



Environment and Public Affairs Committee

Inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices

Background

On 19 October 2010, the Parliament of Western Australia was the first in Australia to apologise for the removal of children from unmarried mothers. The Legislative Assembly noted that, with regard to past adoption practices, it was recognised that from the 1940s to the 1980s the system then operating in Western Australia, in many instances, did not strike the correct balance between the goal of minimising the emotional and mental impact of the adoption process on unmarried mothers, with the goal of achieving what was considered at the time to be in the best interests of the child.

It was acknowledged that, in many cases, those practices caused long-term anguish and suffering for the people affected.

In March 2013, following a Senate inquiry, the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard gave a national apology to people affected by forced adoption or removal policies and practices. The apology acknowledged the experiences of those affected by forced adoptions, which had created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering. In response to the Senate's findings, apologies were given by all other States and the ACT. Some States and Territories have conducted Parliamentary committee inquiries (Tasmania in 1999, New South Wales in 2000, Victoria in 2021).

Inquiry

On 15 November 2022, Hon Lorna Harper MLC tabled a petition in the Legislative Council, containing 318 signatures, presented by Jennifer McRae. This was referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs (the Committee) under the House's Standing Orders. That Committee has the power to inquire into and report on petitions. The petition may be found [here](#).

On 22 February 2023, the Committee resolved to commence an inquiry into the matters raised in the petition. The terms of reference for that inquiry, and the Committee's details, may be found on the Parliament's website at www.parliament.wa.gov.au/env.

Does this apply to me?

It is intended that this inquiry will give any person affected by forced adoptions an opportunity, either publicly or privately, to share their lived experiences. That will include (but not be limited to) mothers who had children forcibly removed from them at birth, or those who were wrongfully coerced or persuaded into giving up their baby for adoption.

Coercion would include circumstances where a mother has signed a consent to adoption, but only as a result of family or institutional pressure. It may also include circumstances of economic disadvantage or lack of support systems, meaning that a young mother could not afford to keep the child.

It will also include the children themselves, fathers and grandparents of those children and adoptive families.

Given the sensitive nature of this inquiry, the Committee will accept evidence given in private, including submissions and hearings.