' for what had happened to them in the past. Both apologies included a recognition of the damage which had occurred and funding for services to address that damage.

Nothing that is said now can change what happened in the past for any of us, but these apologies have not only drawn the attention of both the nation and the world to the issues involved, but are also an acknowledgement on the part of the government that past policies and practices were harmful and inappropriate.

Adoption in Australia has always been managed separately by each state. The apology in Western Australia came about because a mother who had been separated from her child by adoption approached her Member of Parliament, David Templeman, MP, Member for Mandurah and explained to him how her life had been affected by the separation from her child. She and other mothers continued to press for an official acknowledgment of the role of government in separating families. They had the support of many others, both around Australia and around the world.

It was a lovely, sunny day in Perth on the 19th of October and almost two hundred people gathered outside Parliament House to attend the apology. Before we went into the building, there was a small ceremony in the sunken garden where we acknowledged all those whose lives had been affected by adoption separation around the world and those who were deceased. Flowers were laid and balloons were released in honour of those not present. There was a warm, strong feeling of understanding and togetherness. Mention was made of the value of support groups and of the need for specialist services to address adoption-related issues. These were matters which I raised after the apology with politicians. I was assured that they are aware of the need for services to be adequately funded and for professionals to

be appropriately trained and educated in adoption separation issues.

There were many representatives of the media present and the apology was given very good coverage in newspapers, on television and on the radio. We entered the Parliament building and made our way to the public gallery, which had seating for only a hundred and six people. Another room was set up where the others could watch on closed circuit television. The chamber was very attractive, with beautiful stained glass windows.

We waited anxiously through the end of Question Time, unsure of exactly what form the apology would take. We were told afterwards that the parliamentary web site almost went into meltdown, as so many people around the world logged on to watch the apology live.

The Premier of Western Australia, Colin Barnett, MP, moved the motion, which afterwards was carried unanimously, to apologise sincerely and unequivocally to those who had been adversely affected by past adoption policies and practices, which had not struck a balance between caring for the well-being of the mother and the well-being of the child. He acknowledged that some of the processes involved in past adoptions, especially between the 1940s and the 1980s, such as removing babies from their mothers after birth, had caused long term anguish and suffering and that the government was responsible for allowing this to happen. He mentioned the fact that many unmarried mothers were pressured into agreeing to adoption, at a time when they were emotionally vulnerable and that the events surrounding the births of their children had lasting consequences for them and their families. He said that for some mothers this had resulted in a 'deep and profound sadness' and that some had been 'severely scarred for decades to come'. He apologised unreservedly on behalf of the government to the mothers, the children and their respective extended families, whose interests were not best served by such policies and practices.

The Premier pointed out that these policies and practices occurred under past governments and that ***they were wrong***. He applauded mothers for being 'survivors' and for having the courage to persist with their cause until this apology took place. He acknowledged that an apology cannot repair the damage, but hoped that it would assist in the healing process and offered the compassion and recognition of the Parliament.

The Premier also talked about those who were adopted and explained that their mothers did not cast them aside thoughtlessly, but cared deeply about their well-being. Many unmarried mothers in the twentieth century acted in ignorance of the consequences and so did not give informed consents to adoption. On that day in Western Australia, their motherhood was publicly honoured, at last.

The motion was passed unanimously and the Parliament said clearly, ***We are sorry***. Other politicians also spoke. Some wept openly as they talked about our loss and grief and some of them disclosed adoption experiences within their own families. We applauded every politician who spoke, spontaneously disregarding the signs telling us that applause was not allowed. There was a great atmosphere of caring and support in the Parliament and some of the politicians met with us afterwards. When David Templeman, MP spoke, he called for both a state and a national enquiry and

was given a standing ovation from the public gallery. I was so proud to have my son rise to his feet and applaud enthusiastically by my side.

We shared the experience with family members affected by adoption separation who had travelled from around Australia and with many more around the world who made contact before and after the apology. Our thoughts were also with others, who did not live to share this experience with us.

Afterwards, there was a great feeling of relief and appreciation from everyone present, that someone had finally listened and was prepared to declare publicly their concern for our suffering. Many of us felt as if our ship had finally come in and that we had at last been able to throw off the chains of shame and blame which had bound us for so many years. We were inspired by the dedication and passion which had brought about this apology. We left Parliament House with the hope that this apology will be followed by many more.

I believe that the apology in Western Australia will not only help many people with their individual healing, but will also increase community awareness of the issues that many of us have had to deal with since our children were taken from us to be adopted. I have heard from many, many mothers around the world who are heartened by news of the Western Australian apology. This comment is very typical: *I can't tell you how it soothes a damaged heart to hear that at last there is some recognition of the suffering of mothers, fathers and children involved in adoption. My ambition now is to live long enough to see an apology given in Great Britain*. I share her ambition.

We have been told that other states and territories in Australia are now also considering apologising and many of us have drawn the attention of our own state and territory governments to the fact that the apology has taken place in Western Australia. There have also been discussions with the federal government and they are currently considering what would need to happen before a federal apology could be given.

I believe that Australia is setting an example and I hope that other countries will follow our lead.

One mother who was present expressed her feelings to me afterwards: *To receive this apology in such a public way enables me to feel regarded, that I matter, that what I went through has been acknowledged and wrong. This gift restores my dignity and self worth. I received a sincere apology and was told that my consent was* ***not*** *really given, because it was not an informed one; and that what happened was not my fault. So much was affirmed and validated and I feel empowered.*

It is a huge achievement and an example to the world. I believe that it is the start of a widespread acknowledgement of the loss and grief that were caused by past policies and practices and hopefully this will increase awareness of our issues in the community and help many to heal from the hurts of the past.

REMOVAL OF CHILDREN FROM UNMARRIED MOTHERS — APOLOGY

Western Australian Assembly Tuesday 19 October 2010

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys — Leader of the House) [3.03 pm] — without notice: I move —

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the Premier to move a motion in relation to past adoption practices, and that the debate be conducted under the time limits determined for a matter of public interest.

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham) [3.03 pm]: Obviously, the opposition is agreeable to this, and we have appreciated the degree of cooperation between both sides in bringing this matter forward.

Question put and passed with an absolute majority.

Motion

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [3.04 pm]: I move —

That this house notes —

(1) that with regard to past adoption practices, it is now recognised that from the 1940s to the 1980s the legal, health, and welfare system then operating in Western Australia, in many instances, did not strike the correct balance between the goal of minimising the emotional and mental impact of the adoption process on unmarried mothers, with the goal of achieving what was considered at the time to be in the best interests of the child;

(2) that processes such as the immediate removal of the baby following birth, preventing bonding with the mother, were thought at the time to be in the mother's and the child's best interest;

(3) that this house recognises that in some cases such practices have caused long-term anguish and suffering for the people affected; and

(4) that the Parliament acknowledges that previous Parliaments and governments were directly responsible for the application of some of the processes that impacted upon unmarried mothers of adopted children, and now apologises to the mothers, their children and the families who were adversely affected by these past adoption practices, and I express my sympathy to those individuals whose interests were not best served by the policy of those times.

Mr Speaker, past practices were very firmly focused on the goal of ensuring that the children of unmarried mothers were provided with the best life opportunities that were available, and the prevailing view of the time was that these life opportunities resided exclusively with caring, married adoptive parents. Options for unmarried motherhood were extremely limited, resulting in incidents where unmarried women gave up their babies for adoption without there having necessarily been proper thought and attention applied to their own wellbeing. There has been significant change in both law and policy since that time, designed to strike a better and more considered balance of the interests and rights of both children and parents.

On behalf of the state government, and to the extent that previous governments were directly responsible for the application of the processes that impacted upon unmarried mothers of adopted children, I now apologise to the mothers, their children and families who were adversely affected by these past adoption practices, and express my sympathy to those individuals whose interests were

not best served by the policy of those times.

Mr Speaker, a large number of the mothers are here today, and I thank them for coming to this Parliament for this apology. I very much hope that today's apology will bring you some comfort and ease the years of pain, and even a sense of guilt that many of you have so unfairly felt for so many years.

In closing, I thank the Minister for Health and other members of Parliament, including the member for Mandurah, for bringing us to this day and to this apology.

Members: Hear, hear!

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont — Leader of the Opposition) [3.07 pm]: I rise on behalf of the state Parliamentary Labor Party to offer support for this motion and to recognise that the Western Australian Parliament will today be the first Parliament in the country to formally apologise to mothers affected by past adoption practices.

Adoption is a complex issue with many other affected parties involved. What we do today is sincerely and unequivocally apologise to the mothers who relinquished their babies under duress. We are not seeking to address the issues being dealt with by others—those who were adopted out or the families and other individuals who have been involved in the adoption process. Those issues are for another day. What we do today is unequivocally and sincerely apologise to the mothers for fundamentally flawed government policies that meant your babies were taken from you.

I am sorry and the state Parliamentary Labor Party is sorry. We recognise that Labor governments were involved in these events and we apologise for their roles. Whatever their intentions, they were wrong. I would like to note that in 1993 and 1994, I was closely involved in changes in this place to the Adoption Act to modernise adoptions across Western Australia and to increase openness and flexibility within adoption arrangements. If I can refer briefly to my previous comments on the issue of adoption, I would like to do so. I stated in 1992 —

> Adoption is an issue that has touched the lives of thousands of people in Western Australia. Almost one in every 15 people living in this State has been affected by an adoption in some way. Either they are themselves one of the thousands of children adopted, or they are a birth parent who relinquished their child, or they are an adoptive parent. Also included in this network of adoption are the extended family members of relinquishing parents as well as those of adopting parents.

Today we recognise the experiences of those mothers who were pressured into relinquishing their babies when they were emotionally vulnerable and under duress. Past adoption practices were wrong. The legal, health and welfare systems of this state were not supportive of young unwed mothers and many people were wrongly subjected to government intervention that would have lasting and very personal consequences. The way so many adoptions were carried out across the 1940s through to the 1980s was a judgement made according to the values of the time. If we were to be presented with these issues today, both the government and the opposition would take a different policy approach.

What happened across these years is not condoned by anyone in this house. The removal, forcible or otherwise, of babies from their mothers who were under duress is not condoned. Whatever the circumstances of so many of these women, they were not able to give informed consent. Society at the time believed that these young unmarried women chose to give up their babies, but it is unimaginable that any consent could have been informed consent. Traumatic birth experiences, a lack of information, emotional vulnerability, and extreme pressure from higher authorities—including doctors, matrons, lawyers and welfare officers—resulted in signed consent forms and consequences that would severely scar all involved for decades to come.

We recognise that these events were a product of the time, but today we reflect on how much has

changed and how in today's society it would be unacceptable to be party to these forced adoptions. Recognising the attitudes that underpinned these policies is not to excuse the actions of those who took babies from young unwed mothers. We also recognise the wrong and it is because we do, that we apologise.

The deep and profound sadness experienced by mothers who join us here today and who live across our state will be a legacy of this period in history. We recognise that lives have been irrevocably affected. Having a newborn baby taken away in traumatic circumstances is an event that I can scarcely imagine. We also apologise for mothers not having the chance to see their newborn baby, bond with it and continue the love that had developed while in utero.

To the mothers who have endured such suffering, you are survivors. To survive mentally, emotionally and physically the trauma that was inflicted upon you is a credit to the strength of your spirit and character. To now continue that fight today is something that you can feel very proud of. I know many of you are thankful that your children were placed in loving and caring homes, but you still retain the scars of having your babies taken from you. Today we offer you our compassion, understanding and recognition for the struggle that you have endured.

We acknowledge that when you were at your most vulnerable, those who should have offered support, advice and understanding were amongst those who failed you the most. We recognise that this apology does not repair the trauma and damage done to you so many years ago. Nevertheless, Parliament hopes that in offering formal recognition of your experiences, you may be able to move forward with the healing process. Today, in an effort to create a more just and dignified Western Australia and also to enable mothers affected by these adoption processes to heal, we have recognised errors of the past that happened right here in our state. I am sorry for what you endured. The state Parliamentary Labor Party is sorry for what you endured.

[Applause.]

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville — Minister for Health) [3.14 pm]: In case it is more difficult at the end, before I start I will advise members and the public gallery that we will have an afternoon tea in the Aboriginal People's Room for anyone who wishes to attend. I invite all of the members of the chamber and indeed the press gallery to attend.

Members of this house will be aware that I very seldom read a speech in this house, but this is one of the few times I intend to do that because I think it is critical that I get the words out that I want to say.

I wish to first acknowledge the presence in both galleries of visitors from across Australia who are here to hear this apology to mothers whose children were taken from them for adoption. I welcome you all and I hope that this apology will publicly recognise your loss and help to ease the pain and suffering that has affected many of you for a large part of your lives.

Firstly, I would like to commend the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital for the letter of apology it issued 18 months ago. As members know, it was the first to do so and Western Australia will be the first Parliament to do so. In July 2009, when approached by Channel Seven as part of a documentary on past adoption practices, I was asked if the state government would follow the lead of the Queensland hospital and apologise to the mothers affected. My first reaction was to question the need for government to apologise when both public and private hospitals managed pregnant unmarried women in the same way.

I then had the opportunity to meet with some of those mothers in my office to obtain a far greater understanding of their treatment during that time and to gain a greater appreciation of the need for and the benefits of an apology. One of the mothers whom I met explained to me that while the apology could not heal the hurt that she had suffered for so long, it would make all those involved in the process understand that she had not given up her child because she did not want it, but because the process that led to the adoption was so flawed that the option of choice was effectively removed.

Between the 1940s and 1980s, societal attitudes were unsupportive of pregnant unmarried women and the options for unmarried mothers were extremely limited. As a result, unmarried women felt enormous pressure to relinquish their children for adoption. With no single parent benefit until 1974 and the negative attitudes of society, these mothers were made to feel shame and guilt if they did not give up their babies for adoption. The majority of the women affected not only were pressured by the social stigma of being unmarried, but had not reached the age of consent. Therefore, their parents or guardians bore the final responsibility for approving the adoption.

The management within our hospitals also caused enormous stress to the mothers and families involved. At the time, the view of health practitioners and society was that it was in the best interest of the mother and the child that the normal bonding process that occurs at birth should not be permitted. At the time of delivery, mostly already under the influence of pain-reducing drugs, mothers were refused any chance of seeing or even touching their babies. Some had their eyes covered. Some had barriers erected between them and their babies.

Immediately following delivery, their children were taken away and, in many instances, never seen again. As members can imagine, such a practice for young vulnerable mothers was extraordinarily traumatic and has left for many an aching, empty void that can never be filled again.

I have received a large number of letters and emails from all over Australia regarding today's apology. The majority, but not all, have been supportive. I have chosen a segment of those to read to the house so that the Parliament can gain a greater appreciation of the importance that many mothers attach to today's apology. These are all small excerpts from each letter, according to my notes. The first letter states —

> Please accept my congratulations and a heartfelt thank you for your decision to apologise. Also, may I request a copy of the apology to hang on the wall so that I can see it every day?

The second letter states —

> On behalf of the mothers I represent I wish to convey my sincere appreciation for the government's decision to apologise to the mothers, their children and families in relation to past adoption practices. We know that you personally have recognised deeply the painful and enduring negative effects that continue to afflict our lives.

The third letter states —

> My mother was one that was affected by the actions that will be the focus of your apology in Parliament next week.

Obviously, the letter was written last week —

> Unfortunately my mother passed away yesterday in Brisbane and will not get to hear the apology delivered or see it in writing. I am pleased to say that I was able to let her know of your apology plans prior to her death and it gave her great joy. Her funeral is in Brisbane next Thursday — That is this Thursday — and I would very much like to include some aspects of the apology at her funeral.

A letter from a person in Victoria reads —

> Thank you and thank you again. I never thought I would see this day in my lifetime—you could never know just how much this means to me and so many other mothers.

Another wrote —

> I am so very pleased that there will be an apology made in Parliament to all the women so deeply traumatised at having their babies taken from them at birth. Please also acknowledge the nurses as we have also been affected by the role we had to play in this abhorrent event.

I also had a letter from an adoptee that said —

> I am so overwhelmed that an apology is being offered to the mothers who lost their babies as a result of the adoption act that I am lost for words. I saw firsthand the trauma; my own, my mothers. I believe my mother died with a broken heart, a broken spirit. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the incredible gift you are delivering to the mothers, including my own. I just know how much it would have meant to her and thank you in advance for the healing to come over time as a result of your actions.

The last letter I will read was from a sister —

> I breathe a sigh and shed tears of relief for all those unmarried mothers who have been traumatised by the archaic practice of the hospital and welfare authorities. It certainly wasn't in the best interest of "both mothers and baby" as we have been told many times. Instead it left young mothers (not to mention other family members) years of torturous angst wondering where their child was and if they were happy.

Mr Speaker, I have also received letters from adopted children and adopting parents opposed to an apology as they believe that the apology reflects negatively on their actions. I want to make it clear that this apology bears no reflection on them. It is totally dedicated to the mothers who gave up their children and the processes in place that affected them so badly.

Statistics show that many of these mothers have been so affected that they have never again had children. So why should this Parliament apologise to those mothers especially when those events occurred well before any person in this chamber was elected to Parliament? I believe it is right for us to apologise for two reasons: firstly, because it was the government of the day that endorsed those practices in public hospitals and, in retrospect, it can clearly be seen that those practices were wrong and have caused enormous pain and suffering to a great many people including their families and the staff who were required to administer them; and secondly, simply because we can. There is no institution within our system that has a greater capacity than us in this chamber to recognise and acknowledge wrongdoing, and the pain and suffering that it has caused. There is no collective voice in this state that can present a more powerful message to the public than elected members in this state saying with one voice, "The way in which you were treated was wrong, and we apologise for the pain and suffering that this has caused." Will this help those mothers? Will such an apology help those of you who are here today? I hope so. It will not remove the suffering that you have endured, it will not remove the deep ache and loneliness within you, but it will say to the world that you did not give your child away because you did not want that child. In many cases the adoption of your child was not even your conscious choice. It will say to the world that we, the Parliament of Western Australia, recognise that your child was removed from you under a policy and social attitude that was badly flawed, and as a result has caused deep and unending grieving to all mothers involved. To all of these mothers, especially those of you who are present today, and others who have been adversely affected, I apologise.

[Applause.]

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [3.24 pm]: I, too, acknowledge all of those persons affected by today's motion who are present today at the Parliament of Western Australia. I also acknowledge other affected persons who are unable to be with us today.

Over past years, in less enlightened times, tens of thousands of women lost their children through adoption. If the truth were to be fully acknowledged it would not take much scratching of the social fabric to find adoption experiences in most families. This is certainly applicable to our extended family. My sister-in-law Carmel Ward is present here today. She has provided most of the content for my comments. Carmel's only child was born on 14 September 1970. Due to the prejudice of the time, her son was registered as an "unnamed" child on his birth certificate. This was contrary to Carmel's wish, but she was dissuaded from naming him with comments such as,

> “It doesn’t matter; they’ll give him a new name anyway.” Documents released from his file many years after his birth are notated “Notification of Illegitimate Child” and stamped in bold letters denoting him as “Illegitimate”.

His father was listed on the original birth certificate as “Not Stated”. Carmel now sees this as an administrative convenience by those who sought to facilitate the relinquishment process. The father was denied the opportunity to acknowledge paternity of the child which thereby excluded him and simplified the relinquishment process. Carmel was able to have her son’s original birth certificate corrected in 2000 to show his name as “Charles Edward Peter”. Her son was named “Nicholas Michael” by his adoptive parents. Nicholas has declined contact with Carmel; his surname has not been used to protect his privacy.

Sadly, pregnant and unmarried women were scorned and their children were referred to as bastards and branded illegitimate. The relinquishment formalities were generally conducted with the mother under considerable duress within a relatively short time after birth. There were limited options for mothers and certainly a high probability of rejection by the family and others if she chose to keep the child. Generally, no efforts were made to allow women to bond with their babies. Some, like Carmel, were given limited opportunity to hold their baby at the time of birth. Many did not see their babies. The adoption process, either by misguided altruism or blatant conspiracy, made these unwanted and unnamed babies into a desirable commodity. Through until the 1970s, the supply of children was used to satisfy the demand for babies by childless families or infertile couples. Not all babies were adopted and not all went to childless families; some went to families as a replacement child for a stillborn baby or where there had been a sudden infant death syndrome death. The adoption process severed mothers’ legal rights; children were given new identities. Some children were not told they had been adopted. Many were actively discouraged from searching for their family of origin. Those mothers who had given birth were, by and large, deemed not acceptable or deemed unworthy of the title “mother”. This caused a deep pain and sadness for them. For them, Mother’s Day is hardly a cause to celebrate.

There are diverse views about the term to be used to describe women who have lost children to adoption— “relinquishing mother”, “natural mother”, “first mother”, “birth mother” and “original mother”—but those mothers gave their child the greatest gift; namely, the gift of life. The mothers who lost their children to adoption were told to forget about the baby and to get on with their lives; that is, not to be a mother. The event was not to be mentioned again by the mother, family and friends, and certainly not mentioned in polite society. These women suffered disenfranchised grief—the loss not acknowledged, the grief unspoken, the mother unsupported. Counselling and emotional support was generally not offered and not available. Their loss was simply not understood. These mothers remember the birthday of their lost child, often observing other people’s children to mark milestones of growth and development, always with a renewed sense of loss and grief. Having subsequent children did not diminish the loss or replace the child. Many women have suffered deep depression throughout their lives, with their sense of loss and grief, rather than diminishing with time, simply increasing with time. Some mothers suffered further as they were not able, for a variety of circumstances, to have other children. Again, this added to their sense of loss. The circumstances of the women who lost children to adoption differ greatly, but the loss that each of them suffered is immeasurable. I fully support and endorse the motion before the house.

[Applause.]

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough) [3.30 pm]: I, too, rise to support this formal apology to the mothers who were subject to forced adoptions over many years. I would like to acknowledge those affected mothers who are here today in the gallery. This is a very distressing issue. Like many members of Parliament, I have met some of the mothers who were subjected to this practice. Some stories stand out and are always remembered.

The mothers who had their children taken for adoption lived with the loss of the child for their whole lives; the worst part being that for many they have been unable to make any connection with the

adopted child and have no knowledge of the welfare or whereabouts of the child who was removed. The practice was so flawed and was applied regardless of the individual circumstances. I know of one woman whose son was taken from her at birth and adopted out. She then went on to marry her boyfriend and they had another son together. They both mourned the loss of their first-born and indeed the experience shaped their relationship. Once adoption laws were changed, they started the search for their first-born. After finding him, it took their son, who is now a part of another family, many years—not months but years—to garner the courage to meet them. Eventually he was reacquainted with his family and met his parents and his brother, who bore a remarkable physical resemblance to him. I use the word “reacquainted” purposely because as is often the case “reunited” does not always encapsulate the way these things go. He was raised by a good family, but had the confusion of wondering why, as his birth parents eventually married, he was removed from them in the first place. He was removed because of a flawed yet unyielding policy and an unforgiving social attitude. There were many practices in place at the time that are abhorrent these days. This does not excuse them; however, we are left with the legacy of those decisions and we must do our best to help to try to alleviate the suffering and acknowledge the wrongs perpetrated on people who had neither the means nor the support to fight against it.

Closer to home, my mother was closely associated with many of these women. She fell pregnant with my older sister prior to her marriage to my dad. Like most young women in her situation at the time, she was sent to Ngala near the end of her pregnancy, and after a long, traumatic and difficult birth had my sister taken from her to be adopted out. My mother sat through many sleepless nights talking to another young woman at Ngala, and they made a pact that they would not under any circumstances give up their children for adoption. My mother was lucky. She had the love of my father and a supportive mother, whose own mother had a history of supporting single parents. So, after five weeks of resisting the pressure to sign her away, my sister was returned to my mum to take home. When my sister was returned to her, mum did not recognise her and thought for a long time that they had given her the wrong child. Babies change so quickly in the first few weeks, and these feelings are exacerbated by the separation from the baby at birth, thereby removing all opportunities to bond with the new baby. Mum knew she should be feeling a particular way towards her baby, and could not understand why those feelings were not there. We all know how critical those first weeks of crucial bonding are, and they are not recoverable. My mother, though, I acknowledge, and so does she, was one of the lucky ones, and went on to marry my dad and have another five children. However, with each subsequent birth, she endured the distressing reminder of what was missing in the first experience. With each subsequent baby came the poignant reminder of the loss of opportunity with her first-born—a loss that has been with her through her whole life. My beautiful older sister, a wonderful caring nurse, was blessed with a kind heart and a loving, forgiving nature, and because of that and mum’s commitment to their relationship and my grandmother’s commitment to supporting them, she has a relationship with my mother and the rest of us, such that none of us knew the pain of mum’s first parenting experience until the birth of the first grandchild when mum’s heart-wrenching experience came to the fore again.

So many other women out there were not as fortunate as my mother. There is no excuse for the way these women and children were treated. Some were deprived of the normal standard of nursing care, were left to fend for themselves after the delivery, and at one of the most vulnerable times of their lives were treated like pariahs. Mum said that, at the time, all of the girls were led to believe that they deserved this treatment. They were left believing that they were bad people; they had done a terrible thing and they had to cop the punishment—what else would they expect! My mother understands that the practices of the day were the practices of the day; it was a different time and things were done differently. Thank goodness attitudes and practices have changed and this flawed policy has long been abandoned. As I said, my mum was a lucky one. So many of the girls were not as fortunate.

This apology acknowledges those young women. It acknowledges that they were not complicit in relinquishing their children. They did not deserve this treatment, nor were they bad people. These girls were not advised of their rights and did not know that they could object. Society and the authorities of the day were convinced that this was in their best interests and the interests of the baby, and these

young, unmarried girls were in no position to argue or to object. They were deprived of that choice, and of the opportunity for a relationship with their babies. We all know that an apology may not heal the hurt, fill the loss or mend any of the emotional pain. An apology does, however, acknowledge that these mothers did not choose to give away their children. For many, who have never known what happened to their children, it does give those children a public explanation as to why they were adopted, and some satisfaction perhaps that they were never rejected.

I take this opportunity to pass on my personal thanks, and the thanks of my mother, to the Deputy Premier, Dr Kim Hames, for initiating this apology, and also to the member for Mandurah for raising it earlier this year. This past wrong needs to be acknowledged. I hope this apology will in some way help those women to start on a pathway to healing this terrible hurt, a hurt that they have endured through no fault of their own.

[Applause.]

MS A.S. CARLES (Fremantle) [3.38 pm]: I rise to fully support and endorse this apology for mothers who were forced to adopt out their children. I would like to say on the record that my own mother only recently found out that she was adopted. She found this out when she was 53 years old. She had been removed from her teenage birth mother at birth in New Zealand in the 1940s, where they had similar policies to those in Western Australia at the time. Secrecy surrounded her birth, and secrecy surrounded her life until she was 53. I would like to acknowledge that with the assistance of Ruth Dyson, a Labour Member of Parliament in New Zealand, an extensive search was undertaken and my mother found out the name of her birth mother. Unfortunately, when she took on this search, her mother had only just died, so she never got to meet her mother and I never got to meet my grandmother. However, extraordinarily, she found out that she had four birth sisters and one brother. Imagine discovering that when you are in your fifties! She has spent her whole life alone. She has always felt alone, and she finally found out that there was a strange, missing piece to the jigsaw of her life. Those of us touched by adoption never, ever get over it. I thank the member for Mandurah for raising the idea of an apology. I thank the Deputy Premier for bringing this motion before the house. I also thank the Premier for today's proceedings.

[Applause.]

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [3.42 pm]: I first need to highlight to the house that both the public gallery and the Speaker's gallery are full to capacity. Members of the public—mothers and their families—are watching proceedings in the Labor Caucus room, which is adjacent to the chamber, because they were unable to be accommodated in the public gallery. I acknowledge all of them. I also acknowledge members of the other place who are here to witness this important apology motion. As has been indicated by the Leader of the Opposition, members on this side of the house support the apology motion.

It is important that members are under no illusion that this apology, as worded by the government, will achieve all that it should set out to achieve. Many mothers and their families will read the wording of the apology as a sanitised acknowledgment of past practices and policies sanctioned by the state and other institutions. In many respects it is what is not in the apology that needs to be debated. I am pleased that members who have spoken have highlighted a number of the issues that I will raise. It is important that we make this apology in Parliament to the thousands of women, children and families affected by what happened in the past. Language is forever important in this issue. The language of this apology is crucial if we seek to right a great wrong of the past. During the period mentioned in this apology, state-sanctioned practices and policies, which we now know and acknowledge to be wrong, were often brutal and, in many cases, illegal. In the past those practices and policies have been explained as one of the social mores of the day. The broader Australian community would never have accepted that myth. That is no excuse. What happened was wrong. We need to acknowledge and state that it was wrong. Those practices involved the removal of babies from their mothers after birth. In many cases the separation of a mother and her baby happened illegally and immediately after birth. It was an attempt by the state to sever the most sacred of relationships—that between mother and

child. As has often been detailed in personal stories, at times that separation was carried out in the most inhumane of ways. Numerous mothers have reported that they were prevented from touching or seeing their newborn before he or she was taken away. Many were told that their child had died only to find out years later that their child was alive and that he or she had been looking for them. Others were heavily drugged or sedated during and after the birth of their child. This apology motion should acknowledge that that practice was never in the best interests of the child or the mother. It is also important to acknowledge that so many women in our community continue to live with the trauma, anguish and suffering that was caused as a result of their being separated from their baby. It is important that this apology acknowledges that pain and the deep scar that remains forever in the hearts of many mothers. In many cases leading up to and immediately after giving birth, women were coerced, intimidated or threatened into giving consent for their child to be adopted. That happened—we should say that it happened and apologise for it. Research clearly shows that many of these adoption practices throughout Australia had their origins firmly grounded in delivering a government-sanctioned population policy.

Today I pay tribute to the women and to their children and families. Many of them are here this afternoon. I also acknowledge those who could not be here. They need this apology as part of their journey of healing. As the Leader of the Opposition said, it is to them whom we say sorry. It is to them whom we express our profound apology.

I, too, want to share some personal stories with the Parliament because today we speaking about real people— mothers and their children. The two stories I want to share are representative of thousands of stories. I hope that members of Parliament will have an opportunity to meet with mothers and their sons and daughters and to listen to their stories. Phyllis is in the public gallery. I am so pleased that she is here. I want to share part of her story.

According to my notes, Phyllis writes —

> When my baby was due I went to the Hillcrest Hospital just up the road from the home in North Fremantle. Us girls lived at the back of the hospital, while we waited to give birth.
>
> The night my baby was born I was in the lounge watching TV. I said to one of the girls I have just wet myself, she said your waters have broke. They took me down to the labour ward at the other end of the hospital, I had to walk. They had to help me up into the bed as I was in a lot of pain.
>
> I had a needle put in my leg and I don't remember anything until the next morning. I was still very groggy and was put into another bed, this one was nice and soft. I must have slept for two or three days but when I awoke I asked where is my baby? One of the girls said you had your baby a couple of nights ago don't you remember? She told me that the baby was probably already gone.
>
> I cried for about three days and the sisters gave me tablets to dry up my milk and something else to calm me down.
>
> Someone came and took me to a dark room with a very pale light. I told him I wasn't signing any papers and that I don't have a name picked out.

Phyllis writes that she was taken to a room on a number of occasions and asked each time whether she was going to do what they wanted. She replied no. Phyllis goes on to say that a nice sister came in and asked her whether she had had a boy or a girl. Phyllis told her that no-one would tell her the sex of her baby. The sister informed her that she had given birth to a boy. She then writes that an arrangement was made "against the rules" for her to see her son. Phyllis writes —

> She told me to come down to the nursery about 10pm, and that I would be able to see my son and cuddle him for about half an hour, but not to say anything because she could get the sack for what she was doing. I was able to cuddle my son and I told him that one day I would see

> him again.

On 24 February this year when I spoke about this issue in Parliament and asked the Premier for an apology in Parliament, I also read out Sue's story. Sue, who is one of my constituents, is in the public gallery with her daughters; her partner, Stewart; and some other wonderful people. I admire this wonderful woman for her strength and courage, and her enduring spirit to ensure that a part of our Western Australian history is told and heard. Sue's story, like all these stories, is a deeply personal one, I want to read a small section of her story.

According to my notes, she said —

> "At 9:00am on the 16th of July my baby was born and that moment has haunted me ever since. My beautiful little baby was born and I heard her terrified calls for me, her mother. They covered my face to prevent me seeing her and drugged me into oblivion. As that veil of darkness descended, so a veil of secrecy, shame and toxic humiliation descended on my life."

It is of particular importance to Sue and, I am sure, many other mothers, that this apology acknowledges her firstborn—her daughter; she has two other beautiful daughters who are also here today—and that it is a clear message that she, like so many mothers involved, loves her children, her babies.

Mr Speaker, also in your gallery today is Bob. Bob was an ambulance driver in the 1960s. During this time, one of his jobs was to do what was called "the baby lifts". Bob would attend King Edward Memorial Hospital nearly every day at 1.00 pm to pick up babies—sometimes one or two; sometimes, as Bob told me this afternoon, as many as five. He would deliver them to hostels or other hospitals involved in arranging adoptions. I am really glad that Bob is here today.

This morning on talkback radio a father by the name of David rang in and highlighted that in the 1960s he was the father of a child who was taken for adoption. He, too, has never forgotten the child that he never had the chance to be a father to.

I want to acknowledge the work of so many women, their families, and the organisations that have been campaigning for this day, some for many decades. To ARMS WA Inc and its affiliates throughout the country, to Adoption Jigsaw, to the Adoption and Research Counselling Service, and to other community support groups that have lobbied and campaigned for this apology, we say thank you. It is important that this Parliament make this apology and acknowledgement; I think it is an appropriate role for our Parliament. If we, as parliamentarians and as a Parliament, can assist in the healing of these mothers, their children and their families, it will be a good thing. But it is time for us to continue to lift the lid on this issue and to investigate it openly and transparently. In my view, it is time for a national inquiry into past adoption practices and policies in all states and territories within Australia. This should also include a direct, sincere and heartfelt apology in the federal Parliament. We need to also acknowledge the need for ongoing counselling for mothers, their children and their families into the future. It is also time for Western Australia, through this Parliament, to initiate a formal inquiry by a relevant standing committee into this issue. I believe it is also important for the churches and non-government organisations that operated the hospitals and hostels that were involved in these practices to consider an appropriate apology.

As a Member of Parliament, I am proud to be part of this moment in our state's history; but, more importantly, I pay tribute to those who have been seeking this apology and acknowledgment for so long. I hope, we hope, that this apology aids in the healing process that is so important for these women, their children and their families.

[Applause.]

MR P. ABETZ (Southern River) [3.55 pm]: I also rise to lend my support to this apology motion. The tie of a mother to her unborn child is a very strong one, and the process of giving birth only strengthens that connection, as I am sure the mothers in the gallery will testify. Having served as a

pastor for 25 years prior to entering Parliament, I have had mothers tell me their stories of losing their children many years earlier. Even if it had been 30 or more years earlier, the tears would often flow freely, as though it had just happened the day before, particularly if they had never felt able to grieve for the loss of their child. The grief for the loss of a child they never got to see, cherish or nurture is enormous. I had the privilege of conducting small private services for such mothers to help them grieve and bring closure to their loss. In years gone by, before single parent pensions, if a young woman became pregnant and marriage was not considered appropriate, and the family was not adamant about raising the child, the child was more or less automatically put up for adoption without any real consultation with the mother, and that was wrong; it was inexcusable.

For those mothers who were coerced into giving up their children for adoption, the pain does not go away with time; in fact, the pain often grows stronger as the years roll by. It is the deep pain of reflecting on what might have been, and of not knowing what actually happened to the children that they bore; the pain of knowing that their son or daughter is somewhere out there, and these mothers would not even know whether or not they are now grandmothers. The pain of not knowing penetrates to the deepest recesses of the soul.

Although the adopted child no doubt brought joy and delight to the adoptive parents, and no doubt most adoptive parents nurtured, cherished and loved their adopted children, that knowledge does not take away the pain of the mother who gave birth to the child. It is my prayer that those who experienced the pain of having their children taken from them at birth might find in their hearts the courage to forgive, because in the end, harbouring anger and pain will only damage and destroy. The conscious decision to forgive and to no longer hold the wrong against the offender can bring healing.

Forgiveness is so much easier to extend to someone when they have said, “I am sorry for what I have done; will you forgive me?” I trust that this apology will open the door to a new choice—to choose to forgive and to no longer hold that offence against that person or the state and, instead, to say, “I forgive”. As we pray in the Lord’s Prayer in this house every sitting day, “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us”.

It is my prayer that as you move forward and move towards forgiveness, you will find a new liberty of spirit, a new beginning; that as you begin to look forward, rather than backwards, you will find a degree of healing that you never thought was possible—a healing that will allow you to face the future with renewed joy and confidence. I warmly endorse this apology.

[Applause.]

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham) [4.00 pm]: I congratulate all the speakers here today. It has been a wonderful occasion, and the speeches that members have delivered have been simply beautiful. I would like to acknowledge the member for Mandurah for originally raising this matter, and to congratulate the government for following up and delivering upon it. It has been a tasteful and outstanding occasion.

I say to all those people in the gallery, and to those who could not make it here today—because we would have to expect that there are many thousands, and perhaps millions, of Western Australians, and, indeed, Australians, who have been involved in this issue in one way or another, either directly or indirectly—that I do hope that today’s event will serve to assist in the healing process for all the families and people involved. One thing that it has brought home to me is that you can rest safe in the knowledge that you are not alone. You are cared about.

There are people more broadly than just yourselves who have thought about your plight and have considered it in their own family context.

Some other members in this place have mentioned their experiences. I want to mention my experience just briefly. My mother grew up in a town in western New South Wales. Her mother—therefore, my grandmother— who came from a deeply Catholic family, had given up a daughter for adoption in the 1920s. This daughter lived with the family up the street. My mother never

knew that the woman whom she knew when she was young was her half-sister. She thought she was just a family friend who lived up the street. My mother came to know about this only later in life, because in a Catholic family it was something that was never, ever discussed. My grandmother, who I remember only as a very old lady—she died in 1979 when I was 13—went through many years of anguish as a consequence of giving away her child. The way my mother explains it to me is that it was part of the social mores of the times—the 1920s. It was part of the family understanding, or compact, of a deeply Catholic family, as I have said, that what my grandmother had done would not be tolerated. Therefore, the decision was made by the family, based upon their understanding of what was acceptable and what was not acceptable, that the child would be given away; and my grandmother, as a young woman at the time, was not consulted as part of that process.

Therefore, I would say to the house that this is a start. I think that other Parliaments need to consider their options in this regard. Other organisations outside this Parliament also need to consider their roles in this matter.

People who live in New South Wales and Victoria, and in other states of Australia, need to also enjoy the knowledge that their parliamentarians—their Parliament—cares about them. They also need to enjoy the knowledge that other organisations external to the Parliament also care about what was done to them in the past and acknowledge their role in what took place, which has caused so much hurt and anguish for many families around our country.

I will finish by reiterating: you have safety in numbers. There are so many of you who endured what took place.It was not your fault. You have many friends, both among ourselves and among the descendants of people who experienced what you have experienced.

[Applause.]

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [4.03 pm] — in reply: In drawing this debate to a close, I place on the record that this has been an important day for the Parliament, and an important day particularly for those mothers who lost their babies at birth. The stories that have been told in this place are reflective of literally thousands of young women who did not have the ability and did not have the opportunity to make a decision about the child—a little baby boy or girl—that they had just given birth to.

I also thank members for speaking in this debate. I thank those women who have come to Parliament today for their courage in acknowledging and talking about their experiences. I hope that, small as it might be, this apology, formally given by the government and the Parliament and the people of Western Australia, does bring you some comfort and does help you in dealing with the pain and the anguish that you have handled and carried for so many years. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

[Applause.]

Question put and passed.

[Applause.]

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Later in the day Hon Alison Xamon from the Greens made the following statement:

HON ALISON XAMON (East Metropolitan) [9.47 pm]: On behalf of the Greens (WA) I wish to acknowledge the significance of an event that occurred in the Parliament today. I speak, of course, of the apology given by the Western Australian Parliament to those mothers who had their children removed and given up for adoption either through coercion, intimidation, threats, guilt or just plain

fraud. Today's apology was very important to so many people, and I thank the ALP, the Liberals and the Nationals for recognising how important this apology is and for treating it with the bipartisan approach it so deserves.

I particularly acknowledge the hard work of the member for Mandurah, Hon David Templeman, whose perseverance, I believe, has been absolutely instrumental in bringing about this apology. I also thank him for the generous way in which he has been prepared to work with others, and for the sensitive and compassionate way in which he has worked with the mothers. I also acknowledge the role that Dr Kim Hames has played and the willingness with which he was prepared to ensure that the apology came about.

For the women so tragically affected by past adoption practices, for so many of their children, for the fathers who never consented to give up their babies and for so many of the extended families, I hope and pray that this apology-the first public acknowledgment that what was done to them was wrong, and it was wrong - will be the first step towards some sense of healing, although I am not convinced that complete closure will ever be possible. To be honest, when I hear the stories of some of these women, I wonder whether I would ever be able to recover if that happened to me. I think about my own relationship with my children and how sacred that is. I think about my beautiful daughter, whom I had out of wedlock and raised on my own only 14 years after these terrible forced adoption practices ceased. I think that it is only because of an accident of history that I was able to have my little girl when I did and I was able to keep her when so many other women could not.

The stories are horrendous and devastating. Around Australia thousands of young, unmarried, primarily teenage mothers, who in the period from the 1940s until as recently as the 1980s found themselves pregnant were subject to the cruellest adoption practices of their children, which in many instances can be described only as institutionalised baby theft. Young women were subject to practices that denied their rights as mothers and told them they were unworthy, sinful, substandard and selfish for even falling pregnant, and worse if they wished to keep their children. They were ostracised, degraded and diminished. They were denied the chance to see their babies, hold them or name them. The state and churches intervened to sever that primal relationship that exists between a mother and her child. These women were weak and vulnerable; they had no advocates and, in the face of the unassailable power of the church and of the state, they had no power.

Some women tried to keep their children, or even just tried to see them, to assert their fundamental rights as a mother but were forcibly drugged and restrained. Many women were tricked into signing adoption papers, believing that they were signing other documentation, or were so deeply in shock or affected by medication that they were simply unable to provide legal consent as we know it. Women giving birth would have their face covered to ensure that they did not see their babies. The point is that they did not want to relinquish their children, yet they were forced to, whether it be by coercion or straight-out fraud.

What we know now is that many of those women never survived this experience. We have been told of mothers who, unable to live with the guilt and grief, committed suicide. I have also been told of adoptees who, never able to understand why they were given up, have also taken their life. What we also know is that for those who have been left behind lives have been shattered and families ripped apart. Mental illness and depression have become recurrent themes in the lives of these women. They live with the eternal shadow of grief and loss and, tragically, the sense of guilt at their utter powerlessness to keep their baby.

Members who spoke in the other place referred time and again to their relief at today's changed

social mores and their gratitude that the practices of those terrible times would no longer be tolerated or accepted. Of course, it is true that the absolute worst of it is in the past. Adoption practices are clearly far more stringent and models of open adoption are clearly designed to ensure the long-term emotional wellbeing of all parties-the new parents, the relinquishing mother and, of course, the child. We are also grateful that this is now the way. But I cannot agree that the thinking that drove these abhorrent practices is entirely dead. Prejudice and discrimination against women who raise their children out of wedlock and on their own are still very much alive and well. Those who peddle this hurt may not be stealing the babies anymore but they are still attempting to perpetuate the thinking that led people to think that it was okay, if not preferable, to steal these babies from their mothers.

Every time someone claims that children raised by a sole parent are more likely than other children to become alcoholics or drug addicts, or have a mental illness or become delinquent, or every time they predict some other inevitable catastrophic and desperate outcome, or attempt to justify this warped thinking on some bogus study produced from some entirely partial source, they continue to be part of the problem, because this is the thinking that remains a painful hangover from exactly the same thinking that enabled the state and the churches to tear at the very heart of the mother-child relationship and to undertake the very behaviour that we are apologising for today. What we know now, which was not accepted then, is that marriage in itself is no guarantee of a happy and stable home, and that having a mother and a father figure is not automatically a substitute for the love of a birth mother. Families in all their forms can succeed or fail, and there is no one right or wrong way to do it.

I am grateful for today's apology. I think it is particularly special that it has been Western Australia that has led the way. I would have liked the opportunity to have this chamber echo its support for the apology in a more formal way, but this was not meant to be. However, I hope that Western Australia's example is now just the beginning. I am aware that there were women from around Australia who flew here to hear the apology and who are desperate to have the role of their own state governments, departments and churches acknowledged and admitted. I also support calls for an apology and an inquiry to be issued in our federal Parliament, and I am pleased to know that my colleague Greens Senator Rachel Siewert will again be introducing a motion calling for this exact thing next week in the Senate. So to those mothers, to their children, on behalf of the Greens, you are not to blame for what happened to you. And on behalf of the Greens, I am truly sorry.

Hon Alison Xamon MLC
Member for the East Metropolitan Region
Parliament of Western Australia

On 27 October 2010 Ms Meredith Hunter, the Greens Leader in the ACT Legislative Assembly put forward a motion calling for an apology to women affected by forced adoptions. This is her speech:

"Mr Speaker, there are many parts of our history to be remembered and there are many that can never be forgotten. What I am rising today is a very difficult issue that involves an enormous amount of pain and trauma for many thousands of Australians. It is the issue of past forcible removal of babies from their unwed mothers for adoption or to be placed into institutional care.

More than mistakes or errors, not just misguided lapses of judgement, what was done to women and babies under these past policies and practices was so fundamentally offensive to common decency and to our inherent rights as human beings that we have a responsibility to understand what happened and to do our best to ease that suffering.

What must be made clear is that the most appropriate first step is through a national inquiry, a thorough inquiry into what happened to all those mothers who had their babies taken away without their consent. I understand that the minister will be moving amendments to recognise some other work that is being done, in particular, research being carried out by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

As a community we need to understand the full extent of what happened, why it happened and how best to respond and ameliorate the harms caused. This will involve an apology from the government and the parliament, both at a national and state and territory level. However, we must first understand the full extent of what happened and make sure the community understands why it is that we should be apologising and exactly what we are apologising for.

The ACT is in a different position from the states. We did not have self-government at that time and so we do not have the same type of continuity of governmental responsibility as is the case in the states. That said, the evidence suggests that what happened to women in Tasmania, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, in fact, right across Australia, was a product of a Commonwealth government policy that was implemented by the states.

Given that this is the case, while we do not know the numbers involved, we must expect that it did happen here and that even if the effect was to send single young women to institutions in New South Wales to have their babies and have their babies taken, this is just as bad as if the removal occurred within our borders. The fact that we are unsure of the extent of the problem and the Commonwealth government's role in taking children from young single mothers here in the ACT only further strengthens the need for a Commonwealth inquiry so that we can find out what really happened here in the ACT to the ACT residents that we now represent.

On the issue of the need for an apology, there are two significant points to be made. On 17 June 1997 this Assembly passed a motion apologising to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT for the hurt and distress inflicted upon any people as a result of the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. This motion was then reaffirmed on 14 February 2008 following

the national apology that was done in that year. In this case it is also appropriate that the ACT government and this parliament act even though neither existed at the time.

In the 2008 debate Mr Stanhope, referring to the morning of the national apology, said that Canberrans were on their way to hear one word said. They heard it said not once but again and again, but there was more than one wrong to be made right, more than one hurt to be healed, more than one need to say sorry.

Today we start the process of addressing another need to say sorry. That need arises not because the ACT government did the wrong thing or that as individuals we have done the wrong thing, but because as a society we recognise that a great wrong was perpetrated against members of our community and that it is appropriate that we all fully understand those wrongs and that the government and the parliament on behalf of Canberrans apologise for those wrongs.

There is a particularly strong need to make the community aware of what happened and apologise for it so that those children who were adopted out or raised in institutions know that their mothers did not abandon them as unwanted babies, as was widely claimed at the time, that this was certainly not in the best interests of the mothers and babies and these young mothers did not have a choice about what happened to their children, and that they have carried a lifetime's anguish wondering what became of them.

Child psychiatrist Dr Geoffrey Rickarby in the book *Releasing the Past: Mother's Stories of Their Stolen Babies* that was edited by Christine Cole, says:

> "Each year I hear an adoptee say, 'If my mother had really wanted me she could have.' Something inside me boils. No matter how much I feel with the adoptee before me, as a psychiatrist I am left with one standout conclusion, that a woman having a baby taken from her is one of the deepest traumas available, and the grief is untenable when she knows her child is out there, but where?"

The Western Australian Minister for Health, Dr Hames, in his speech in the Western Australian Apology, said that after speaking to a mother who had been affected by the practice, he had, and I quote, "a far greater understanding of their treatment during that time and to gain a greater appreciation of the need for, and the benefits, of an apology. One of the mothers whom I met explained to me that while the apology could not heal the hurt that she had suffered for so long, it would make all those involved in the process understand that she not given up her child because she did not want it, but because the process that led to the adoption was so flawed that the option of choice was effectively removed."

The minister also read out a number of letters that he had received from around the country, and one that I would like to share again here, and it read,

> "My mother was one that was affected by the actions that will be the focus of your apology in parliament next week. Unfortunately my mother passed away yesterday in Brisbane and will not get to hear the apology delivered, or see it in writing.

> I am pleased to say that I was able to let her know of your apology plans prior to her death, and it gave her great joy. Her funeral is in Brisbane next Thursday and I would very much like to include some aspects of the apology at her funeral."

Enough time, Mr Speaker, has passed now that many women who are affected by the forceful removal of their children are nearing the end of their lives, and this only adds to the need to act promptly so that our actions may be seen and heard by them, and hopefully they may have some of their pain eased by our efforts.

There is a significant concern by some of those affected by this that an apology without a proper inquiry and community understanding of what happened is not the right way to go. I agree that there does need to be a proper understanding of what happened to these mothers. As I said, today is the first step, and I hope that the Assembly will give its support for a national inquiry and subsequent apology.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child in Article 5 provides "States, parties, will respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents". And Article 9 provides "States, parties, will ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will except when competent authorities, subject to judicial review, determine in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child".

It is important to note that what occurred was illegal. It was not in accordance with the law of the day. Chisholm J of the Family Court described it as effectively kidnapping in his evidence to the New South Wales inquiry into the issue. He made the point of explicitly stating that it was not in accordance with the law and that the practice did breach international law of the time as well as the laws of Australia.

There are reports that not only were young mothers given drugs to sedate or coerce them into signing forms to relinquish their babies, but also that some were tied to beds during the delivery to ensure that they did not try and escape with their baby, and that young mums were only released from the hospital after having signed the required adoption forms.

It was commonplace for screens or barriers to be erected so that the women could not see or touch their babies before they were taken away. As a mother myself, I do not think I can imagine anything more horrific than the thought of never being able to touch my children, of always wondering what had happened to them. The anguish of being subject to such cruelty, powerless to do anything to get them back I imagine would be almost unbearable.

Mr Speaker on a more positive note, the motion also recognises that it is Children's Week, and in fact today is the day that Australia recognises Universal Children's Day. I felt it was appropriate to recognise this in the context of what is a motion on recognising the harms done to children both as the parents and adoptees because it does show that we have changed as a society, and we recognise the role children play, the rights of children, and in fact have a very positive alternative to the practices of the past.

In the context of this debate, it is also appropriate to mention the CCCares Program. Established in 2005, the program has won a number of awards, is nationally

recognised as a leader in the services it provides, and has given young parents an education that is so important for both them and their children.

The program has made a real difference to many hundreds of lives. These young parents now have many more opportunities, and not only will they benefit, but the community will also benefit from knowledge, skills and understanding they will bring to whatever endeavour they apply themselves to.

This is a good opportunity for us to say that we appreciate all the work that the CCCares staff are doing, and that we support Canberra's young parents who are doing their best at what is, even in the easiest circumstances, the very challenging job of raising children. Today is the first step, as I said, in bringing out into the open this important issue, and is intended to recognise and acknowledge the past practices and harms caused, and provides a means of moving forward. Much more will need to be done to address this issue.

We must also be careful to ensure that we recognise that the recipients of the forcibly removed babies are not unfairly labelled or made to feel like they did the wrong thing. As is the case with all parents who care and nurture and want the best for their children, they provided the best upbringing they possibly could to their very much loved adopted children, and it would be wrong of us to label them in any way culpable or involved in what occurred.

I would also like to take the opportunity to note that November 8-14 is National Adoption Awareness Week. As a community we should be openly talking about adoption and encouraging awareness and understanding. I think that it is also appropriate to promote referral services for those parents who want to find their children, and those children who want to find their parents.

As a jurisdiction that has formally recognised the basic human rights that forcibly taking away babies from their mothers offends, we have an obligation on us to address what was a clear and gross breach of human rights and of common decency and compassion. I hope that now, having put the issue into the public arena, and identified what needs to happen next, we can make a positive contribution to a very sad part of our history.

For so many years there have been very few able and willing to advocate the cause, now that there is an increased national momentum across Australia, now that there are many able and willing advocates as well as many mothers themselves who have told their stories, we simply cannot in good conscience hide from the issue, we in the ACT have an obligation to respond on this issue as well. I therefore commend my motion to the Assembly."

The amended motion passed by the ACT Legislative Assembly is given below:

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

That the motion as amended be agreed to:

"That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

(a) Children's Week is from 23 to 31 October and provides an opportunity to celebrate the right of children to enjoy childhood and to demonstrate their talents, skills and abilities;

(b) the Western Australian Legislative Assembly passed a motion:

(i) recognising that past adoption practices, such as the immediate removal of babies following birth and preventing bonding with the mother, have caused long-term anguish and suffering for the people affected; and

(ii) apologising to the mothers, their children and the families who were adversely affected by these past adoption practices;

(c) the Australian Institute of Family Studies' 'Impact of Past Adoption Practices' report has been released and that a cost-shared budget submission was agreed to by the ACT Government in June 2010 to progress a national research study to build on the Australian Institute of Family Studies' review;

(d) the extent and impact of past adoption practices needs to be understood to inform the development of an appropriate response for those affected. The Australian Institute of Family Studies' review is the first step in building this evidence base; and

(e) similar practices probably occurred in the ACT during the Commonwealth Government Administration of the Territory;

acknowledges the work of CCCares program in providing education services to young parents;

supports a national inquiry into the forcible removal of babies from their mothers for adoption or institutional care and a national apology to those affected; and

calls on the ACT Government to:

(f) apologise on behalf of the ACT Legislative Assembly and the community to those ACT residents who have been affected by forcible removal practices; and

(g) support initiatives that assist young parents and their children.".

Question put and passed.