


**Submission no. 222**AUTHORISED: 4/4/07 

### Breastfeeding Enquiry Submission

My name is Claudia Stephenson. I live in a rural area of Central Queensland. Before having my five children I was Senior Mistress of the local high school. At present I am Acting Director of the local childcare centre. Over the years I have taught in various school and kindergarten settings, I have been a volunteer with the Australian Breastfeeding Assn (formerly Nursing Mothers Assn) for over 25 years, the past 16 years as volunteer qualified breastfeeding counsellor. My experience of living on an isolated property with my 5 young children, and a husband working very long hours, being far from family support, has led me to continue giving many hours of my time and expertise each week, to help mothers of babies and young children. Many mothers in modern Australia, in both rural and urban settings experience a sense of isolation and lack of support. Most of the breastfeeding helpline calls I receive are from mothers in Brisbane and the Gold and Sunshine Coast.

In my submission I will speak of my own experiences and what mothers have told me of their experiences with health professionals in hospital and baby clinic settings, as well as how family, friends and acquaintances view breastfeeding

I will show how our health professionals are inadequately trained to support mothers in breastfeeding.

I will discuss how the MAIF agreement is not working, and how legislation is necessary to eliminate unethical marketing of breastmilk substitutes and associated products.

I will speak of the inherent dangers of bottle feeding, (including the disastrous effects on the health of indigenous Australians) of and the huge economic burden of unnecessary health costs associated with bottle feeding.

The unfairness of the commercial lobbying by multinational infant formula companies will also be a focus.

Finally I will explain some steps which will help improve the health and welfare of Australia's babies, children and adults into the future, by returning to the practice of universally feeding human babies with human milk, in accordance with the guidelines of the WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION( WHO)

From mothers I have counseled on the breastfeeding helpline roster, I have found that in some hospitals, babies are still routinely given at least one bottle of infant formula. Thus, from the start, breastfeeding is undermined by some health professionals. Very few people are aware that babies fed infant formula are sicker and that there are serious health risks associated with even a single early exposure to infant formula. Some staff still recommend the detrimental practice of limiting the baby's access to the breast. This almost always leads to early weaning as the mothers milk supply fails to meet the growing baby's requirements due to inadequate stimulation of the breasts. Those mothers who do breastfeed, with support from other breastfeeding mothers often find once the baby reaches about 4 months of age that people are asking when they are going to stop breastfeeding. This is despite the fact that WHO recommends that all babies be breastfed at least 2 years. Breastfeeding mothers often receive unsolicited comments about replacing breastfeeds with solid food or formula. It is well documented that many babies are intolerant to cow's milk, on which formulas are based. Unfortunately once a mother has weaned her baby, it is difficult to relactate in order to help a baby who has become ill from formula. Soy based formulae also have well documented detrimental effects on many babies and young children.

The MAIF agreement is not working Pharmacies have formula on special and there are a host of "specialized" formulae, labelled as if they are superior and health promoting. Follow on formulae are aggressively marketed. Teats and dummies and bottles also feature in promotions and in everyday images referring to babies (Greeting cards and wrapping papers, baby care rooms, images on computer clip art, and children's literature) Dummies (pacifiers) and bottles, given as breast substitutes lead to malocclusion of the teeth and malformation of the pliable hard palate in babies often resulting in the need for expensive orthodontic work.

Up to the 1920 and 30's, it was common for indigenous Australians to breastfeed their children for up to 6 years. Photos of such children and their mothers show them as the picture of good health. What a tragedy that modern western society has replaced this excellence with the sad state of indigenous health witnessed in Australia today. Many Asian and African migrants or refugees resort to the practice of bottle feeding as it is seen as the norm in this country. This leads to adverse health consequences.