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

Preamble to Submission

I, Catherine Edwards (nee Fox) am a British citizen (Permanent Resident) of the Commonwealth of Australia resident in Western Australia

As a British 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 British 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

Catherine Mary Edwards

In 1970 at the age of 10 I emigrated from England to Australia with my parents and two brothers aged 13 and 2 years old and settled in Belmont Western Australia.

In April 1974 age 14 years I became pregnant, the Father was only 16 so there was no decision re Marriage as we were both far too young to consider that option.

In September when my parents were finally informed that I was pregnant, as I did not wish them to know prior to 28 weeks as I was against a termination. I had been informed, by a Medical Practitioner that a termination was still possible up to 28 weeks at that time due to my young age. In fact my parents first reaction was one of "Why did you not tell us earlier so that we could have done something about it!" That was exactly why I did not; I wished to keep my child.

Upon the advise of my family GP, I was taken by my parents, to see a Government social worker to discuss Adoption. I made it very clear that I wished to keep my baby and did not wish to consider adoption.
A week later, once again on the advise of my family GP, I was taken to see the Social Worker Nun at the then St Anne's Maternity Hospital Mt Lawley WA, once again I made it very clear I wished to keep my baby and that Adoption was not an option.
During the next few weeks I purchased with my savings a basinet and layette to bring my child home with me. At no point at home was adoption discussed, my schooling had been arranged via correspondence and plans where being made for the birth and subsequent arrival home of my child.

On the 17th January 1975 aged 15 years I was admitted to St Anne's and my labour was induced, I was shown no comfort by the Sisters, when I stated I was scared I was informed that "I should have thought of that 9 months ago!"

I was left alone during my labour, and when I stated that I felt like pushing made to walk the long distance from the ward to the labour room, married women were taken by wheelchair.
At 1.15am on the 18th January 1975, I delivered my son in stirrups with a sheet in place to prevent me seeing him, when I attempted to see him I was physically restrained by the Nuns. They also tried to prevent me naming him, "John is a good saints name" however I prevailed and had him named .
Also a saint's name, but not the one they had chosen!
After having him I then walked back to my room on the maternity ward where I was left and not checked upon till morning when I was then transferred against my wishes to the medical ward away from the babies and other mothers. I was placed in a double room with the other patient, an elderly Nun, who quickly informed me that my baby deserved a "better home" and I was being "punished" for my behaviour and to stop crying.

I requested to see my son on several occasions and this was denied.

I informed my Doctor and every member of the hospital staff who would listen that I did not wish to give my son away, that I wished to take him home, that they had taken him away from me and to please give him back.

I attempted to access the nursery to retrieve him and was physically removed from the Maternity ward, and returned to the Medical ward by the staff.

At no time did I receive any form of counselling or advice regarding my options

On the 5th day I was taken to an office with four officials including the Social Worker Nun, where an attempt was made to make me sign the adoption papers, which I refused as they would not let me see my son.
Finally a baby, possibly mine was shown to me and I was advised that if I signed I would be allowed home, but I could not take my child with me as I was underage.
So I then signed the papers as they refused to let me leave the room without signing.
A piece of paper was briefly handed to me and I was told that it was required to reclaim my son within a month, however as I was underage the paperwork was taken away from me as "it was not required!"

At no time did anyone discuss my rights
At no time did anyone inform me of any government social/monitory assistance for single mothers
I was informed that my son would be adopted immediately and would go to his "New" parents straight from hospital

On the 6th day I was given an injection possibly Diethylstilboestrol to "dry up my milk" and discharged home without my son

I feel I was lied to by the Hospital Social workers and totally let down by the government of the day.

- Denied of any basic human rights as I was a minor and a single mother
- I did not wish to give my child up for adoption, a point I stated on many occasions
- I was underage to sign any legal document, I always assumed that my parents had counter signed the papers, however upon obtaining a copy of my sons adoption papers this is not the case.
- I was denied any recourse by informing me that as a minor the month "cooling off" period did not apply.
- I was lied to as my son spent the first 6 weeks in foster care not with his "New" parents
- My parents were informed that this practise was the government policy, and they were not allowed to let me keep my son.

I have since met my son he has grown up in a loving home with one sister also adopted, I since have had two further children who have met their older

brother. However the emotional ties are not there, I am not his Mother; he has Parents chosen by someone else.

The emotional trauma caused by adoption is long lasting; Birthdays, Christmas, Mothers Day, the birth of further children, grandchildren the list just goes on. You never ever "get over it" the loss continues. During the past 36 years I have suffered several emotional breakdowns and carry the emotional scars all of which can be traced back to the events surrounding the forced adoption of my son.

- Anger directed at my parents for allowing this to happen, even though they were informed that this was the only and "Best" option. To this day I have difficulties discussing this with my Mother as I feel that as an adult she could and should have stood up to the authorities, not just blindly accepting that adoption was the only "legal" option available.
- Post partum depression following the birth of my second son , which manifested as an irrational fear that "someone would steal him" I would check on him every 10-15 minutes day and night for the first few months of his life. My husband at the time did not understand and would get angry that I could not even remember name – I would refer to him as . The strange thing is that I did not have this fear when my daughter was born two years earlier; it was the birth of another son that triggered it.
- Sitting in a car overnight at the top of Greenmount hill overlooking Perth on birthday looking at all the house lights hoping he was in one of them.
- Driving past the schools in my area on his first day of school hoping I just might see him and recognise him.
- Watching children his age to try and get some understanding of how old he was, because to me he was always a small baby – just a face and one hand wrapped in white blankets because that was my only memory of seeing him.
- When he was 18 the laws changed and contact was possible via a third party government department, at this point I attempted to contact and received a refusal from as he was not ready, and had been lead to believe that I did not want him and that I had just "given" him up. My reaction total emotional breakdown, and suicide attempt.
- When he was 20 laws changed again and I could obtain copies of the Adoption papers and thereby his new name and that of his adoptive parents. It was then I realised that the whole adoption was illegal as I was underage to sign any legal document and neither of my parents had countersigned as I had always thought. In fact my son had been stolen from me, by government officials of the day, at no time had I given him away. He was stolen from my body whilst I gave birth to him.
- I sent him a card on his 21st Birthday providing him with my contact details. Which enabled us to finally meet

My parents brought us to Australia for a Better life, however what I ended up with is lasting emotional damage from a government policy that was abused to deny single mothers especially underage mothers and their children basic human rights. At least if your child is stillborn you are allowed and encouraged to grieve, with adoption you are just expected to shut your emotions away and get on with your life with a hole in your heart that can never be filled as there is always someone missing. The unanswered questions are the worst - Where they are? Are they happy? Are they well? What do they look like? Or even the big one - Whether they are alive or dead?

My greatest hope is that these submissions help prevent these events from ever happening again, and that no mother should ever again experience the devastation of having her child stolen.

Yours faithfully

Catherine Edwards