

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO  
*RELEASING THE PAST: ADOPTION PRACTICES 1950-1998*  
RELEASED BY THE NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL STANDING  
COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

The Final Report of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues, *Releasing the Past: Adoption Practices 1950-1998*, makes a valuable contribution to understanding how adoption practices evolved in NSW and the way wider social ideas are reflected in legislation and practice.

The Report examined past adoption practice, past legal and ethical standards, past social conditions and beliefs, past attitudes to single motherhood and past adoption secrecy. The Government acknowledges the pain, suffering and distress that a group of women experienced with past adoption practice. Although these practices have not been part of the practices of this State for some time, some mothers, fathers, adoptees and their families experienced lasting suffering.

To a large degree, adoption practices of greatest concern to the Committee reflect values and attitudes that prevailed in the 1950s and 1960s. However in the past, like today, there was not a universal set of social attitudes and values. Many practitioners were starting to question and challenge adoption practice and pressured for more openness in adoption during the period covered by the inquiry.

Adoption practice has changed radically since the early 1970s. The new *Adoption Act 2000* reinforces these directions. It acknowledges that adoption is a lifelong experience for all the parties involved and embodies important principles to guide future adoption practice. The legislation recognises the importance of counselling of parents and children prior to any adoption consent, including the exploration of all the alternatives to adoption. It affirms the importance to the child of access to his or her family of origin and cultural heritage, and provides for adoption plans that may include continuing contact between the child and the parent. The proclamation of this strengthened legislation is expected early in 2002.

As recommended by the Committee, the Government will provide a \$40,000 grant to the Benevolent Society's Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC) to coordinate publication and distribution of a post adoption resource and training kit for counsellors, particularly for use in regional NSW. The Benevolent Society will work in partnership with DoCS, the Centre for Mental Health of the NSW Health Department and the agencies and groups who are members of the NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care on the content and distribution of the kit.

An additional \$50,000 grant to PARC will allow for the employment of a designated counsellor to support rural and regional areas in NSW. Initially this position will be for 3-days per week, as a one-year pilot to determine the effectiveness of this strategy. This person will further develop PARC's online counselling services with the establishment of an adoption chat-line and would network and support professionals counselling people affected by adoption. With regular visits to regional centres, the counsellor will also train and support professionals, run information and search clinics and establish regional support groups.

A grant of \$15,000 will be provided for the collation and publication of the adoption experiences of mothers who have lost a child to adoption, as recommended by the Committee. This publication will allow mothers to tell their story and the community to have a greater understanding of their experiences.

The Government supports the Committee's recommendation for a review of the contact veto provisions in the *Adoption Act 2000*. It also supports the placing of uniform post-adoption legislation on the agenda of the Community Services Ministers' Council.

The Department of Community Services is currently reviewing the issue of fees for the provision of the *supply authority* and for additional services provided by the department, such as accessing of information from departmental files, and for related mediation and reunion services.

The Government believes that it is important for people to receive their *supply authority* as quickly as possible. Whilst it may not be possible to provide *prescribed information* at the same time as the *supply authority*, because that information may be obtained from a variety of sources, the Government is committed to continuing to provide *prescribed information* within reasonable timeframes.

The Committee's report recommended a major independent research project be conducted on the adoption reunion process and the short and long-term impacts of reunion on adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents and their families. The Minister for Community Services will raise the benefits of national longitudinal research into the course of reunion with her counterparts at the Community Services Ministers' Council.

The Government is committed to improving information about adoption issues within the general community and will explore ways of doing this most effectively. Initially this Report, together with the publication of the experiences of parents and the trauma caused by some practices, will contribute to an enhanced understanding of adoption. The Inquiry has also provided a point of reference to consider the changes to adoption practice and

social attitudes in recent years, which are embodied in new adoption legislation. It vindicates more recent adoption policies.