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

Preamble to Submission

I, Margaret Nonas, am a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia resident in South Australia.
As a citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia I have an inalienable right to protection under the Australian Constitution and the Common Law of this country

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 these rights, within and without, the borders of Australia

This was my submission to the Senate Select Committee on mental Health, 2005. I am including this submission followed by comments since this submission.

From: Margaret Nonas

Sent: Tuesday 16th August 2005.

To: Committee, Mental Health (SEN)

Subject: Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health.

In 1967 and at the age of 19, while living overseas, I became pregnant to a man I was living with at the time. When we found out I was pregnant he said he did not wish to get married and take responsibility for a child. I made the decision to return to Australia to have my baby, so I could have the support of my family and friends. My parents were initially shocked to hear of my pregnancy, but took it in their stride and looked after me financially and emotionally before and after the birth of my son.
I saw a doctor at 4 months and every month until the birth, at no time seeing a Social Worker to discuss adoption, as my parents said the decision was mine as to whether I kept the baby or not, they would support my decision.

My doctor mentioned adoption but I told him I wanted to keep my child, so nothing more was said. I was admitted to the (...) on the night of (...), 1967 at approximately 11.30 PM. My paperwork states that I was a Mrs. and not a Miss, which I believe my Doctor did to protect me from adoption. I arrived with baby clothes and though frightened was looking forward to having my child.

I do not remember how the nurse knew I was unmarried, maybe I told her, I couldn't see it being a problem as I had parental support and knew very little about the practice of adoption. However, from that moment on her attitude changed and she treated me as if I was less than human. I was alone in the Labour Ward and very frightened as most new mums are and as the pain worsened I became upset. I was told to shut up and put up with the pain as I had gotten myself into this situation. As the night wore on, I was given several drugs, I have my medical records; among the drugs were barbiturates and an anti-psychotic. At approximately 6.30 AM I was in a great deal of pain and asked the same nurse how much longer I had to go, she had just examined me so would have been aware of my progress. Her answer was that I had all day to go yet and just to shut up and get on with it. I gave birth less than 2 hours later with the blankets piled over my face and a needle jabbed into my shoulder immediately upon giving birth. This needle contained Stilboestrel to dry up my breast milk

My baby was whisked away without me seeing him. I asked the nurse what sex the baby was and what the baby weighed, she told me that was not for me to know. Twenty minutes later when my doctor arrived he asked me why I was so upset and I told him I wanted to know about my baby, he looked the nurse in the eye and said, tell Margaret what sex her baby is and what it weighed. She glared at me but she had no choice but to tell me at that stage that I had a baby boy who weighed approximately 7lb 6 ounces.

I was taken to a private room, where I remained for 4 days, sedated and very upset. Adoption was mentioned frequently with me being told this baby needed 2 parents and I

would have no way to support the child, even though my parents would help me. On the fourth morning I said to my Doctor that I wanted to keep my baby, he left the room and returned with the Matron, the Head Sister and another woman, who carried paperwork. I was told I was selfish to want to keep my child, if I loved him I would want him to have 2 parents and a better life than I could give him. With four powerful people surrounding me and in my very distressed, drugged, emotional state, I agreed to give my child his 'better life'. At no time was I told that there was financial assistance to keep my child, or told that there was a time period in which I could still get my baby back. I was told never to look for him, as he would be sent interstate. I eventually found out that he was only 12 miles from me the whole time I lived in Newcastle.

I was sent home that day, together with my baby clothes and told to forget about him and get on with my life and get married some day and have more children and be happy for the gift I had given some childless couple. The adoption was never mentioned, nor did I ask my parents why they weren't there to advise me, firstly as I was underage at the time and secondly because they had said they would support me in my decision. They are deceased now so I still don't know the circumstances in which their support was withdrawn. I was never warned or aware that there could be life-long consequences of losing my child to adoption.

I eventually married and gave birth to a son who died at 7 weeks of age. Not having been advised that the adoption may cause a lifetime of emotional distress I believed I was being punished by some external force and my second son had died as punishment for 'giving' away my first born. When my third child, a daughter was born, I was suffering from severe depression and a restlessness that has never abated to this day. I woke her every night for approximately 6 years to see if she was still breathing. I went to work when she was 6 weeks old, as I was frightened of her and too emotional to breast feed or care for her properly, I felt. She had a wonderful babysitter, which I am grateful for, but she has suffered emotional problems through her life due to my depression and inability to 'mother' her sufficiently.

I found my son in 1991; he had experienced a good life with supportive adoptive parents, who encouraged us to have a relationship together. My daughter and he were ecstatic to have found a brother and a sister for each other and became very close. My son however died in 1995, a victim of cancer, after knowing him for only 4 years. I am still left to wonder if the drugs I was given during labour contributed to his death.

I can remember every moment of my time in that hospital and every waking moment the events are in my head and affect my everyday life. I have recently been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and still suffer from depression that is helped by medication. I have been very unsettled throughout my life, always trying to escape my pain and have moved 37 times in 5 different countries, never settling in a job or a relationship. I am currently seeing an excellent Psychologist and having Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, which helps me cope on a day-to-day basis. However, I am not able to be in a social or work situation without becoming extremely distressed and agitated. I am unable to listen to music or watch television and avoid noise as much as possible. I

am having flashbacks of both visual and olfactory situations, I have made a personal decision not to drive any more, which isolates me even more, but I do not believe it is safe for other road users for me to be driving while my mind is somewhere else. My dreams are traumatic, both from the deaths of my sons and many other traumatic life events brought on at times by my feelings of having no self-worth and an overwhelming sense of feeling useless in all areas of my life.

Thank You, Margaret.

Since 2005 I have also seen a psychiatrist, (...) , who has had some experience of adoption. This has helped me understand the times somewhat differently but in essence nothing has changed with my mental health. I am still isolated, still do not drive or listen to music and I am on disability as I am not able to work as I can not be around other people very much. I have just looked at the laws for child adoption in that period and I am astounded and horrified that these laws were ignored.

The following regulations of the Child Welfare Act 17, 1939 evolved in the early 1950's to explain that:

"A mother giving an adoption consent must be fully aware of the import of her action and, must be emotionally and mentally able to appreciate all the implications of such consent. A consent should not be taken if there is any suggestion of indecisiveness or that she has not given sufficient consideration to the matter".

"To avoid any misunderstanding or any suggestion that the mother was misled or uninformed, District Officers are instructed to explain fully to the mother, before taking the consent, the facilities which are available to help her keep the child. These include homes licensed under the Child Welfare Act for the private care of children apart from natural parents, financial assistance to unmarried mothers under section 27 of the Child Welfare Act, admission to State control until the mother is in a position to care for her child, and assistance to affiliate the child and obtain a maintenance order against the putative father, when all of these aids have been rejected, the officer is expected to explain to the mother the full implications of the act of surrendering her child. (this included warning her of the risk of dire future regret if she considers adoption). Only when a mother has considered these, and still wishes to proceed with the surrender for adoption, should the consent be accepted."

The law was very clear in stating how a mother had to insist upon adoption before it could proceed.

Was I indecisive? Yes, very much so. On the fourth day when my doctor came in I once again told him, in tears, that I wanted to keep my baby. That is when he left the room and returned with the matron, head sister and what I know now was probably the social worker. I was given the spiel about two parents. I was never told there were any alternatives re assistance. I feel sick once again putting this submission together and my

tears are falling. Why? Why? Why? Why did they do this? My son was a beautiful young man and my daughter and I missed most of his life.

Thank you, Margaret Nonas