

National Peak Overseas Adoption Support Group Meeting 29–30 July 2008, Canberra Communiqué

The second meeting of the National Peak Overseas Adoption Support Group was held on 29–30 July 2008 in Canberra. Discussions covered a broad range of issues proposed by members and the Attorney-General's Department (as set out in the [agenda](#)). Key elements of the discussion are outlined below.

1. Procedural Matters

AGD informed members that the Attorney-General, the Hon Robert McClelland MP, had agreed to the appointment of alternate members to ensure representation from jurisdictions and positions that currently have only one representative on the Group. Alternates for the ACT, adoptee and professional positions will be appointed from existing nominations. Members agreed that the nomination process for Tasmania and the Northern Territory should differ due to only one nominee being put forward during the original nomination process. Further information about nominating for the Tasmanian and Northern Territory positions is available from the [‘What’s New’ page](#).

2. Australian Government’s Current Work

AGD provided an overview of the work of the Intercountry Adoption Branch since the inaugural meeting in May 2008. Discussions focussed on the implementation of accepted recommendations from the *Overseas Adoption in Australia* Report, including the recent signing of the [Commonwealth–State Agreement on the Continued Operation of Australia’s Intercountry Adoption Program](#). AGD encouraged members to provide ongoing feedback about the intercountry adoption website.

AGD informed members that State and Territory Central Authorities have agreed to invite a representative of the Group to attend a session of the next Central Authorities’ meeting in November 2008. Members said there was a need for ongoing representation at Central Authorities’ meetings, while recognising that any representative would not necessarily attend an entire meeting. Central Authorities also agreed to its standard agenda being published on the AGD website.

3. Harmonisation

Members identified that the harmonisation of laws, fees and assessment practices to best practice standards should be prioritised by AGD. AGD informed members that the harmonisation working group would be established through the Community and Disability Services Ministers’ Advisory Council as soon as possible. Membership of the working group will consist of officers from Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. Members recommended a Group representative be appointed to the working group (as well as other future working groups). AGD reiterated that the Commonwealth will work collaboratively with States and Territories, and noted that the advice and comments of the Group will inform the Commonwealth’s position in harmonisation discussions.

General discussion took place on a range of harmonisation issues raised by members, ranging from consistency in education and post-adoption support to the employment

and retention of trained professionals. The experiences of families with regards to obtaining passports and birth certificates in particular States and Territories were noted. Members commented on the commitment required to ensure the outcomes of the harmonisation working group are implemented by governments in accordance with the undertakings made in the Commonwealth-State Agreement to progress such changes.

4. Intercountry Adoption Programs

AGD provided an overview of recent delegation visits (Bolivia, Chile, Ethiopia and Thailand), recent developments with existing programs (including the new quota from South Korea) and investigations into possible new programs. AGD noted the information available on the website in this regard, including a detailed table of assessment work.

There was general discussion about the increasing need for families for older children and children with complex social and medical backgrounds. The additional complexities regarding training, assessment and post-placement support for families adopting children with these backgrounds was noted. Members also expressed their preference for moving away from the phrase 'special needs' - which can unintentionally attach a negative stigma - to the use of the phrase 'more complex needs'.

5. Government Entitlements

General discussion took place on a range of issues relating to government entitlement including the National Employment Standards (which come into effect on 1 January 2010), the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave (submissions closed on 2 June 2008) and the Baby Bonus. A number of clarifications were sought which AGD will investigate.

6. Post-Adoption Support Services

Members reiterated comments from the first meeting about the importance of governments providing high quality and well-funded post-adoption support. Members identified that the provision of such services is one of the most significant issues for intercountry adoption in Australia. The Group urged the Australian Government to become involved in the area as a critical priority in order to secure nation-wide services and accessibility to adoption-specific specialists. Members noted the difficulties for IASOs in working to provide these services with limited resources and funding from the States and Territories.

7. Statistics

General discussion took place on a website statement to clarify some common misunderstandings about Australian intercountry adoption statistics. AGD provided information to members on the interpretation of statistics arising from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's annual publication.

AGD also noted that work is progressing on the development of the National Intercountry Adoption Database. Members generally agreed that the database will assist in obtaining more accurate and consistent statistical information. Discussion also took place on the consent-seeking process and the potential role for members in encouraging families to consider providing consent.

8. Other Issues

The 9th Australian Adoption Conference, 'Connecting Past, Securing Future', will be held in Sydney on 2–5 September 2008. AGD noted that a number of international delegates will be attending.

9. Next Meeting

The next meetings of the Group are scheduled to be held on:

- 23–24 October 2008 (Darwin), and
- 12–13 February 2009 (Canberra).