The role of the Commonwealth Government in relation to Adoption in Australia

Submission to Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Inquiry into the Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices.

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I am an adoptee of the child welfare Act of 1939 of New South Wales.
I am a natural Mother who lost her child to adoption in Queensland in 1975.

I have suffered the grief and the confusion of not being reared by my biological Mother I was adopted privately to save a fragmented marriage that marriage ended 5 years later. I was raised by my adopted father until the age of 16 when it was recommended by professional judgments for me to try to live with my adoptive mother. Not long after the move I fell pregnant to my boyfriend, who moved back to South Australia, as soon as he was informed of my pregnancy. My adoptive mother sent me back to live with my adoptive father; at this stage of his life he was moving to Queensland to live in a small rural subdivision. We had a camper van and he had built a double garage which enclosed the campervan; the water tanks were in readiness for us to live there while the house was being built. There was no electricity and the provider said it wouldn't be until May 1975 that it would be connected and they could not move it forward. I needed electricity in late March early April to guarantee that I would have power to work the pumps for the water tanks to work, for easier access to water for my baby's needs. That did not happen.

I had approached my local parish priest (now deceased) and the local social worker at the time and no help was offered. To move into the town until electricity was connected was financially unaffordable due to the pension at that time being $32.00 per week (from memory) and to rent a flat was $24.50 a week plus bond, so there was not enough to support us for even a short period of time. There were no child care services at that time for my child to be looked after while I returned to work and my adoptive father had his own work commitments to attend to. It became obvious to me without financial, emotional and spiritual support, that I was facing an impossible struggle.- also without electricity and running water, although it is not law to have, generations of children have been brought up without it and still are. Also witnessing in the media of aboriginal woman losing their children because they had no electricity and running water; to me this reinforced my fear of having my child taken from me, under these conditions.

I lost my child to adoption because of judgments that were made that because I was the

daughter of a woman who lost her child at age 29 to adoption I was unworthy and incapable of rearing a child. Hence I was not worthy of any assistance and none was given. So I could make some sense of what was going on. I also had a persona on that, to give my child up to adoption was the way to go, so that the he /she would not go through the trauma of being taken from me. I knew the pain of being separated from my adoptive mother, but it all come too quickly that my pain was ***loss of mothers.*** And being told you want the best for your child, knowing adoption was not always perfect I was placed in a damned if I do, damned if I don't, situation.

Three generations have endured the pain of separation and pretend they are not traumatized by those genetic links being torn apart. We have also have endured either incomplete or incorrect paperwork. They talk about the best interests of the child: I would like to think honest paperwork would be part of that, but that has not been the privilege my child and I have had.

- My Original Birth Certificate has my given names and surname from my Birth Mother.
- My adoption papers have the names my Birth mother gave me.
- My adoptive parents changed my first and seconds names in baptism.
- My *amended* Birth Certificate has my *original* first names (those names given to me by my birth mother) on it with the changed surname, and it is dated roughly 6 weeks after my baptism.

When I went to apply for a passport I was told I would have to formally apply to change my name to my name. By change of name this certificate would then become my identifying paperwork. There is a problem for me with this: ***I am not changing my name, my baptismal name is the name* I *have used all my life, why should I lose the right to a birth certificate because I am adopted.*** I have been informed by the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages that I can not amend my already amended Birth Certificate as I am over 3 months old .You are suppose to be able to correct an error on a certificate but I can not .In the Law of names it is by usage we get our name. I have also been informed that a baptismal certificate is not a legal document yet that was the only certificate that my adoptive parents used and was accepted for enrolling me in schools and for out of school activities. How can it be said I am changing my name when I am not?

My first knowledge of incorrect paperwork came to light when I went to get married; I had never had a Birth certificate before then. When the certificate arrived, it was an extract and it had the names my birth mother had given me and my adoptive parent's surname. I sent the certificate back and told them they had sent me the wrong one, Their reply was no this is yours. I was not informed at that time there was a problem that needed fixing . That is when my adoptive father (now deceased) told me they were the names my birth mother had given me.

I took my birth certificate and baptismal certificate to my local parish priest (now deceased) and told him I was adopted. I have only recently found out that my full baptismal certificate has legally adopted on it. It appears that my adoptive father showed the priest my adoption papers and the baptism was allowed to go ahead.

On my Original Birth certificate the state that my mother was born in is incorrect. I had to go to the Supreme Court of New South Wales 24th February 1994 for help with that

situation so I could get access to correct information to be able to continue my search for her. This cost me $454.60 which was a significant amount in 1994.

A few years ago I misplaced my drivers license and not knowing what I now know, I took all my paper work into the department of transport where I was told by a female staff member that I actually had a license under an alliance and that my original names has now been recorded with my baptismal names. This woman (female staff member) has now added to this ongoing mess. So now every time my license is checked it is showing I have two names.

When I made contact with the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, they informed me that because I knew that there was incorrect information on my Birth Certificate in 1976, and that it had been left so long, it was now my problem to fix it. They implied that they may have been able to fix it back then; they failed to mention that I had in fact contacted them back then and returned the certificate to them.

If I was able to have my amended Birth Certificate changed or get a passport I have decided to combine the 2 names. ***The 2 names from my birth mother is my inheritance from her. As the application demands a reason, once again I have no privacy and my adoption is knowledge to the world.. But how many names do I have to say previously known as!***

I have been married 34 years with my baptismal names and am now known by my husband's surname. His surname is the only change I have done with great pride, and that is by usage. Your name is the only thing that lives on past us and the history of that name ties you with your family. All my four children have my Baptismal names on their birth certificates *as MOTHER. This a total adoption stuff up.*

Now to the next generation.

When I went to my local Court House to register my child's birth, I was told I could not name my child; that as my child was being adopted, it was up to the adoptive parents to name the child. Knowing that my adoptive parents had named me, (at that stage I had never seen any paperwork) and at age 17 I believed what I was told. I now understand that this practice of having an unnamed child for the adoptive parents also reinforced the myth that the child was not wanted by the mother. About 27 years ago whilst I was a volunteer Lifeline counsellor I was informed that I was lied to.

In 2007 I made contact with Queensland Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages by phone and was told I could not rewrite history, my response was "what, is the world still flat?"
After contacting Post Adoption Resources Centre NSW and them trying to help to no avail, they suggested I make contact with Dr Denise Cuthbert from Monash University as she was presenting a paper on **the Legal Fictions and Necessary Truths Birth Certificates and adoption in Australia** at the 9th Adoption conference "Connecting Past Securing Future" in Sydney 2008. I wrote to her 1/8/2008 and Dr Denise Cuthbert used part of my letter in her presentation. After talking to her in Sydney I went to see my Local Member for Queensland Parliament; (I had written to Phil Reeve's Policy advisor at that time and had not received a reply). The Local Member read my letter into the Hansard in Queensland Parliament 18th August 2009. On the 10 August 2010 I met with representatives of Adoption Services Queensland, Minister Phil Reeves policy advisor,

representatives form the Qld Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, and representatives of Adoption Loss Adult support Group (A.L.A.S). Following this meeting I was finally invited on 14/8/2010 to record my Child's original names on the original Birth Certificate. My child's now new/ old certificate ended up being dated 11 years after my child and I were reunited. Our anniversary present: it only took **35 years 5 months and 11 days after their birth to get what was their right from birth.**

As it states in the Hague convention, a child has a right to a name from Birth. My child's adoptive parents were also denied the opportunity to give my child a name from me, the child's mother. At least my adoptive parents did give me in Baptism one of the names from my Mother. I also find it hard that adoptive parents have had our names on the adoption paperwork of the child they are to pick up, but both my mother and I were denied the right to know where and with whom our children were.

I also have on my current Birth certificate "prescribed" and my child has "schedule" so everyone who knows about Certificates knows we are adopted – this practice has failed to protect our privacy. I could never get a Birth Certificate with my adoptive parents name on it until the laws changed in 1991 and even then I only received an extract - my adoptive father told me it was because I was adopted.

Professor Ian Jones of Royal Brisbane Hospital had the courage to apologize to me and others in the Adult Lose Adult Support (A.L.A.S) 19/5/2009 and White Australian Stolen Heritage (W.A.S.H)12/11/2010 on hearing our stories (personal and legal). I have not included in my submission the full trauma and pain of being treated as a second glass citizen.

My Mother and I were born in Australia and so was my child supposedly with full rights and protection. How can a 17 year old sign such a life altering piece of paper and know the life long consequence when she herself was not given the so called protection it was meant to offer? I have dated my submission on the anniversary of when my life was meant to be in my best interest… I still struggle with the statement: **Best Life Interest of the Child.**

Recognition of the **truth** in society would go a long way to the **validation** of what has happened to my mother, my child and myself. When will it be acknowledged that we have been victims of the history of adoption in this country?

I have found in this entire paperwork journey that a lot of administrative staff have no or little knowledge of the history of past practices of adoption, and cannot understand that when you have had everything stripped from you in life that paperwork done in their way adds to another trauma, another lie.

My child and I grew up with out support around this trauma. There was never an opportunity to talk to anyone in relation to where do I come from and why? If we were struggling we were made to feel grateful.

When does my Birth Mother feel safe to acknowledge me? I feel never, as she is now in her 80's and Secrets and pain get harder to change the longer they go on.
I have met my Childs Other Parents and they do love my child very much but they cannot get over how in tune we are with each other.

My child has never been a secret in my life even though others wanted me to go home and forget. How can you forget? You are separated from your Mother and you were separated from your child.

My child is back in my life and we have a text message we make to each other and it says: **Just Because I Can.**

Now which name do I sign this from?

(b) the potential role of the Commonwealth in developing a national framework to assist states and territories to address the consequences for the mothers, their families and the children who were subject to forced adoption policies.

Apology - brings validation and healing
Redress – financial compensation and acknowledgement for the separation
- All costs should be removed from registries (Births, Deaths and Marriages) for applications for birth parents and adoptees.