

**SUBMISSION NO. 146**

AUTHORISED: 1-06-05 *WAW*

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 3 May 2005 2:56 PM  
**To:** Committee, FHS (REPS)  
**Subject:** intercountry adoption - submission to Secretary of the Committee  
**Importance:** High

dear committee secretary

thank you for the opportunity to submit my comments and observations related to the inquiry on intercountry adoption by australian parents. this email briefly outlines my personal experience of intercountry adoption and related issues. i am aware that issues related to

- 1) the inconsistencies between state and territory approval processes and
- 2) inconsistencies between benefits and entitlements for birth parents compared to families through intercountry adoption have been well covered by a number of submissions that have already been forwarded to the inquiry. rather than repeating these important and valid points (which i completely endorse) i would like to focus on my own 'case study'.

i am a 37 year old woman. i am married and my partner is 38 years old. i have known for a number of years that having a child through pregnancy would not be possible. i have juvenile diabetes (which i have lived with for over 25 years) and a pregnancy would have been dangerous for both myself and my unborn child. therefore, when my partner and i decided that we were ready to become parents we approached the department of community services in nsw and started the process of having a child through intercountry adoption. i was reasonably familiar with the process (and the fact that domestic adoptions are now minimal in australia) as i am a qualified social worker specialising in work with children and young people. we were aware that the process would take a minimum of 2 years and possibly longer and we were fortunate that this timeframe did not include previous years of infertility, IVF, etc (which is the most prevalent reason for parents to choose intercountry adoption).

in february 2005 after a long, emotional, complex and expensive journey we were blessed with the news that we had been allocated our daughter - FU pei xiang born on 30 january 2004. on 27 march 2005, after travelling to china, we met our precious daughter for the first time. we are now back in australia and have been home with our daughter for just over 3 weeks. like many new parents life with our daughter is wonderful, as well as busy and hard work. pei xiang is 15 months old and a very active and amazing little girl.

i think it is important to note that if i had made the decision to go ahead with a pregnancy this would have created huge medical problems for me and the potential for frequent visits to hospital and intensive medical support. these costs would have been covered by medicare irregardless of how expensive and intensive the ongoing treatment through a complicated pregnancy would have been. however despite the fact that i made a responsible decision for both myself and a potential unborn child (and prevented costs to the government and the

health system of much needed resources and expensive) i did not receive the same support by having a child through intercountry adoption. rather than receiving financial support i was required to pay money to a government department (a non profit organisation), an amount which you would be aware has now increased to just under \$10,000. we were also liable for other costs both prior to and after our child's allocation (in total costs of over \$20,000). none of these costs are subsidised.

like all new parents part of our preparation as parents has been to enquire about our entitlements as new parents through centrelink. we were very upset to discover that as our child was over 26 weeks when she came in to our care we will not be entitled to the maternity payment of \$3000. the maternity payment while not in anyway covering the \$20,000 costs of intercountry adoption would certainly assist us as new parents with a new baby. although our child is adopted she still requires all the equipment and resources that other children require. the first 12 months for babies involves large adjustments for all in the family and for intercountry adoption these adjustments can be even more significant. most children through adoption in china will have spent their first months of life in institutional care and therefore will have significant delays which thankfully can be reversed through positive attachment and intense support. the department of community services in nsw recognises the importance of attachment for children through intercountry adoption and one parent is required to provide full time care for their child for a minimum of 6 months. this means that one parent is without an income for 6 months (and many parents through adoption are not entitled to paid maternity leave).

in having a child and becoming parents, as well as our individual happiness we are assisting with the Honorable Peter Costello's recent invitation of having a child "for yourself, for your partner, and for your country". the problem of a decreasing australian population is well documented however the government does not appear to extend its support for families to families formed through adoption. i believe that if the government is serious about increasing the population and demonstrating non-discrimination to parents through intercountry adoption then the screening and processing for intercountry adoption should be completed at no charge and intercountry adoption legislation should be consistent across all states.

although my submission is brief (we were in the middle of travelling to china to meet our daughter when the inquiry and submissions were announced) i feel very committed to improving the processes, legislation, policies and support of parents (and their children) through intercountry adoption. if appropriate, i am also very happy to appear at the public hearing of the inquiry, to provide further information and/or answer any questions the committee may have.

thank you for your time.

kind regards  
belinda cooley

**NSW**