



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MOTIONS

National Apology for Forced Adoptions

SPEECH

Tuesday, 3 December 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Tuesday, 3 December 2013
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Questioner
Speaker Pyne, Christopher, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (15:04): by leave—I move:

That today, this Parliament, on behalf of the Australian people, takes responsibility and apologises for the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering.

We acknowledge the profound effects of these policies and practices on fathers.

And we recognise the hurt these actions caused to brothers and sisters, grandparents, partners and extended family members.

We deplore the shameful practices that denied you, the mothers, your fundamental rights and responsibilities to love and care for your children. You were not legally or socially acknowledged as their mothers. And you were yourselves deprived of care and support.

To you, the mothers who were betrayed by a system that gave you no choice and subjected you to manipulation, mistreatment and malpractice, we apologise.

We say sorry to you, the mothers who were denied knowledge of your rights, which meant you could not provide informed consent. You were given false assurances. You were forced to endure the coercion and brutality of practices that were unethical, dishonest and in many cases illegal.

We know you have suffered enduring effects from these practices forced upon you by others. For the loss, the grief, the disempowerment, the stigmatisation and the guilt, we say sorry.

To each of you who were adopted or removed, who were led to believe your mother had rejected you and who were denied the opportunity to grow up with your family and community of origin and to connect with your culture, we say sorry.

We apologise to the sons and daughters who grew up not knowing how much you were wanted and loved.

We acknowledge that many of you still experience a constant struggle with identity, uncertainty and loss,

and feel a persistent tension between loyalty to one family and yearning for another.

To you, the fathers, who were excluded from the lives of your children and deprived of the dignity of recognition on your children's birth records, we say sorry. We acknowledge your loss and grief.

We recognise that the consequences of forced adoption practices continue to resonate through many, many lives. To you, the siblings, grandparents, partners and other family members who have shared in the pain and suffering of your loved ones or who were unable to share their lives, we say sorry.

Many are still grieving. Some families will be lost to one another forever. To those of you who face the difficulties of reconnecting with family and establishing on-going relationships, we say sorry.

We offer this apology in the hope that it will assist your healing and in order to shine a light on a dark period of our nation's history.

To those who have fought for the truth to be heard, we hear you now. We acknowledge that many of you have suffered in silence for far too long.

We are saddened that many others are no longer here to share this moment. In particular, we remember those affected by these practices who took their own lives. Our profound sympathies go to their families.

To redress the shameful mistakes of the past, we are committed to ensuring that all those affected get the help they need, including access to specialist counselling services and support, the ability to find the truth in freely available records and assistance in reconnecting with lost family.

We resolve, as a nation, to do all in our power to make sure these practices are never repeated. In facing future challenges, we will remember the lessons of family separation. Our focus will be on protecting the fundamental rights of children and on the importance of the child's right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

With profound sadness and remorse, we offer you all our unreserved apology.

Very briefly, this is an important motion to provide support for the national apology for forced adoption and removal policies and processes. It was moved in the House on 21 March 2013. It was debated in the House and in the Federation Chamber in the last parliament. Unfortunately, it was never returned to the House of Representatives. The Manager of Opposition Business and I have arranged to move this motion now to properly recognise the sentiments that were expressed in this chamber and in the Federation Chamber about what is a very serious issue.

The SPEAKER: For new members, there is a copy of that motion on the table so that everybody may see precisely what that apology was about. As a mark of respect, I ask all present to signify their approval by rising in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

Question agreed to.