

To: The Secretary of the Committee

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Please accept this letter as my submission in relation to;

The Committee shall inquire into and report on how the Australian Government can better assist Australians who are adopting or have adopted children from overseas countries (intercountry placement adoptions) with particular reference to:

- 1. Any inconsistencies between state and territory approval processes for overseas adoptions;**
 - **Age limit.** There seems to be varying age limits from state to state of parents wanting to start the adoption process. The fact that this would inhibit a couple from starting the process or cause them to have to move to another state to come under an age limit defies logic. It causes stress to the family; it is an unnecessary cost and burden that can be rectified with some standardisation between states. One of my observations in life is that the older you are probably the more wise you become and possibly even more capable to handle the added pressures of an international adoption. If a couple are willing to cover the approximately \$30,000 costs, the invasion of privacy and emotional stress of having your very motives and reasons for wanting to start a family questioned by a government department. I think not only should this couple be approved but we should support this family any way we can. I understand that as a government we need to ensure that the rights of the child are considered and protected to best of our abilities. In the words of MARY GRIFFIN, DIRECTOR OF ADOPTION AND PERMANENT CARE, DOCS NSW, "It is a rigorous process and we don't apologise for that because it's important to protect children" While I completely agree with Mary's comments in relation to protecting children and authenticate the part about not making any apologies, I would also add that if a couple were willing to go through the process, cost, time and feel that they would be able to raise their child in a loving family relationship then age should be a very inconsequent issue indeed.
 - **Cost.** Most couples understand that it costs approximately \$30,000 to start a family using intercountry adoption. The fact that 502 people in 2003-04 completed the process tells you something about the value that these people place on adoption and starting a family. Please do not forget to include the added economic cost of one partner having to give up work for between 6 and

12 months. This is another issue that seems to vary from state to state and another inconsistency between parents of biological children of whom this decision is left up to them. This is in comparison to parents who value adoption and have this decision made for them by people remote or removed from their individual situation. Lets face it, if a couple are organized enough to save \$30,000, put themselves through a very intrusive personal buracratc investigation of their lives, able to deal with the pain, guilt, stigma and loss enough to get up and put themselves in the situation whereby they can be disappointed and hurt again by a process of selection (I could go on....). If such a couple decides to adopt them I think the process qualifies them to be some of the best judges of what is in their and the child's best interests. I do not understand the underlying thinking that biological parents are trustworthy and competent while adoptive parents need guarding against as they are inexperienced, incompetent and otherwise untrustworthy, if this were not true they would be able to have there own kids "naturally". These parents well understand that adopted children need bonding time with the parents and lots of it. Please let the parents organise this, the best way they see fit!

- **Application process.** I think that if the government makes any changes to the adoption process that encourages more families to adopt this would be a great thing. But without providing more resources to facilitate the fair, accurate and timely processing of applications, any increase in numbers would add more strain to an already loaded system. Some suggestions that your committee may like to consider;
 - National Standardisation of criteria, costs length of time for process to be complete in line with world's best practice.
 - Outsourcing of the selection process. I have noticed that state departments already use subcontractors in terms of social workers to complete reports on couples and in seminars that prospective parents must attend. Why can't suitable organisations in a community provide assessment support subject to set of national standard criteria as listed above? This would free up valuable government resources to handle the aspects that must be completed on a government to government level.
 - Partial Government Subsidisation of assessment costs.

2. Any inconsistencies between the benefits and entitlements provided to families with their own birth children and those provided to families who have adopted children from overseas.

- I have heard numerous reports and experienced firsthand myself the frustration involved in being rejected in an adoption application because of health issues. I have several observations to make on this subject.
- The eligibility criteria for adopting states that "An applicant's state of physical and psychological health should not interfere with their ability to care for a child until the child reaches adulthood." Source NSW DoCS 2005, http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/adoption/want_eligibility.htm

No doubt that departments have had lots of experience in this field and that their studies have shown that overweight parents love less, care less, provide less and are overall less suitable parents than thin ones. Do we really believe that weight correlates to a parents ability to raise children. I do understand there is a definite and strong correlation between health and being overweight. The complication that is so often related to being overweight is the increased risk of developing adult onset or type 2 diabetes. Are we therefore making the assertion that diabetic parents are less capable or less suitable than those that are not! If we make the assertion that overweight parents are less mobile and therefore less suitable, does this mean we also make the assertion that disabled parents, parents in wheel chairs are less suitable to parenting than their able bodied peers?. In each of these situations these assertions lead to utterly ridiculous and spurious conclusions. I have also noted that neither drinking nor smoking seemed to carry less weight (pardon the pun) in the eligibility process. I understand and agree that the process needs to ensure that parents will be alive to care for a child until they reach adulthood. But to be completely fair and statistically correct in this process perhaps we should look at the top 10 things that kill Australians and asses parents this way. While perusing the ABS website for the most common causes of death in Australia (<http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/2093da6935db138fca2568a9001393c9?OpenDocument>) I noted that the Northern Territory recorded the highest death rate in 2003, while the ACT recorded the lowest rate. This further adds to the speculation that perhaps we should all considering careers in parliament and move to Canberra. It is also noted that the number one cause for deaths in Australia is attributed to malignant neoplasms or cancer. This accounts for some 28.4% of deaths in Australia in 2003. Yet I do not recall ever being asked if I wore sunscreen or heard of an applicant being rejected for smoking. I however do concede that 5 of the top 10 causes of death seem to be related to being overweight. I wonder what housing prices are like in Canberra?

- In researching how good a determinate a BMI over 30 is for health I decided to take a representative sample of some of the fittest athletes around and do a study of some NRL teams. For this study I took last years premieres the Bulldogs and in keeping with our theme the team leading the ladder in April 2005 the Canberra Raiders. According to players stats listed on the www.nrl.com site April 2005, the Canberra Raiders have 3 players with a BMI over thirty and 7 of the 21 players whose stats are available are in the danger zone with a BMI of 29 or above. Perhaps this is just peculiar to the Raiders. Upon analysis of the Bulldogs 8, of their 13 players had a BMI of 30 or over (considered obese). 11 of the 13 players stats that were available had BMI's of 29 or greater. All this evidence mounts as more proof of why you should move to Canberra! In relation to adoption, some NRL players, most forwards and the whole of the Bulldogs team need not apply as you are considered obese!
- In considering the question of highlighting any inconsistencies between the benefits and entitlements provided to families with their own birth children and those provided to families who have adopted children from overseas. I think it would be helpful for the purpose of this exercise to imagine that couples who are

wanting to adopt from overseas are really couples having a child biologically while on holiday! I understand this is a somewhat simplistic view and fails to include delicate and intrinsic details specific to overseas adoption but it is helpful in pointing out some of the flaws and inconsistencies.

1. Our couple on holidays does not have to justify why they want to have a baby and become parents to a panel, however neither does the way they treat and raise their child have the potential to cause international embarrassment.
2. If our mum on holidays had a medical condition that was going to “interfere with her ability to care for a child until the child reaches adulthood” and this assessment was made before she gave birth would we intervene to terminate the pregnancy? Certainly not. We would support the mother and offer any and whatever medical, social and welfare support in order for her to best tackle or cope with the interference. In the case of adoption we make an assessment and decide not to approve these parents for adoption in what has to be a dump of rejection and humiliation of biblical proportions. This on top of an emptiness of being infertile that persists and pervades echoing through your very soul. Truly something to be missed and not wished upon your worst enemy!

In summary if two parents have the guts, get-up-and-go, courage and enough love to share a journey with a precious life from an unfortunate circumstance in another country and build a family. Then let neither this country, nor its governments, nor bureaucracy stand in their way but instead recognise, support and rejoice in their decision and lend every assistance that we can in their journey of building the very fabric of this great country, family!

Mrs Donna Simard
QLD