

PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

INTERIM REPORT ON

INQUIRY INTO ADOPTION PRACTICES:

TRANSCRIPTS OF EVIDENCE

FROM 27 AUGUST 1998 TO 19 OCTOBER 1998

Ordered to be printed 19 November 1998

CONTACT DETAILS

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

That the Standing Committee on Social Issues inquire into, and report on:

1. the professional practices in the administration and delivery of adoption and related services, particularly those services relating to the taking of consents, offered to birth parents and children in New South Wales from 1950 to 1998;
2. whether adoption practices referred to in clause one involved unethical and unlawful practices or practices that denied birth parents access to non adoption alternatives for their child; and
3. if so, what measures would assist persons experiencing distress due to such adoption practices.

The Committee will consider adoption practices in New South Wales from 1950 to 1998. However, the primary emphasis of the Inquiry will be on the practices occurring before the introduction of the *Adoption Information Act, 1990*.

These terms of reference were referred to the Committee by:

The Honourable Faye Lo Po', MP

Minister for Community Services. Minister for Ageing.

Minister for Disability Services. Minister for Women.

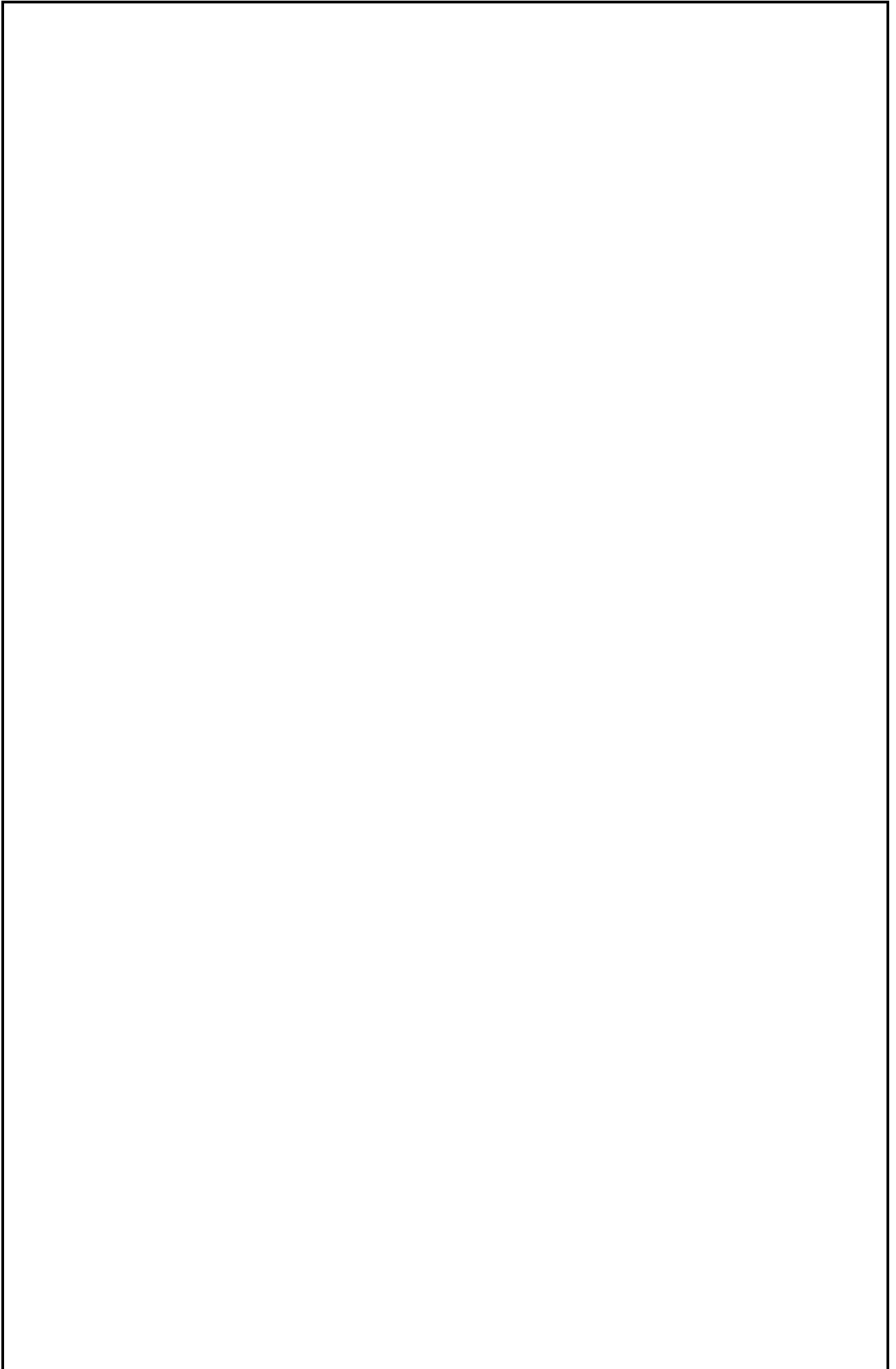
COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS

The functions of the Standing Committee on Social Issues are to inquire into, consider, and report to the Legislative Council on:

- any proposal, matter or thing concerned with the social development of the people in all areas of New South Wales;
- the equality of access to the services and benefits including health, education, housing and disability services provided by the Government and non-Government sector to the people in all areas of New South Wales;
- recreation, gaming, racing and sporting matters; and
- the role of Government in promoting community services and the welfare of the people in all areas of New South Wales.

Matters for inquiry may be referred to the Committee by resolution of the Legislative Council, a Minister of the Crown, or by way of relevant annual reports and petitions. The Committee has the legislative power to:

- summons witnesses;
- make visits of inspection within Australia;
- call upon the services of Government organisations and their staff, with the consent of the appropriate Minister;
- accept written submissions concerning inquiries from any person or organisation; and
- conduct hearings.



COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

In June 1998 the Minister for Community Services, the Hon Faye Lo Po', MP, asked the Standing Committee on Social Issues to inquire into the professional practices in the administration and delivery of adoption and related services in New South Wales from 1950 to 1998.

Once the Terms of Reference were received, advertisements were placed in a number of newspapers inviting members of the public and relevant agencies to make written submissions to the Inquiry. By mid November 1998 the Committee had received 246 submissions.

Public hearings commenced in August 1998. Four days of hearings have been held. Those appearing before the Committee included mothers (and one father) whose children were adopted, representatives from the Departments of Health and Community Services, the Australian Association of Social Workers, the Post-Adoption Resource Centre and several church-related adoption agencies. This Interim Report is made up of the transcripts of those hearings. You will notice that to maintain the confidentiality of some mothers their real names are not revealed.

Throughout this Inquiry there has been considerable media interest. Articles have been run in a number of newspapers ranging from the *Australian* to smaller regional and suburban papers. The public hearings have featured on nightly television news broadcasts and current affairs programs both in New South Wales and interstate. Over one hundred members of the public have attended each public hearing.

The NSW Parliament will be prorogued before the end of the year in the lead up to the March 1999 state election. Once this occurs, Parliamentary Committees are unable to conduct any official business such as holding hearings to take evidence. The Committee will use the period from December 1998 to April 1999 to conduct background research, undertake a detailed analysis of the submissions received and prepare some of the introductory chapters of the final report.

It is expected that following the election the Committee will recommence hearings around May 1999. The Committee anticipates taking further evidence from parents, children, adoption agencies and government agencies. At that time, we will write to all those on our mailing list informing them of the hearing dates.

The Committee has decided to release the transcripts of the public hearings held to date. The release of the transcripts from public hearings is an unprecedented step for this Committee. The Committee has made this decision for a number of reasons. Members are very conscious that, for many people, involvement in this Inquiry has been difficult and very emotional. Some people find they are overwhelmed at the hearings and, much to their frustration, unable to remember all that is said. Others have requested access to the transcripts so they can use the information provided to make supplementary submissions. There is considerable interest in the Inquiry from people living interstate and overseas who are unable to attend the hearings. Providing the transcripts to these people will, it is hoped, help them feel part of the process.

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

The Social Issues Committee will accept written submissions to this Inquiry up until Monday, 31 May 1999.

In preparing your submission please remember that any material presented to the Committee may be made public once the final report is tabled in Parliament. Should your submission contain information you do not wish to be released into the public domain please clearly label the submission "confidential". It would also be helpful if original documents, such as birth certificates or hospital records, were not included. The Committee cannot take responsibility for returning such items. You are, however, more than welcome to include photocopies.

Want to add to your submission?

If you have already made a submission and, upon reading these transcripts, wish to add to the material you originally provided, please feel free to make a supplementary submission. We will ensure the additional material you provide is attached to your original submission.

All submissions, including supplementary submissions, should be sent to:

The Director
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Parliament House
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