

Submission No: ..... 20 .....

Date Received: ..... 25-7-03 .....

Secretary: .....



The Committee Secretary,  
Standing Committee on Family & Community Affairs,  
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry,  
Department of the House of Representatives,  
Parliament House,  
Canberra. 2600.

21<sup>st</sup> July, 2003.

Dear Sir or Madam,

I recently read that the Government announced an inquiry into child custody arrangements for separated families.

As a concerned grandparent, I am writing to voice my concerns. The best interests of the children should be the **only** concern.

When the children come from a home where they or their mother have been physically, verbally and emotionally abused, where they have been forced to go into refuges, where the father has been charged with domestic violence and/or other offenses, when the father has not contributed to the upkeep of the children, where the father has made no weekly telephone call to talk to the children, where the father has not picked them up for bi-weekly access or school holiday access, these concerns would have to be taken into consideration before any change in these circumstances



should occur. Each case would, and should, be judged on its own circumstances

I am a member of a family that has seen my daughter and my grandchildren scarred by such occurrences as mentioned in the previous paragraph and I would be horrified if shared custody were to be introduced as the norm. There are many other families in similar circumstances that would be equally horrified and would argue against it with great determination. It could cause a huge number of cases in the family court.

I can sympathise with the fathers who are honestly getting a raw deal because of a few unscrupulous mothers. I know there are some children who are used as pawns to be fought over by parents. I am sure there are fathers who support their children financially and emotionally, but equally, there are many fathers who take no responsibility for their children, either financially, emotionally, or physically, who collect partial child support without a care for the children, so please do not assume that all families can be covered by the one umbrella.

Many women will stay in abusive relationships mistakenly believing they will be able to protect their children, and themselves by doing so.

When you make your decisions, please remember the welfare of **the children** and do not do something because it might get the Government a few votes. Remember small children will feel the results of your decisions right into their adult lives, and any confusion, hurt, disappointment, upset, apprehension, and in some cases terror, will affect them for ever. The same will apply to the mothers.

You must agree, that the love and nurturing by one caring parent is better than a separated couple where one cares and one is indifferent, irresponsible or cruel.

I have enclosed an item from the Gold Coast Sun, dated Wednesday, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003 which is self explanatory. Many children are abused by parents, male and female, on visits after separation, so for the sake of the children, I urge you not to make decisions which will affect children en masse. Legislate for the welfare of the children in a manner that shows you really want to do what is best for them. Their safety, happiness, welfare and long term peace of mind is more important than just pleasing a few parents.

Surely children would not benefit from being with one parent three days one week and four days the next, or even week about. This would make children, upset, unsettled and confused, Counselling could be needed in the future, placing a strain on resources which are already in short supply. Children need a stable environment! Their schooling, sporting interests and recreation activities would need to be uninterrupted. I imagine these are some of the concerns that you will be considering.

The existing child support formula does not work fairly for both parents in relation to their care of, and contact with their children. Might I suggest that you investigate parents who go on the dole, or pension, thereby ignoring their financial obligations towards their children.

I am sure that I am not the only concerned person who will be writing to your committee, There will be a great outpouring of advice, questions and worries from parents all over Australia. I thank you in advance for your attention to my letter.

I wish you success in your Child Custody Arrangements inquiry and hope sincerely that whatever decisions you make, you focus on the children and their welfare, and make wise decisions. After all they are our future and whatever you decide will affect them for life.

Yours faithfully,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Encl.

c.c. Margaret May MP

# A sickening jump in child abuse cases

THE Gold Coast is Queensland's child abuse capital, with 2146 cases reported in just nine months.

The sickening statistics were released by Abused Child Trust CEO Jane Anderson.

Ms Anderson said that in just nine months during 2001-02 there were 1646 reported cases of child abuse on the coastal strip with a further 500 cases for the region which includes Beenleigh.

"It's absolutely alarming," said Ms Anderson.

"We know there are 76

By MERILYN MacKENZIE

children being abused in Queensland every day, but in reality there are many more, and helping them is our priority.

"We have seen run-aways from the age of 10 who would rather live on the streets than in an abusive home."

Ms Anderson said despite the Gold Coast having the highest percentage of reported cases in Queensland the Government was failing to provide any funding towards the Abused Child Trust.

She said statistics released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showed that in Queensland for the entire 2001-02 year there were 27,592 reported cases of abuse and neglect, with 10,036 of those cases substantiated.

However, Gold Coast police statistics are substantially lower as the abuse must be a criminal offence of ill-treatment, indecent assault or unlawful carnal knowledge. Their figures stand at 102 cases for 2002.

"We know that is what we call the tip of the iceberg of what the true number of cases is really. Every time there is a report in the media we get a number of calls from these adults who were trying to block it out," said Ms Anderson.

"We have all these adults coming forward now whose cases were never reported before."

According to the Abused Child Trust, in the past year there has been a 25 per cent increase in the notified cases of abuse, with 19.5 per cent of those cases substantiated.

Gold Coast City councillor Margaret Grummitt,

a Gold Coast police officer of 25 years standing currently on leave from the force, said reports of child abuse had skyrocketed, particularly from adults who had kept their horrific past secret for decades.

Cr Grummitt said she believed victims had been more willing to come forward since the jailing of convicted child rapist former MP Bill D'Arcy, and the controversy surrounding former governor-general Peter Hollingworth over his failure to act on child abuse complaints.

"Child abuse complaints have just gone through the roof," said Cr Grummitt.

"There are no winners in child abuse."

D'Arcy is serving a lengthy jail term for molesting children in the 1960s when he was a teacher.

As for former Governor General Dr Peter Hollingworth, he was haunted by allegations that as Archbishop of Brisbane he turned his back on serious allegations of sexual abuse by an Anglican teacher.

Cr Grummitt said Gold Coast police had in recent months been inundated with complaints, many dating back two decades.

"From a professional point of view, a lot of the complainants just want to be heard," said Cr Grummitt. "You take the statement, but it's hard to find witnesses now."

According to the Abused Child Trust, 94 per cent of children are harmed by someone they know and 85 per cent by their natural parents.

The Abused Child Trust website further states that one in every 170 Australian children under the age of nine years will become a victim of abuse or neglect.

The Australian Social Trends 2003 report shows that 18 per cent of abuse cases are reported by police, 18 per cent by school staff, 18 per cent by parents, 11 per cent by friends and neighbours and 8 per cent by other relatives.

The Abused Child Trust can be contacted on 5526 1233.

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*Gold Coast Sun*

*Wed. day  
July 16, 2003*