

National Peak Overseas Adoption Support Group Inaugural Meeting 21 & 22 May 2008, Canberra Communiqué

The first meeting of the National Peak Overseas Support Group was opened by the Attorney-General, the Hon Robert McClelland, on 21 May 2008.

- [Welcome address by the Attorney-General](#)

Discussions covered a broad range of issues proposed by members and the Attorney-General's Department (AGD). Key elements of discussion are outlined below, and the agenda is attached:

- [Peak Support Group – Agenda – May 2008 - Word 61KB](#)

Role of the Peak Support Group

The terms of reference of the group are to:

- provide advice on intercountry adoption matters referred by the Attorney-General or AGD
- provide advice to the Attorney-General or AGD on issues of relevance to the intercountry adoption community as identified by the Group, in consultation with the intercountry adoption community, and
- inform the intercountry adoption community of the issues being considered by the Group, where appropriate.

AGD will provide secretariat support, as well as refer matters to and receive advice from the Group. It was noted that State and Territory representatives have been appointed to represent the views of their jurisdiction's community, not individual intercountry adoption support organisations (IASOs), although the insight and input that comes from these connections is very welcome. Members agreed to list their email addresses on the AGD website should families wish to contact them directly.

1. Australian Government's Current Work

AGD provided an overview of the work of the Intercountry Adoption Branch since its creation in December 2006, as well as key priorities for the coming year. It was noted that AGD would seek the advice of the Group on a broad range of projects.

2. Intercountry Adoption Programs

AGD provided an overview of recent delegations, and noted the range of information available on the expanded website. The role of the Health Assessment Service in providing medical clearances following allocation was also discussed.

AGD presented a draft paper on the establishment of new programs and the expansion of existing programs, and noted that the principles of the Hague Convention and the [Strategic Plan](#) guide all such work. Further information will be provided on the AGD website as soon as possible.

3. Government Entitlements

General discussion was held on the Productivity Commission's inquiry into paid maternity, paternity and parental leave. The changes to the maternity allowance (to

include adoptive parents of children aged up to 16 years) was noted. Please refer to <http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/budget/budget2008-budget2008.htm>.

Members identified a range of experiences with Medicare, Centrelink and DIAC, and noted the importance of ongoing training for staff in these departments.

4. Tax Deductible Adoption Fees

There was general discussion about the possibility for tax deductible adoption fees. This included discussion on the increased costs of adoption applications, Commonwealth and State fees, and possible concessions and subsidies. AGD noted that this was not a recommendation of the Standing Committee's report (*Overseas Adoption in Australia*). Members raised a range of questions on this issue, which AGD will investigate.

Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status (tax deductibility) was also identified as an important issue and challenge for a number of IASOs. Members noted that securing DGR status and tax deductibility for donations made to orphanages will be of great assistance to adoptive families, and will also assist in raising more funds for the various projects supported by IASOs.

5. Older Children and Children with Special Needs

AGD noted the consistent need for families for children with complex social and medical backgrounds, as identified by overseas adoption authorities. The additional complexities regarding training, assessment and post-placement support for families adopting children with these backgrounds was also noted.

A number of members noted that importance of high quality post adoption services for all adoptive families, and particularly those whose children had more complex needs. Members noted the varied use of the term 'special needs' and the difficulties this created for families wishing to make informed decisions on this complex issue. AGD noted the progression of a range of work to better inform Australian intercountry adoption practice on this issue.

6. Intercountry Post Adoption Support Services

The need for high quality and well-funded post adoption support services was raised on a number of occasions throughout the meeting. It is an issue of clear importance to members and the Australian intercountry adoption community. Concerns were raised regarding the lack of services nation-wide, as well as the limited availability of adoption-specific specialists across a range of professions. Members noted the difficulties a number of IASOs have experienced in attempting to produce resources and service directories. Members noted the fundamental importance of research informing policy and practice.

The importance of specific services for adoptees (both children and adults) was also identified as lacking, and concerns were raised regarding the fees attached to access to information (for adoptees).

7. Child Trafficking

Members expressed their substantial concerns regarding the risks to children should adoption programs have inadequate protections. Discussion focused on the

importance of rigorous assessment and the implementation and maintenance of appropriate safe-guards in the establishment of new programs and the review of existing programs.

8. Harmonisation

Members identified this as a primary issue of importance and focus. AGD discussed a range of factors relevant to the task of pursuing greater harmonisation of laws fees and assessment practices. Members identified the harmonisation of application processes and fees, and procedures to obtain citizenship and birth certificates as particularly significant for the intercountry adoption community.

AGD stated that the Government intends to work collaboratively with States and Territories, and noted that the advice and comments of the Group will inform the Australian Government's position in harmonisation discussions. Members will provide AGD with further issues to be considered at the next meeting.

9. Communication and Education

Members raised concerns regarding misinformation often presented in the public domain, and noted the importance of factual, evidence-based information being available to families. AGD shared this concern and raised the example of the incorrect statistic that Australia is ranked second lowest in the developed world for intercountry adoptions. It was agreed ongoing efforts are required to dispel myths and ensure accurate information is available.

General discussion was held regarding the development of a National Intercountry Adoption Database (NICAD), to allow for a better understanding of intercountry adoption in Australia. Once established, NICAD is intended to allow AGD to identify national trends in intercountry adoption. Practical and privacy issues were identified, and further work will be required by AGD.

Members provided comments to AGD regarding possible improvements to AGD's provision of information to the Australian adoption community. AGD noted that when providing information relating to other nations, any such comments were cleared with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade prior to public release.

AGD noted that whilst the Peak Support Group served as the primary forum for consultation with the intercountry adoption community, AGD would continue to attend State and Territory consultative forums on occasions if invited.

A broad range of work was identified by the Group, which will be progressed by AGD. Members agreed to provide information regarding meetings to the intercountry adoption community via communiqués on AGD's website.

10. Future meetings

Members expressed a strong desire to proceed with a range of issues, and will meet up to four times per year. Two future meetings have been scheduled:

- 29 & 30 July 2008 (Canberra)
- 16 & 17 October 2008 (Darwin)