Senate Inquiry into "Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices."

I, Virginia Frances Perry, (nee Vane), am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia resident in Tasmania

As a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia I have an inalienable right to protection and absolutely

As an Australian citizen, the Commonwealth affords me protection from the unlawful and harmful actions that threaten my right to life, liberty and justice from those who would deny me those rights within or without the borders of Australia.

In July, 1970 at the tender age of 16 I thought I may be pregnant to my boyfriend. I had little knowledge of the mechanics of sex and reproduction and was very naive. My family life was one of normal suburbia. We lived a comfortable life, and I had a job working in an office supply company. My sister and I had attended a Catholic girl's school which was very strict. My parents were quite strict and I was terrified to think I might be pregnant. and I decided to go to the Gold Coast and start a new life there.

We only made it as far as Casino and we were ripped off the train in the middle of the night and taken to Grafton Police Station. We were finger printed and kept in a cell over night, even though no crime had been committed. Is pregnancy a crime? A friend had alerted my parents and they had used their social network to get police help, and to scare us silly.

On getting back to Wollongong, my mother took me to the doctor, who confirmed I was pregnant. I was told I was having an abortion, although they tried to cover it up by saying it was just a D & C. This was through a doctor who was a family friend and a good Catholic at that. I refused and was then told I would be sent to the nuns in Sydney.

I was made to feel ashamed, and dirty. I had sullied my parent's lives and now I was to be punished. They had the police come and talk to me as well as a

Catholic priest. I was constantly told what a bad girl I had been and of the consequences this would bring on my family. “What would the neighbours say??”

I was admitted to the Waitara Foundling Home in Oct, 1970, a week after my 17th birthday. I was scared of who I would meet there, as only bad girls got pregnant. To my surprise all the girls were just like me.....scared, vulnerable, naive and very young. Most of us had gone to Catholic schools and had little or no sex education. I had to work in the home.....my job was to clean the nursery, which meant heaving around a huge floor polisher, right up until 's birth.

I saw a counsellor once. I told her I wanted to keep my baby and was hoping my parents would have a change of mind and help me. My parents only visited me 3 times in the 6 months I was there. Every time I would beg my mother to help me keep the baby but she refused. She had told her friends and family that I had gone nursing to Newcastle. The Sisters of Mercy had a house there where my mail was delivered and then forwarded on to me at Waitara. So much secrecy!!

JRD was born on April 1971. It was a long, hard labour and I screamed my head off when they went to take my baby girl away. They bought her back and placed her in a cot next to my bed. I was allowed to see her and hold her in the nursery but was not allowed to breast feed her.

On April 7th, 1971 I was discharged from hospital and driven with some other girls, with our babes to the Catholic Adoption Agency. I signed the Adoption papers, knowing I had 30 days to go back and pick up my girl. At no time was I ever told of a pension that would have helped me keep my baby, and this was the ONLY thing that was stopping me from keeping her. I needed financial support but no was forth coming. My parents refused to let me home with a baby and I had no money of my own.

Luckily this story has a good ending. I met my daughter in 1987, as her adoptive parents couldn’t cope with her and wanted me to take her back. By this time I was married to and we had a nine year old son who had always been told he had a sister. My husband has been my rock. We have been married for 39 years which is a real testament to our strength and love. I met him at 13 and we fell in love when he came back from Viet Nam in Oct 70. He stayed by my side for all of my pregnancy coming from Nowra to Sydney most weekends to see me.

I believe that the Commonwealth Government had a duty of care to protect me, as a young vulnerable girl, from the vile practices of the Catholic Church and others. It is quite obvious that they preyed on young girls, making it extremely

difficult to stay in main stream society once they found themselves pregnant. We were made to feel ashamed, dirty and irresponsible by those in power.

I also believe that at five days after my pregnancy it was wrong to make me sign papers. Also how could this be legal when I was 17 at the time? I believed I had 30 days to get my child back, only to find out that she was adopted 3 weeks after her birth and taken from Australia to live in Papua New Guinea.

I was never told of any pensions or of any Government Agencies who could help me, in my quest to keep my daughter. I was never counselled about what would happen to me after I had given my baby up. I was just sent home and had to deal with the grief and dreadful sense of loss on my own.

The policies and practices at the time were very wrong and ill conceived. Pardon the pun. Every mother has a right to her own child. It is a fact of life on which the world revolves. The pain inflicted on me, my husband and son, not to mention the dreadful life my daughter has endured at the hand of her adopted father, has never, ever been addressed. This man was never interviewed by the CAA. The couple that adopted my baby were dysfunctional to say the least. The father was a known pedophile but this was obviously not a problem for the CAA. They adopted my baby on a letter of recommendation.

My daughter, her father, my husband and son have all suffered a huge amount of grief over this adoption. We have brought ourselves together as a family with no help from any Government agencies. I believe a special department should be set aside to help those come to terms with the huge grief and sense of loss that comes with having a child adopted. Even though I now have my daughter as my own, the pain of losing her never eases, and I will never, ever get back her early days which should have spent with me, her mother. There are physical and mental issues that need to be addressed, and we do not have the resources to do this on our own.

In closing I would like to add that my extended family has quite a number of adopted children in it. I do not see the adopting families as enemies, rather as people caught up in the same web of lies and deceit, that we young girls were also caught in. The Government believed they were helping by taking our babies away, but how wrong and misguided they were. It is time people were made accountable for their actions and no, saying “sorry” is NOT enough.

Signed:

Virginia Frances Perry (nee Vane)